

The Story of our International Labour Movement



'LABOUR'S MAY DAY'
DEDICATED TO THE WORKERS OF THE WORLD



Daniel Edmonds, Global Labour Institute, Manchester, 2022



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List of Frequently-Used Abbreviations

ACFTU- All-China Federation of Trade Unions

ADGB- Allgemeiner Deutscher
Gewerkschaftsbund (General German Trade
Union Federation)

AIFLD- American Institute for Free Labor
Development

AFL- American Federation of Labor

AFL-CIO- American Federation of Labor and
Congress of Industrial Organizations

BWI- Building and Wood Workers'
International

CIO- Congress of Industrial Organizations

CFL- Chinese Federation of Labour

CGIL- Confederazione Generale Italiana del
Lavoro (Italian General Confederation of
Labour)

CGT- Confédération Générale du Travail
(General Confederation of Labour)

CNT- Confederación Nacional del Trabajo
(National Confederation of Labour)

COSATU- Congress of South African Trade
Unions

CTUC- Commonwealth Trade Union Council

CUT- Central Única dos Trabalhadores
(Unified Workers' Centre)

DAF- Deutsche Arbeitsfront (German Labour
Front)

ETUC- European Trade Union Confederation

FES- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Friedrich Ebert
Foundation)

GLI- Global Labour Institute

GUF- Global Union Federation

ICEF- International Federation of Chemical,
Energy and General Workers' Unions

ICFTU- International Confederation of Free
Trade Unions

IFA- International Framework Agreement

IFCTU- International Federation of Christian
Trade Unions

IUF- International Union of Food, Agricultural,
Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco, and
Allied Workers' Associations

ILO- International Labour Organisation/
International Labour Office

ISNTUC- International Secretariat of National
Trade Union Centres

ITGWU- Irish Transport and General Workers'
Union

ISEL- Industrial Syndicalist Education League

ITF- International Transport Workers
Federation

ITS- International Trade Secretariat

ITUC- International Trade Union
Confederation

KMT- Kuomintang

IWW- Industrial Workers of the World

NGO- Non-Governmental Organisation

RILU- Red International of Labour Unions

SEWA- Self-Employed Women's Association

SPD- Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
(German Social-Democratic Party)

TGWU- Transport and General Workers'
Union

TNC- Transnational Corporation

TUC- Trades Union Congress

WCL- World Confederation of Labour

WFTU- World Federation of Trade Unions

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Introduction

What is the Point in History?

"The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

During the 1990s, some claimed that we were living at the 'end of history'. That capitalism had proved itself as the only way of running society. The idea that workers should have control of their workplace, or over society as a whole, was treated as an embarrassing idea from the past. The future of the world was just going to be more of the same.

And yet the last 30 years have seen immense changes. An explosion of new democracies has given way to a rise of new dictatorships. Violent nationalism and religious fundamentalism are on the march once again. Environmental disaster seems closer than ever before. Wars and conflicts between powerful countries threaten the ordinary people caught in the middle. New technologies and connections between producers and consumers which should make life easier only seem to make working harder.

This text was written because we believe the international labour movement can play an important role in changing the world. We have important and potentially very powerful organisations which we can take part in. Yet many activists, trade unionists, and ordinary people are unaware of them, why they were created, or what made them the way they are today. They do not know the history of the campaigns, conditions, and ideas which helped to shape them.

This book emphasises the importance of organising internationally. We want to make it clear that it is a very important part of working class history, and show you some of the different ways that people have done it. Despite the importance of internationalism, many trade unionists and activists have few connections to, or knowledge of, the international structures of our movement and the histories behind them.

We hope that this book can provide you with a guide to some of the different important organisations, campaigns, and ideas within the international labour movement and show how these have developed over time. By looking at the history of the working class movement across the globe, we believe that labour activists can be better equipped to discuss, debate, strategize, collaborate, and ultimately transform the world to create a system that works for all of us.

'What Have the Unions Ever Done for us?'

The trade union movement is the first, and often the last, line of resistance that workers have to defend themselves. It is the most representative organisation in civil society: it exists in every country in the world except in the most extreme dictatorships. Wherever groups of people have worked together, they have organised together to ensure that their rights are not trampled on, and their needs are met.

Historically, trade unions are an important part of a broader labour movement created by workers to defend their interests. These include workers' political parties, as well as a range of institutions such as co-operatives, education associations, schools and labour colleges, health and welfare

associations, cultural institutions (theatres, choirs, book clubs, and sports societies), women's organisations, youth groups, anti-racist campaigns, solidarity, and defence organisations (including armed militias), radio and TV stations, newspapers, book publishers, bookshops and much more. All of these, taken together, form the historical labour movement.

It is rare for these institutions and organisations to have existed all at the same time in any one country. These institutions are not only meant to improve workers' pay and conditions, but to help workers share knowledge and exchange ideas, offer ways to support one another's' struggles, and build connections between different groups of workers- they constitute an alternative society and a counterculture. The labour movement is a multi-faceted social movement with a cause and with a vision of how society should be.

The power of trade unionism is shown by the resilience of the international labour movement, which has survived the wars and totalitarian dictatorships of the 20th century, even when it has been specifically targeted for destruction. In the face of violence and repression, the labour movement has continued. At times it has gone underground, and even formed the backbone of resistance movements to dictators and undemocratic regimes. Whenever the opportunity presents itself, the labour movement re-emerges, showing great hardiness and flexibility in an ever-changing world.

Unions are not just important in the workplace, but in wider society. Trade unionists have led struggles for democracy, peace, inclusion, and equality. It is a global tradition that we can take great pride in.

The Many Faces of National Trade Union Organisation

Across the world, there are many different ways that different trade unions coordinate at the national level. In most countries, unions are separated by political, religious, ethnic differences or leadership rivalries. Clusters of individual unions which may represent workers of a particular industry, or company, or even an individual workplace, will coordinate through a 'national centre', which may be attached to a particular political party or follow a particular ideal, or represent workers mainly of a particular religious or ethnic grouping.

In India, for example, there are 14 officially recognised national trade union federations, each affiliated to, or supporting one of the many various socialist, communist, Hindu nationalist, or Gandhian parties and movements. This is in addition to a huge array of regional or state-wide union organisations based on occupation, sector, religion, ethnicity, or caste.

In some countries, such as Germany, there are several national centres, with one functioning as the *de facto* centre. Germany's main trade union centre- the DGB- is often well-represented on companies' works councils, plays an active role in shaping industrial conditions at national level negotiations, and helps shape public services such as vocational training/education systems.

In a smaller number of countries- for example, Britain, the Nordic countries, Jamaica, Botswana, and Australia, to name but a few, there is also a single national centre. Individual national unions in these countries may compete for members but are rarely organised around an explicit political affiliation. There may be several teachers' unions, with different views on how to organise and what tactics are best, but there is not, for example, a social-democratic teachers' union, a communist teachers' union, a liberal teachers' union, or so on. That is not to say that there are no political differences

within these movements, but these differences are often contained within shared unions. In a trade union meeting or on a May Day demonstration you will often find members of many different parties, and non-affiliated activists, working or marching together.

In some countries, an organisation claims to be the sole national centre, but it is actually an arm of the state. One prominent example is in China, where the All-China Federations of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is under the control of the Communist Party and all independent unions are outlawed. These types of organisations are unions in name only- workers are often compelled to join them, and they exist to make workers more productive rather than to represent their interests against their employers. These organisations sometimes try to improve the lives of their members and even criticise employment conditions in some circumstances, but their lack of independence and political freedoms means that they must do this in very limited ways.

Our Political Heritage:

As trade unions emerged, grew, and developed throughout history, a range of political ideas and movements were important in shaping their tactics, strategies, and demands. At the same time, the experiences of ordinary people who wanted better treatment helped to shape and develop political ideas. People found themselves living in very different circumstances to one another, in situations where ideas developed in another time and place, for a different set of people, did not seem to apply.

In many European countries, socialist political parties and groups were responsible for setting up the first trade unions, giving them a distinct political character. This meant that groups of workers who did not adhere to those ideals would often establish their own new trade unions, in many cases attached to other political parties, be they Christian democrats, nationalists, or (in the years after the Russian Revolution) communists. In Southern Europe, trade unions were often established by syndicalists (people who wanted trade unions, not political parties, to fight for change through militant strike action, and to become bodies through which workers could run society). In Britain, the early growth of industries and large-scale towns and cities meant that modern trade unions were set up before the growth of the socialist movement in the late 19th century, giving them a different political character.

Within countries that were colonised or taken over by (largely) European and North American empires, labour movements faced a particularly hostile response. Trade unions in these countries often had to fight the imperial system to have any chance to improve conditions, meaning that they often partnered with anti-colonial political groups, playing a key role in the end of empires. Many labour movement activists were inspired by anti-racist ideas which challenged the belief that they could not control their own countries, and played active roles in movements such as pan-Africanism, which in turn helped to shape their organisations. Throughout the 20th century, new social movements, such as feminism, gay liberation, and environmentalism grew in strength. Their activists sought to influence existing trade unions, drawing on longer-standing traditions within the union movement to argue for the compatibility of their beliefs. In some cases where they met resistance from trade union leaders and memberships, they established new unions to reflect their viewpoints.

There are many differences of opinion amongst trade unionists about how to organise, what political parties and policies to support, and what a better world for the working class looks like. This is a sign

of a healthy movement. There have always been some trade unionists who have said (and still say) that we should 'de-politicise' trade unionism, and that our organisations should focus solely on collective bargaining, improving pay and conditions, and lobbying for industrial regulation. But debating and defining common political values has been a feature of trade unionism since the birth of the movement. An absence of debate does not mean that everyone agrees, or that there are an absence of political values guiding the movement, just that they are swept under the carpet. We hope that this book encourages readers to take part in a growing movement to bring political debate and discussion back into the heart of trade unionism.

What are Union Values?

The labour movement is one of the oldest social movements seeking to transform society in the name of universal values, with the objective of creating a society that meets the needs and aspirations of all human beings. While there are many different political groupings within trade unionism, a shared set of values has often come to the forefront.

These fundamental values include **equality** (all human beings are of equal worth, and therefore should have equal rights); **justice** (it is unacceptable that, because of the way power is distributed, some should enjoy wealth and privilege while many others should be consigned to poverty, starvation, and early death) and **freedom** from exploitation and oppression. These are the values that have driven countless movements of resistance throughout history and continue to drive the modern labour movement.

What makes the modern labour movement different from many earlier liberation movements is that it is international in nature. Since the development of capitalism, the world has shrunk. New ways of communicating (the telegraph, the telephone, the internet) and new means of transport (from steam-powered rail to the advent of air travel), along with big changes in the way that trade works, have allowed the development of truly global companies and truly global workforces. With many workers on different sides of national borders working in the same industries, in similar conditions and companies, it always made sense to organise together.

The **internationalism** of the labour movement is further rooted in the fact that workers are an international class with a common cause. Whether you were born in, or live in, Poland, India, the UK, or Senegal, you are denied control over what you produce and how it is produced. People are overworked, underpaid, and alienated the whole world over. What's more, when workers' conditions are attacked in one country, it has a knock-on effect for workers around the world. If tin miners in Peru are forced to work for poverty wages, tin mine owners in Australia will seek to pay their workers less to stay competitive.

The workers' movement has also fought for **independence**. Many have tried to control our institutions from the outside – imperialist powers used their spy organisations to create unions which did their bidding; Stalinists took over unions and turned them into arms of their repressive states; Mafias and violent gangs have tried to turn unions into tools to control industries so they can keep stealing from hard-working people; Political parties and Religious movements have tried to use unions to increase their power, while paying lip-service to workers. No workers' organisation controlled from the outside can ever truly represent working class people.

These values of **equality, justice, freedom, independence, and internationalism** mean that for us, democracy is not just an end goal but a means to achieving freedom. Undemocratic means cannot lead to democratic outcomes. Democracy is a living process and a continuous work in progress. For democracy within the labour movement to thrive, workers' organisations must be independent- their aims, their tactics, their political ideas- must be chosen by the movement itself, not by private companies, governments, donors, outside political parties, or so on.

"[It is] a hundred times untrue that the end justifies the means... Every end requires its own means, and an end is only obtained by the appropriate means"

Victor Serge, From Lenin to Stalin

Not only does the labour movement need to have democratic organisations, democracy is one of its aims. Workers and their organisations often have to rely on the strength of their numbers and ability to act together to fight bad conditions and injustice. While you can keep some plans secret, having conversations with hundreds, thousands, and millions of your fellow workers, creating a common plan and aims, and then acting on them, requires a democratic society. This is why the workers movement has so often fought for democratic rights.

This book offers readers a chance to explore these values, how they have been acted on, and the role that they can still play. Our movement faces many obstacles to success, and it is ultimately through a democratic culture which places emphasis on our shared values that we can continue to grow in size and strength, and meet the challenges of today.

Internationalism Beyond Europe

While many of our international labour organisations are now truly global in scope, they often started as European and North American institutions in the 1800s and early-to-mid-1900s. There are several reasons for this.

It was in Europe that modern industry first developed in big clusters around towns and cities, bringing hundreds and thousands of workers together into the same neighbourhoods and workplaces. Organising trade unions was easier in these circumstances than across large, mainly rural areas with poor communication and transport networks.

European states had colonised much of Africa, Asia, and Oceania, turning independent peoples into colonised populations. The European governments deliberately prevented the growth of modern industry in these conquered lands, forcing them instead to produce agricultural exports (such as cereals, coffee, tea, sugar, or cotton).

The imperial powers aimed to take as many natural resources as possible for their own countries and pay as little as possible to do so. They didn't want to pay to improve infrastructure, modernise equipment, train workers, or provide decent pay, living conditions, or public services- that would have threatened the entire business model! Often European workers were brought in to be supervisors, roads and railways were only built so that raw materials could be taken to ports faster and taken out of the country where they had grown, and colonised peoples were forced to move to unfamiliar places and live in extreme squalor.

What's more, while Europe in the 1800s was far from democratic, colonial states used stricter laws and extreme violence to prevent challenges to European rule. These conditions were much less favourable to labour organising.

Colonialism was justified by racism. Non-white people were often talked about and treated as though they were either naïve children or violent animals, not capable of running their own societies without white people's supervision. As we shall see later, while some trade unionists and labour activists challenged these views, they were sadly not uncommon in the movement.

When European activists started creating international organisations, labour movements outside the continent were less-developed, more difficult to communicate with because of colonial repression, and ignored because of the racism within Europe, North America, and settler-colonial states. Because the focus of this book is on institutions as well as ideas, labour movements in Europe and North America will often take centre stage when we look at the development of international institutions. While we aim to include examples of different trends from many different parts of the world in this book, it is impossible in a text of this size to include a detailed history of every country and region's labour movement and the conditions which shaped it. We urge readers to make use of the 'further readings' section and to use other sources of information alongside this text.

A Guide to this Book

Each chapter in this book follows a roughly-chronological structure. Because we have chosen to focus on themes, ideas, and political organisations across the global workers movement, it would be impossible to follow everything in a neat line from one year to the next.

This is because different ideas and types of organisation and tactics are formed by people in different political and economic situations. Capitalism has not developed across the whole world in the same way or at the same pace. Neither have democratic or labour rights. Neither has the working class or the workers' movement.

As capitalism grew in different ways at different times, it would be impossible to say, for example, that 'industrial unionism grew between the 1870s and 1900s', and for that sentence to be true for all countries around the world. This book is not meant to be a guide to the history of every country's labour movement, but to international trends and institutions. Sometimes this means we will use examples of a trend from one country or another, or refer to general international trends. These may not refer to every country at every time.

This book was originally written for British readers. However, with funding from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and advice and input from many people- labour historians, activists, and workers- we have reworked it for a global audience.

This book is currently four chapters long. We want to develop a fifth chapter with your input. We encourage people involved in the labour movement to set up discussion groups, educational events, and educational programmes, and to submit responses about the text, reflecting on the importance of history for the movement today. Submissions will be included in a fifth chapter which will be published as part of a physical copy of this text. We can provide support for educational events and programmes- for further information please get in touch with us at gli-uk@global-labour.net

Chapter 1: Where Did We Come From? The Origins and Ideals of the Workers Movement

The Earliest Examples of Labour Organising

Even before trade unions as we know them today came to exist, there have been many examples of workers banding together for better conditions.

In 1170 BCE, the first recorded labour strike took place in the Egyptian village of Deir-El-Medina, which was home to the artisans and tomb-builders who built the Valley of the Kings.

It took place under the reign of Ramses III, who was the last powerful pharaoh of the Egyptian Empire. His regime claimed to be based on the Ancient Egyptian value of *ma'at*, or harmony, under which universal, communal, and personal balance was the highest good.

Attacks from marauders and corruption in the ruling class had depleted Egypt's wealth and grain supply. As a result, artisans and labourers had not been receiving their rations on time.

Angry with an 18 day wait for their rations, workers went on strike. They lay down their tools and marched towards the city shouting, "*We are Hungry!*", staging a sit-in.

In response, the officials gave them rations and sent them home. However, this did not solve the underlying problem and soon the labourers' conditions became harsh once more. They went on strike again. This time they blocked all access to the Valley of the Kings so that no priests or family members could pay their respects to the dead. This was very effective, and eventually the officials agreed to pay the workers their rations on time.

The strike marked a major change in the relations between workers and officials. The strike began in protest at late wages but soon became a protest of corruption and injustice. The workers had taken it upon themselves to challenge the rulers' way of governing. It was also the first time that anyone had directly challenged the value of *ma'at*. The success of this strike encouraged others to do the same.



Egyptian Craftsmen were highly-skilled workers who made beautiful decorations for the tombs of the powerful. When they weren't paid on time, they went on strike, and even robbed the tombs that they'd created.

Religious Proto-Socialism

Before the growth of ideas like socialism, anarchism, syndicalism, and communism, there were still conflicts between the haves and have-nots. In some cases, these have-nots were peasants and serfs who did not work for a wage, but instead had to provide crops, join the army, or work for free for

local lords. In some cases, they were urban and rural workers in industries much smaller than those we know today, the rules of which were set by a few masters. Sometimes they were self-employed, sometimes they were waged, sometimes they worked for many years to pay off debt, sometimes they were enslaved, and sometimes they were employed in different ways at the same time.

The have-nots in these pre-capitalist societies often used religious ideas and language to explain their situation, forming left-wing religious movements. Some of these movements saw no way for the oppressed to change things and said that you should quit society rather than get rid of the government or the masters and landlords. The Bogomils were a Christian movement amongst Slavs in what are now the Balkan states, and were most popular in the lands of modern Bulgaria and Bosnia between the 900s and the 1400s. They hated the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, and were oppressed by both. While they launched no uprisings against the state, they said that the world and its authorities were wicked.

“They teach their followers not to obey their masters; they scorn the rich, they hate the Tsars, they ridicule their superiors, they reproach the boyars, they believe that God looks in horror on those who labour for the Tsar, and advise every serf not to work for his master”

-Cosmas the Priest, *Sermon Against the Heretics*

However, some religious proto-socialists led and took part in uprisings. In 1416, thousands of peasants, nomads, and seafarers joined an uprising led by Sheikh Bedreddin against the Ottoman Empire, in the lands of what are now Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece. It was the biggest revolt in the entire history of the Empire, and came after a gruelling 11 year civil war and a series of fights between the Ottomans and nearby rival states. All this conflict had put a lot of stress on ordinary people, and many had even been forcibly deported to different parts of the empire, often to lands that were unsuitable for their needs.

Many were inspired and organised by Börklüce Mustafa, a preacher whose followers dressed in simple, plain clothes and ate simple, plain food. Mustafa preached that everything must be shared in common— food, clothing, ploughs, and lands, and that there was no difference between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. This message caught on, and 6000 followers joined him, defeating two imperial armies before being eventually put down.

Bedreddin and Mustafa were both killed for their part in the revolt, but remain inspirational figures for many on the Turkish left today. Marxist poet Nazim Hikmet wrote the *Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* in his honour.

This was not the only uprising by religious proto-socialists. In 1524-5, peasants and urban workers across what is now Germany revolted against their governments which were run by princes and priests. 50 of their representatives got together in Memmingen and drew up a list of demands which included:

- The right to hunt, fish, farm, and gather wood in lands which had once been public, but powerful lords had taken over.
- An end to being treated like serfs and instead treatment as equals.
- Reductions in rents, taxes, and fines on the poor

This revolutionary movement also made alliances with some of the less-wealthy nobles and masters who wanted more say in the existing system, but not a total change. These middle classes often

made separate peaces with the authorities once they had gotten some guarantees that they would get a place at the table, and left the peasants to be violently crushed by the better-armed armies of the big landlords. Some 100,000 would die in the Peasants War, including a famous radical preacher named Thomas Müntzer. His reported last words "*Omnia sunt communia*" ('All things are to be held in common' or 'Everything is for everyone') can still be found on left-wing movements' banners today.

These movements were often unsuccessful, but showed some key principles of workers' politics which are important to today. They organised beyond borders, and built alliances of very different types of workers and peasants- no matter where they lived, the way they were exploited, or who they worshipped. Their legacies have inspired many, and their ideas helped pave the way for the first modern labour movements.

Before the Unions: Guilds

Guilds were some of the first popular membership organisations. These groups were very common in medieval Europe, but similar types of organisations existed around the world- from Turkey and Russia to China and Japan. They organised people by trade, and contained masters (employers), journeymen (skilled workers), and apprentices (trainees). Some of their activities are similar to those of modern trade unions, but they also took on a range of other roles.

They were often given exclusive rights to practice their trade by a local ruler. Members of the guild would be the only people allowed to take part in that trade, and would make and sell their products in conditions and at a price set by the guild's membership. They jealously guarded their trade secrets to stop people who hadn't completed an apprenticeship from practicing the job. This would keep competition for jobs down, and keep wages high (in theory).

The Revolt of the Ciompi

In late 1300s Florence, the wool guild was open only to the trade's employers, not the workers. The wool-carders (known as *Ciompi*), whose job was to comb wool so it was ready for spinning, were banned from organising.

Florence had 21 guilds at the time, and they effectively controlled the local government- 7 big guilds represented the richest trades' leaders, and 14 smaller ones represented skilled artisans and newly-rich merchants. Some 5000 people were guild members, out of around 55,000 people living in Florence. There were 10-15,000 wool-carders, who had been explicitly banned from organising guilds or gathering in groups of six or more, after a previous attempt to organise in the 1340s.

Those not in the guilds had no political voice, were underpaid for their produce, had to pay heavy taxes on basic food, and often faced months of unemployment throughout the year. Workers and those in debt could face cruel and violent punishment. Those in the smaller 14 guilds wanted equal government power to those in the big 7. They formed an alliance with the unorganised wool-carders, and in 1378 they rose up as part of the *Ciompi Revolt*.

In June and July of 1378, the *Ciampi* and other unrepresented workers took action- they refused to work, and attacked the houses of the rich, the monasteries, and government buildings. They marched on the jails and freed poor prisoners.

On July 21st, a crowd of 7000 people, both from the small guilds and *Ciampi*, stormed the city government headquarters and hung flags representing the minor guilds and unrepresented workers across the building. Records of workers' convictions and debts were burned in the uprising.

The unorganised formed three guilds, and were able to take part in the city government, with one of the *Ciampi* becoming the city's leader. Salt and flour prices were regulated, work guaranteed for the textile workers, debtors' prison and many debts abolished, and the barbaric practice of chopping off workers' limbs as a punishment was ended. Rulers from big guilds were ousted, and the minor guilds increased their power.

However, the *Ciampi* soon found that the small 14 guilds were still blocking their attempts to improve the laws. The wool-carders staged their own uprising in August 1378, demanding full control of the city government, but were slaughtered in the grounds of the government's palace by their former allies. The 3 new guilds were forcibly broken up and many of their gains made during the uprising lost.

Members took oaths promising to support each other, to keep the group's secrets, to pay their dues, and to stick to the rules of membership. The guilds provided members with insurance, support in sickness, and even a social club. They organised religious ceremonies, festivals, parades, and feasts.

In some cases, members of the early labour movements kept rituals and habits that were common within the guilds. But it would be wrong to say that they simply evolved into modern working-class organisations. They bound together workers and bosses by industry, and the masters often tried to prevent the journeymen and apprentices from challenging them or organising separately.

Before the Unions: Journeymen Associations

For most of history, when workers got together to try and improve their lot, they faced violence and harassment from people in power. They had to look for ways to cover up their activities by pretending to be other types of organisations.

From the mid-1300s, many journeymen started organising separately from the guilds. They set up journeyman's associations (sometimes called 'fraternities') which represented them and them alone. Members of these associations and professions started wearing special clothes- such as fancy hats and trousers- to show that they were not just servants. They started taking oaths to protect and support one another, and more and more refused to let guild officials mediate disputes between journeymen and masters. They wanted to represent themselves and be independent. They organised their own ceremonies, feasts, parades, and insurance, separate of the guilds.

Journeymen often had networks of pubs and inns where they could find work. They would 'tramp' from town to town, and would be able to find out if there was work available from other journeymen at these places. If there wasn't, they were looked after and then sent on to the next town. Many of these networks were international, and were used by journeymen to make sure there wasn't too much competition for work, so they could have more control over conditions and wages.

These organisations started becoming so threatening to the masters' control that by the 1500s, the state tried to clamp down on them. In 1530 a law was passed across the Holy Roman Empire (a large state which included parts of modern Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Croatia- to name just a few!) which banned Journeymen from striking. Similar laws were passed across France throughout the 1500s, and in England in 1549. The English laws remained in place until 1826.

To get around the laws against striking, if the journeymen had a problem with a master or masters in a town, they would blacklist that employer. Journeymen would quit one or two at a time, and then use the networks of inns to find work in other towns, while people at inns would warn newcomers against taking the vacant jobs. In the city of Colmar (in modern day France), bakers boycotted the city for 10 years from 1495 to 1505. They were annoyed that they were bumped from a prestigious position in a local religious procession, and did not return until they were given their original spot!

Before the Unions: Friendly Societies

The late 1600s and early 1700s also saw the emergence of other types of workers' organisations, such as the **friendly societies**. As workers started moving from the countryside to the towns, they could no longer rely on the charity of churches to help them when they were sick or help their families if they died. Instead, they set up groups where all members would regularly contribute part of their wage as a form of insurance. They would put their funds into a locked box kept at a local ale house, a practice which started with sailors but soon spread to other trades.

In 1793 in England, they were made fully legal by 'Rose's Law,' while trade unions were still illegal. English Friendly Societies soon became fronts for trade union and radical activities. In 1810 when button makers were in dispute with their employers, they formed the 'Loyal Albion Lodge'. As one member later recalled: *"We had a sick and burial club, our only legal hold in those days, but our principal object was to keep up wages"*

Similar groups combining mutual aid and workplace organising have existed around the world. In the Philippines a series of 'Gremios' sprung up from around the 1850s, often amongst groups of skilled workers. All members would put money into the organisation, and get support for times of sickness and hardship. In some cases, they organised feasts on religious holidays.

These groups also took action against the Spanish colonial authorities and their employers. In 1872, members of the 'Gremios de Impresores' struck in protest of poor pay and conditions, and abuse from Spanish foremen. Also in that year, members of a mutual aid association set up twenty years earlier for Filipino workers and soldiers at the arsenal in Cavite City, mutinied and fired on Spanish officers. They had recently been told that they would have to pay more taxes to the colonial state, and that they were to take part in forced, unpaid labour. The uprising was crushed violently within two days, and several Filipino priests were executed for allegedly taking part. The rebellion and its violent putdown helped provoke the Filipino independence movement. While the Spanish colonial

powers banned the workers' gremios in 1887, they helped to lay the groundwork for the emergence of the union movement in the early 1900s.

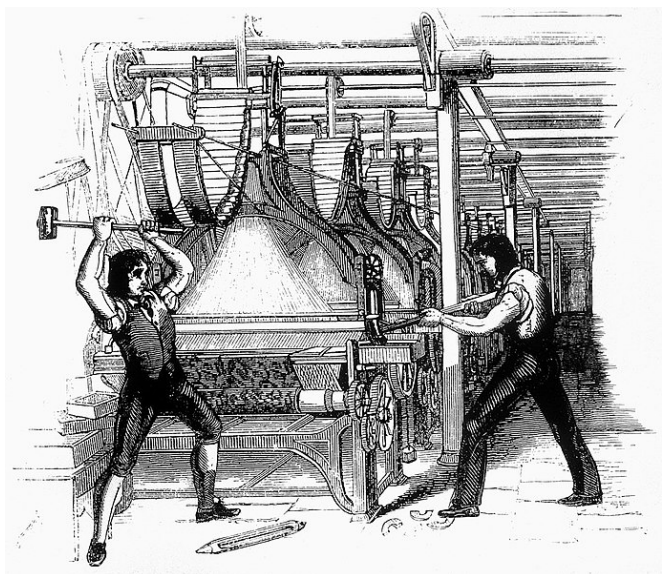
These types of groups which combine mutual aid and worker organising can still be found today, particularly in the informal economy. During the Covid pandemic, for example, the Nepal Transport Labour Association distributed food bundles and personal protective equipment to members, and pressured bosses to provide free Covid testing. In Brazil, waste pickers organised together through CataSaúde Viraliza project (an alliance between NGO's and unions), supported one another by distributing food and personal protective equipment, and lobbied local governments for access to vaccines.

During the era of proto-unions, strikes were often marked by 'rioting' and the smashing of machines. The guilds of old had once had the right to enter workshops and destroy both machines and tools which had not been approved of by their society. Many underground trade unions, modelled on guilds and journeymen associations, kept up this tradition.

In England this happened frequently in the 1700s and 1800s. **The Luddite Movement** (1811-1817) was perhaps most famous. Gangs of workers would gather at night to break into workshops, and smash new machines which had led to wage cuts, job losses, health risks, and a 'speeding-up' of monotonous work. In some cases, they had to fight the army to get at the machines. Some employers even started building secret vaults to hide their property. This was a time of 'collective bargaining by riot.' When picketing and protesting could see you arrested, fined, and even killed, sabotage and riot seemed to be much more effective tactics. In some cases, Luddites wanted to end the threat that machines posed to their working conditions; in others they explicitly called for the right to vote.

In France, machine-breaking took place before and during the 1789 Revolution. In the five years leading up to it, St Etienne was home to waves of machine-breaking, with metal workers, silk ribbon makers, and coal miners all taking part. During the revolution, wool workers often led machine-breaking actions, destroying and setting fire to English-style machines ('spinning Jennies') and the proto-factories which threatened to make their work repetitive, dangerous, and precarious. They would also attack government officials' and tax collectors' offices at the same time.

Across many countries, repressive laws against workers' organisations forced workers to create front groups, and dual-purpose groups. They combined mutual aid with organising and action (sometimes taking violent forms), to improve their working conditions and have a greater say in society.



Before striking and picketing were legal, workers often rioted and destroyed machines to express themselves. Here the English Luddites break stocking-frames in 1812.

The Earliest Unions

Because many of the earliest trade unions had to operate in secret, it is hard to pinpoint when exactly the first 'modern' unions existed. Between the late 1700s and mid-1800s, however, groups which could definitely be called trade unions started to be formed in England.

This went hand in hand with huge changes in the way that the economy was organised. **The Enclosures** saw aristocratic landowners drive many peasants off their traditional lands to make way for wool-producing sheep, forcing the former-peasants to move to the towns and the cities. New machines changed the way many industries would work, and brought together larger workforces. Raw materials were grabbed from new colonies by European powers, while their local industries were destroyed so that European products could be sold without competition. At the start of the 1700s, India produced 25% of the world's textiles, but British conquest and control meant that a century later, India was the largest importer of British textiles.

As poverty and population grew in many cities, the young working class increasingly had a reason to resist and the numbers to do so successfully. More and more, the production of goods was being done by large numbers of people working together in a single site or place. Mass workers' action was becoming more powerful.

In Manchester, England in 1818, cotton workers went on strike. This was nothing particularly new. But this time, strikers from each mill elected a delegate to a central committee which arranged well-organised pickets and large protests. As a local military officer put it:

"The peaceable demeanour of so many thousand unemployed men is not natural... their regular meeting and again dispersing shows a system and organisation of their actions which has some appearance of previous tuition"

The cotton spinners received solidarity funds from friendly societies of other trades. The strike soon spread from the spinners to carpenters, glassblowers, and brick-makers, and all would hold giant, peaceful demonstrations. Soon, nineteen different trades formed a general union called the **Philanthropic Society**. Another was set up in London. Delegates from across the country met to plan how to organise more effectively together. Even though the strike was defeated after 10 weeks, the idea of a public-facing trade union, drawing together workers from several sectors and trades, was growing in strength.

In 1824, the laws banning trade unions were repealed in Britain. Trade unions still faced legal harassment and violence from both employers and the state, but they were no longer explicitly illegal. Attempts were once again made to bring the trade unions together. Over the next twenty years there were several efforts, including the National Association for the Protection of Labour (1830), the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (1834), and the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour (1845).

Organising Internationally

In the early 1800s, unions and workers' associations were on the rise in many different countries. Australia's first unions were founded in the 1820s. France, which had many friendly societies that had organised strikes, saw the growth of workers co-operatives in the 1830s. In Germany, local workers' associations were growing in number, while in the first half of the 19th century, there were

23 court cases in the United States where 'combinations' of workers who fought to get better wages were prosecuted. The mood was growing across Europe and the Americas to not just combine nationally, but internationally as well. In 1843, the French-Peruvian activist Flora Tristan published '*L'Union Ouvrière*' ('The Workers' Union'), in which she called for the establishment of an international general workers' union. Flora had travelled widely before publishing this book, visiting Peru, England, and Ireland. She had been impressed by the English Chartists' and Robert Owen's attempts to set up a general union for all workers, men and women. She was particularly impressed by the Irish people's ability to organise in the face of dire poverty, and repeatedly stated that the French workers could learn from them.



Flora Tristan was a campaigner for women's and workers' rights. She called for workers from different countries to organise into one big union.

She was a tireless fighter, who campaigned for women's rights to divorce and own property, and called for the working class to organise themselves just as the bosses had, and the aristocrats before them. She went on tours of her home country following the same routes that travelling journeymen took on their search for work. She would stay in shabby hotels and put on meetings with local groups of workers where they would discuss what they needed and how best to achieve their goals. She was regularly harassed by the police and denounced by the church. She concluded that workers needed to stop organising in small groups for specific trades, and instead all unite- not just in France, but across borders.

"The Workers' Union," she wrote, *"should establish ... in all capitals of Europe, committees of correspondence."* In her pamphlet, she stressed that the workers had to emancipate themselves by their own action, and that no one else was going to do it for them. What's more, she claimed that they had to unite internationally because society itself had become international. *"Workers, you see the situation. If you want to save yourselves, you have only one means: you must UNITE."*

Flora's ideas were very similar to those that Marx and Engels would develop later on in their famous Communist Manifesto. She continues to inspire to this day- in Peru, a feminist NGO was established and named for her in 1979, which to this day works with the international labour movement to challenge the poor treatment of women both in the workplace and society.

This idea of organising internationally was not just the result of theorists or dreamers. Since the early 1800s, journeymen had gone on international journeys to seek work in towns and cities across Europe. These 'tramping' routes only worked when there was coordination between groups of workers on different sides of national borders - there had to be a way to check that they had served their apprenticeships.

These migrant workers were joined by groups of political exiles and refugees, who had to flee their home countries because of repression, and who would continue writing, publishing, and organising in whichever country they could set up a base in, sharing their democratic and radical ideas with fellow travellers.

In the 1830s, Paris was an important centre of this international organising. The League of Outlaws was set up among German workers (mainly tailors) there in 1834. The group's leader, Theodore Schuster, wanted a 'cooperative republic' to be founded by a revolution led by outlaws and exiles. He argued that the divisions between bosses and workers was more important than the divisions between the Germans and French.

The Outlaws drifted apart after a few years, but a number of them formed the League of the Just in 1836. Its leaders were based in Paris, but it had branches across Germany, Switzerland, and eventually England. A German tailor named Wilhem Weitling drafted the League's manifesto, which called for a revolution led by workers to create a society based on shared property and equal work. Despite being a secret organisation, the group had internal elections and democracy. After a French secret society attempted to seize power in Paris in 1839, the authorities cracked down on the group, arresting, imprisoning, and exiling many of their leaders- despite the fact that they had nothing to do with it!

The attempts to create a formal and permanent organisation which could bring together workers from many countries shifted from Paris to London. London was the home to many political refugees who had been forced to flee their homelands by oppressive governments (including those who had been in Paris in 1839)- the strength of the labour movement and the country's relatively-liberal political culture was attractive to many.

England had already been home to an early working class internationalist effort. In 1836 the working-class pro-democracy campaign group, The Working Men's Association of London, heard of a crackdown on the young Belgian workers' associations. Their secretary, William Lovett, wrote and published an 'Address to the Belgian Working Classes', which encouraged the fledgling labour movement of the country to fight against attempts to shut them down. In this letter they declared that all labourers should work together, saying *"We are of opinion that those who produce the real wealth of any country...have in reality but one great interest."*

The address was a hit, and soon reprinted in Belgian, French, and German publications. Belgian workers sent a reply which declared their allegiance to the international working class.

This exchange of letters soon led English workers to collect funds to help Belgian workers' fight against legal repression. There were soon attempts to turn solidarity campaigns into solid organisations.

In 1844, political exiles from across Europe, living in England, got together with some English Chartists and Socialists to have a banquet. This wasn't just a pleasant evening meal and some nice conversation; the attendees formed the 'Democratic Friends of All Nations' and declared that 'All Men are Brethren.' They were a well-meaning group, but not well-organised, and soon collapsed. The following year, a larger effort was made for a bigger banquet, and the 'Fraternal Democrats' were set up, using the

*"To those who will stir us up
against our brethren and speak to
us of our fatherland and the
general welfare we shall answer:
there is no other fatherland but
the world, and the general
welfare is the welfare of all the
peoples, of all the countries."*
- 'Le Courrier Belge',
January 24, 1837

same motto. This group had secretaries for each nationality represented at the banquet, and is seen by many as the forerunner of the First International (see page 28). While they lasted longer than the Democratic Friends, they found it difficult to organise across Europe after the failed revolutions of 1848, and stuck to publishing messages of international solidarity and articles on international events, rather than organising.

Unions, Revolution, and Reform

The French Revolution of 1789 shocked Europe to its core. One of the most powerful European ruling families had been ousted, not by another monarch, but by a movement of people demanding 'liberty, equality, and brotherhood.' Even though the revolution eventually came full-circle, with Napoleon first crushing the left and then the royal family eventually returning, its memory spread fear amongst the monarchs and aristocrats of Europe.

Many of the pro-democracy movements of the era were led by the growing capitalist class- traders, factory owners, 'professionals', and bankers- who were horrified at being locked out of power despite their wealth. They wanted political equality, so that they could also have access to the power of the state.

However, the foot-soldiers of these movements were often working men and women, who wanted an end to the poverty that they found in the cities. Many of them sought democracy because they hoped that having a political voice would mean an end to the starvation and sickness that defined city life.

'Peterloo', the working-class protest for democracy that was met with extreme violence in Manchester, 1819, was one such example of this idea. The years preceding this protest had seen cotton spinners in the region attempt to unionise and petition parliament for a relief to their poverty, with each of their efforts being met with violence from their rulers. The idea of democracy was enticing to these people.

In 1848, a series of revolutions spread across Europe. Barricades were thrown up across major cities, government offices were stormed, and revolutionary democracies were established. These were revolutions driven by organised workers- in Milan, 338 out of 350 who died on the barricades were from the working class. In France, the workers of Paris were the heart of the revolution. However, within the year, the revolutionary wave was defeated across Europe.

While workers were concentrated in cities which held the keys to power and willing to take to the streets, they were still small in number and weak in organisation. Trade unions tended to be a few hundred, or perhaps a few thousand strong at most. The first national German trade unions were founded in the heat of the



In Berlin, 1848, workers and students set up barricades to protect the new democratic government they had created against the soldiers of the regime.

revolution. Small socialist groups and famous socialist thinkers existed, but there was no large-scale party of the workers in any European state. They could scare their enemies, but not defeat them.

Signs that this situation was changing came in 1871, when the workers of Paris rose up once again, forming the **Paris Commune**. After an unpopular war between Napoleon III's France and Prussia, the citizens of Paris refused to disarm, and formed their own local government, electing socialists and anarchists to represent them. They allowed workers to take over workshops and run them democratically, they abolished debts and rents owed by the poor to the rich, established free schools, banned night work in bakeries, and demanded pawn shops return the goods and tools of workmen which were sold off due to the poverty brought on by war. The conservatives' government, based in Versailles, were determined to crush the Commune, and invaded the city, unleashing a wave of extreme violence on the people of Paris. Between 5000 and 30,000 workers and 'Communards' were killed in the infamous 'Bloody Week' when the city was taken over by the old rulers. The violence of the initial uprising could not compare to the bloodshed of the counter-revolution- a theme common to workers' history.

These experiences of the potential power of organised workers, and the dangers that they faced should they fail, encouraged labour activists across the world to think about how they could gain power not just in their workplaces, but in wider society.

International Anti-Slavery Movements

It was not just waged workers who were beginning to organise internationally. Enslaved workers also used international networks to defeat the system which denied them their rights.

The European Empires and colonial states relied on slavery to take the resources from conquered lands and to grow cash crops. When genocides, brutal conditions, and imported diseases wiped out too many locals for a successful slave society, slaves were imported from overseas. Infamously, the Triangular Trade saw between 10 and 12 million African men, women, and children enslaved and forced onto boats to cross the Atlantic Ocean and work in the Americas. International traders grew rich off selling slaves, and selling products like sugar, tobacco, and cotton grown by enslaved peoples.

The enslaved peoples resisted in many ways. Sometimes they wrecked machines. Sometimes they worked slowly. Sometimes they ran away and set up 'Maroon' communities (groups of formerly-enslaved black workers who banded together, sometimes joining with indigenous peoples, sometimes forming small bands, and sometimes large-scale cities and regions). Sometimes they openly rebelled.

The most successful slave rebellion was in Haiti. Originally a French colony called San Domingue, it was the most profitable colony in the Americas, producing more sugar and coffee than anywhere else. Forced to trade solely with France, the colony was very important to French elites' wealth. The land was rich, and the people were worked to exhaustion in horrific conditions.

During the French Revolution, white slave-owners tried to gain independence so they could choose who to trade with. Poor whites protested because they felt that they deserved liberty, equality, and brotherhood- which in their eyes meant the right to own slaves! Non-enslaved black and mixed-race people wanted an end to white rule in the colony, but not necessarily an end to slavery.

The slave rebellion broke out in 1791 and took 13 years to succeed, with Haiti becoming the first independent black republic and the first state to ban slavery in 1804. They were led by Toussaint Louverture, who has remained an inspirational figure for many to today. It was an extremely difficult struggle- the slaves had to fight against many different groups who wanted the return of slavery. First, they had to defeat white land-owners, then British and Spanish invaders, then Napoleon's French Empire.

Some of Napoleon's forces in Haiti were Polish soldiers who had also seen their attempts to fight for equality and independence crushed by invading empires. While Napoleon had promised them that he would fight for an independent Polish state if they worked for him first, many of them saw similarities with the group of formerly-enslaved black people of Haiti. These Poles defected and fought the French, and were rewarded with citizenship after the revolution.

Haiti became a source of inspiration to enslaved workers across the world- particularly in the Caribbean and throughout the Americas. During an attempted slave revolt in Cuba in 1812, Spanish authorities found picture books containing portraits of the Haitian revolutionary leaders. Haiti provided refuge for runaway slaves, and to anti-colonial activists such as Simon Bolivar, who would help end Spanish rule in the continent. Many local Spanish American elites came to support an end to slavery because they feared being overthrown, as had happened in Haiti.

Though Haiti abolished slavery, they were forced to pay the French former slave-owners 150 million francs in exchange for an end to their attacks and diplomatic recognition in 1825 (the US refused until 1862 after campaigns led by black Americans forced change). They were only able to pay off the amount with French and US loans, keeping the country trapped in debt for hundreds of years to come.

As Haitian slavery ended, it increased in the southern states of the USA. While several northern states had abolished slavery, the end of the institution only came in 1865 towards the end of the US Civil War. The pressure to end slavery across the entire country had come from an international campaign organised by churches, supported by workers, and which grew in strength through every slave rebellion.

Autobiographies of runaway slaves in the USA were published in the UK and across Europe, becoming hugely popular and inspiring petitions and campaigns. French societies translated and published American anti-slavery essays in the late 1700s despite royal attempts to censor them. Former slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs toured Britain in the mid-1800s, giving well-attended public speeches about the evils of slavery. International boycotts were launched of slave-produced sugar, and together with slave revolts, helped to reduce the profitability of the system.

During the American Civil War, ships from the slave-holding Southern states were blocked from leaving ports by the northern navies. This caused a 'cotton famine', causing great hardship in the cotton industry and mass unemployment amongst workers in cotton mills. Many mill bosses lobbied the British government to break the blockade. Their workers felt otherwise.

In 1862, mill workers in Manchester, England got together at the Free Trade Hall and passed a resolution offering their solidarity and support to the northern states, the blockade, and the fight against slavery. Although they faced poverty in the short-term, they recognised the importance of solidarity and of the struggle against racism. Similarly, the International Working-Mens' Association

(often referred to as the First International) sent a letter of support to Abraham Lincoln in 1864, stating that the abolition of slavery was of vital importance to the entire global working class.

International Capitalism and Empire

It is impossible to talk of the history of workers' organisation without talking about the history of capitalism. Early capitalism was only possible because of the robbery of different groups of people. Lands that had been used by large groups of people for hunting, growing, and wood were turned into the private property of the rich. European empires stripped what we now call the Global South of its natural resources, enslaved human beings on a scale never seen before, and destroyed local trades to make sure their industries profited.

From the late 1400s, this expansion of empires and enslavement of non-Europeans made many merchants and their states very wealthy, creating some of the vast pools of money needed for the development of capitalist industry. It also led to large numbers of people crossing borders, and created conditions for workers in different countries that made international organising both possible and necessary.

The peoples whose lands were invaded and colonised were worked so brutally that many consider it to be a genocide, with some local populations dying out almost entirely due to overwork, lack of food, violent treatment, and disease. The Taino people, for example, lived across the islands of the Caribbean and were the first group to come into contact with the Spanish. Within 50 years, only 10% of their population remained.

The Spanish Empire created a system known as *encomienda* which made all native populations property of the Spanish crown. They could then be 'gifted' to Spanish colonists to perform hard labour, and then replaced with others from local villages if they died. Frequently men were forced into mining gold or silver, and both men and women were forced to work on agricultural plantations. Often they did not have enough time to grow their own food, creating famines and aiding the spread of disease.

Overworked and enslaved native populations did not just accept their fate. In 1712, the Huilliche people rose up in a cluster of islands known as the Chiloé Archipelago, in what is now Chile. A new colonial governor had changed the way the *encomienda* system worked, so native workers received no payment, and were tortured if they did not show up for work. On the evening of February 10th, 600 Huilliches stormed the houses of their Spanish bosses, killing them and their families. A brutal counter-insurgency killed many hundreds of locals in response. In the aftermath of the violence, the Spanish authorities replaced the governor and put in place new labour regulations. By the end of the 1700s, the Spanish got rid of the system altogether as it caused too many uprisings by local populations. However, as we will see, it was too little, too late.

As slavery became less profitable and more politically dangerous following not just the Haitian Revolution, but a series of revolts across Barbados, Demerara (now Guyana), Jamaica, Cuba, and the Southern states of the US, the institution gradually died out across the Americas. The profits of the system were funnelled into industry, trade, technological development, and infrastructure across the 'Global North'. Many trade networks established through slavery were kept running.

Slavery became less profitable and more politically dangerous for the imperial powers over time. However, they had another system of unfree labour that they could use – indentured labour.

This system placed workers on contracts that would take them overseas to other colonial states for years at a time, and only allowed to return home at the end of the contracts. Sometimes the workers were allowed a small parcel of land to settle in the foreign country they had been working in.

Indentured labour became very popular for colonial powers in the 1800s as certain raw materials - for example guano (bird and bat faeces used for fertilisers) and rubber – became more important to modernising capitalist industries. These resources required very demanding physical work to extract them from the earth.

Many of the indentured labourers employed in these growing industries, as well as on plantations and in mines and transport, came from China and India, and were referred to as 'coolies', although that term is now more often used as a slur. Indentured labourers were often lied to about the work

they would be doing, or found out the pay didn't live up to the promises, or in some cases were even kidnapped. Some signed up out of poverty and desperation.

All the major empires, whether British, French, Spanish, Dutch or Danish, used this system, as well as several independent states, such as Peru. Working conditions were often brutal – In German New Guinea (now a part of Papua New Guinea), around half of the 400 Chinese indentured servants

Chinese Workers Revolt in South Africa

In 1905, Chinese indentured workers in the gold mines of North Randfontein, South Africa, started a work-to-rule protest. Over the previous six months, they had been forced to work longer and longer and to drill deeper and deeper into the rock- by the start of the year they were working an extra 7 days per month with no increase in pay. They worked in groups of about 20, each supervised by a 'head man'

At first workers tried 'passive resistance'. Many would stay away from the mines, or ran away from the houses on the mining company's land. So many ran away that the government banned Chinese workers from even leaving the mining companies' property. They also arrested a number of Chinese workers for 'refusing work', sentencing them to hard labour.

Then the workers presented a mass petition, demanding an increase in pay, which management refused. Instead management tried to divide the workers – they offered the 'head men' extra pay for getting members of their crews to drill deeper than they were contractually obliged to. The workers had no legal right to reject this offer- so instead, every day, all 1300 Chinese workers drilled exactly 12 inches deep into the rock- no more, no less.

The police were called by the mine owners to arrest the ringleaders for 'refusing work', despite the fact that they were doing exactly what their contracts stated. When they arrived, they were pelted with sticks, stones, and bottles, and forced to flee by the organised workers. The police eventually returned with reinforcements from five surrounding towns, and had to chase the workers down the railway tracks and fight several battles before eventually arresting 53 ringleaders. Management realised that even arrests wouldn't break the workers' resistance, and so offered a better deal which meant that all workers got extra overtime pay.

brought over in the late 1880s to work on tobacco plantations died before their contracts were up. The Peruvian Chincha Isles were known as the 'Islands of Hell' as so many died mining guano.

It was very difficult for indentured workers to organise. They could easily be arrested or deported if they refused work. Company bosses regularly used violence against workers who protested or who didn't work as hard as was demanded of them. Local governments were happy to turn a blind eye to abuses of workers, and imprison workers who refused to be exploited.

As with the anti-slavery movement, reports of horrifying conditions were published in the international press, and a combination of uprisings and political pressure helped to end the system. The numbers of indentured workers shrank in the late 1800s and 1900s as anti-colonial movements grew in power.

Growing Chinese discontent in the 1870s led to a mostly-successful banning of the practice. A major strike among Indian indentured servants in South Africa in 1913 and campaigning from Indian nationalists during World War I led to its end in the British Empire in 1917. The Dutch Empire started to get rid of the practice in its Indonesian colonies after a series of strikes in the sugar industry and the growth of the Indonesian anti-colonial movement. It was only finally abolished in the Dutch Empire as the Depression of the 1930s led many colonial bosses to want to lay off the 'coolie' workers.

International movements against slavery and indentured labour often did not directly lead to the setting up of organisations which are still with us today. However, they created connections and communications networks around the world which were vital for the growth of the political and industrial wings of the international workers' movement. They also helped lay the groundwork for anti-colonial and anti-racist ideas to be taken seriously by sections of the labour movement in the powerful imperial nations. What's more, they showed that through a range of tactics and alliances, even the most oppressive systems of repression can be challenged, changed, and defeated.

Labour and Nationalism

Internationalism is a very common ideal within the workers' movement. It is pretty much agreed by everyone that we should work across borders, although there are different views about how this can be done. The question of nationalism, however, has proved to be much more divisive.

'Nationalism' can mean many different things to many different people. To make things easy, we will say it is the belief that there are groups of culturally-similar people who can be called 'nationalities', and that each of these groups has the right to rule themselves in their own state.

In Europe in the late 1700s and early 1800s, this was a revolutionary idea. Nationalists challenged the idea that kings and queens were representatives of God who should rule over many different peoples and lands, and that aristocrats should have special privileges over everyone else. Nationalists generally believed that all members of the nation were equal and should have equal rights and an equal say in how their country was run (although many elite nationalists were unsure whether women, minority language and religious groups, workers, and non-white people could be counted as part of the nation).

The examples of the French and American Revolutions helped to make the idea of nationalism very popular in the 1800s. Many middle-class people, wealthy merchants, and business owners liked the idea because it could help them become more powerful than the aristocrats.

Many early socialists and labour activists were also nationalists because they wanted an end to monarchies and aristocrats. They were also internationalists- they wanted a series of democratic nation-states which worked with each other, rather than fight with one another. Nationalism at times became an internationalist cause.

For example, Poland had been divided up between the rulers of Austria, Prussia, and Russia through a series of invasions and treaties between the 1770s and 1815. Polish people in these different states were often treated as second-class citizens- they had few political rights and were often banned from using their own language in schools, business, and government.

The cause of Poland was very important to many working-class fighters for democracy throughout the 1800s. In 1830 a revolt by the Poles against their Russian rulers turned into a fully-fledged war, known as the November Uprising. The Polish movement was brutally crushed by the Tsar's armies, causing socialists and democrats from the country to move across Europe, and even to the Americas, seeking refuge.

A number of radicals arrived in England, setting up organisations in which they could continue organising, such as *Lud Polski* ('Polish People'). *Lud Polski* called on English workers not to support the Polish

aristocrats who merely wanted to restore their old kingdom, but instead called on them to *"find their allies in us, the simple soldiers, peasants, artisans."* They found supporters amongst Chartists (a working-class pro-democracy movement) and the Irish nationalists, who saw the Polish struggle for democracy and independence as a kindred movement.

The Chartists and Irish nationalists organised protests against state visits by Russian rulers, and urged the government to support Polish independence and take a strong anti-Russian stance. Some of the Polish émigrés in turn got involved in the English workers' movement for democracy. Major Bartłomiej Beniowski, a left-wing Polish army officer, helped train the Chartists in military tactics and strategies. He was not the only one- in Germany, Austria-Hungary, the United States, and Italy, Polish émigrés played important roles in democratic and labour movements in the mid-1800s.

The movement for a democratic Poland also inspired others to act. In Germany in 1832, the Hambach Festival was organised to demand democracy, national unity, and political liberties. 30,000 people attended, with women's and workers' involvement encouraged. There was also a large contingent of Polish people present, whose struggle for freedom was praised by platform speakers.



Flag of the November Uprising- The slogan reads "For Our Freedom and Yours"

In the colonised countries of the world, nationalist movements also grew up to challenge the lack of democracy and the unfair ways they were treated. In Latin America in the late 1700s and early 1800s, nationalist movements challenged the Spanish Empire. Often these were alliances between elites, workers, and native populations, who all had different reasons to dislike Spanish rule. Some of these movements were very left-wing. For example, in Chile in 1780, two Frenchmen named Antonio joined up with a local also named Antonio, in the 'Conspiracy of the Three Antonios' - they wanted to abolish slavery and the class system, and create a republic. These movements developed into a massive military campaign in 1808, which defeated Spanish rule on the continent by 1826. While the campaign did lead to some important improvements for ordinary people, like the gradual abolition of slavery, it ended up being controlled by local elites. Instead of creating a new continent-wide and democratic state, as figures such as Simon Bolivar had hoped for, rival nation-states were formed which were often controlled by local traders and landowners.

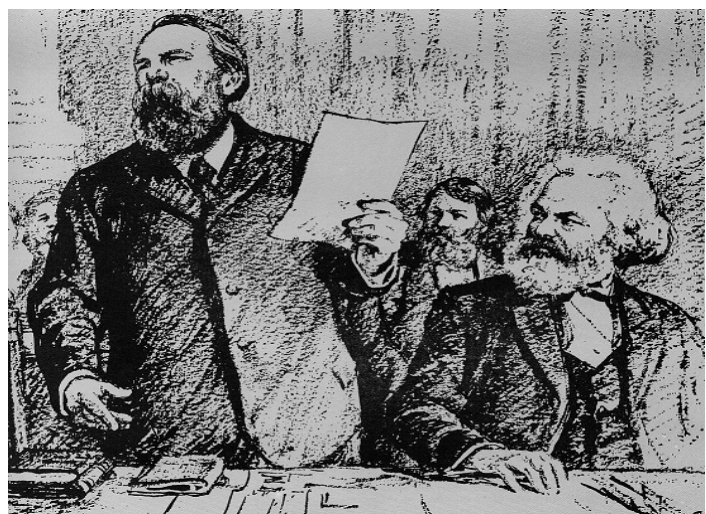
Many socialists and trade unionists have supported oppressed and colonised peoples' nationalism due to their internationalist politics and support for democracy. It has been a part of campaigns which have connected working people across the world.

However, some in the workers' movement did not want alliances with nationalist movements, which were often led by the middle classes. They felt they would use the workers' movement to come to power and then turn on them when they had the force of the army, police, and courts on their side. Some felt it was a distraction from working class issues, and that creating a new nation without creating socialism first, would end up just creating a new group of capitalists that workers had to deal with. Rosa Luxemburg, for example, was an important revolutionary socialist from a Polish-Jewish background during the late 1800s and early 1900s, who played an important role in German and Polish socialist movements. She spoke out against the idea that the workers of Poland should fight for an independent state as their immediate goal - she thought they should fight for socialism, which would allow them to develop a Polish nation not connected to a capitalist nation-state.

The Communist Manifesto

In 1848, one of the most important and influential texts in the history of the modern world was published. *The Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, would shape the ideas and activism of the labour movement over the next 150 years (although it was not well-known until the 1870s).

This short book was itself the product of attempts by working people to organise internationally. The Communist League, based in London, had commissioned Marx to write the manifesto to explain the principles of their group. This group was born of a merger between two



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote together, studied together, organised together, and got drunk together.

others; The League of the Just, and The Communist Correspondence Committee, based in Brussels, which connected socialists from across Europe and had been run by Marx.

The Manifesto, a short, tightly-argued and highly-compressed document, contains a philosophy of history, an analysis of socialist ideas and a call to revolutionary action. At its core is the idea that historical changes are driven by the struggle between classes with different economic wants and needs. In the era of capitalism, the struggle between the bourgeoisie (the bosses) and the proletariat (the workers) had become key. A socialist society, which could end the conflict between classes, could be brought about only by the workers, organised as a political party.

This was ground-breaking for its time. The most prominent socialists in Europe felt that because the political repression they faced was so harsh, the only way to create socialism was to organise secret societies of the trusted few, which could launch coups and implement top-down decrees which stripped the rich of their wealth. But the Manifesto instead said that the first objective of the revolution was to "*win the battle of democracy*". Socialism would come from the working class, democratically organised, taking power for itself.

The workers' struggle, according to the Manifesto, had to be international. The bourgeoisie had created a world market; their companies took raw materials from one country to be worked on in factories and workshops in another, and the finished goods were then sold on in further countries still. Workers were already working together across national borders to create and to distribute products: taking control of production would also require them all to pull together, regardless of where they were from.

The Manifesto ends with the message: "*Workers of all countries, unite!*" which has since appeared on the banners of labour organisations and the headers of left-wing publications the whole world over. The ideas of the manifesto were so powerful, that they inspired the founders and members of many of the trade unions that would shape the modern world.

The First International

After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, governments across Europe worked tirelessly to stop democratic and labour movements from growing. Repressive laws, secret police, and state violence were all used to stop ordinary people from organising.

However, the cities and factories kept on growing, drawing more people into the urban working class, and prompting more and more working people to work together to fight for their rights. The 1860s saw a great revival of labour activism, and it was in this atmosphere of resistance that 'The First International' was born.

The International Workingmen's Association was founded in London, 1864, with its opening speech given by a still relatively-obscure German radical named Karl Marx. This group was a collection of very different organisations and individuals from around the world. Trade unions, socialist parties, left-wing nationalists, and anarchist clubs all affiliated. In many countries, national labour organisations had not yet been formed, so this international connected mainly local or regional groups together. The international drew together groups of workers organising for better treatment in the workplace, with groups who were fighting for political democracy, alongside those who wanted a complete overhaul of the capitalist order.

Many trade unionists found that the International could help them win their struggles in the workplace. In April 1866, the tailors of London went out on strike, demanding higher wages. They immediately contacted the International's General Council, which used the telegraph to let Belgian, Swiss, German, and Parisian tailors know what was going on. The European tailors agreed not to do any work for British firms, and many of the groups contacted also donated to the tailors' strike fund. The London tailors won, and the following year returned the favour when the tailors of Paris went on strike, making sure that French bosses couldn't use English workers as strike-breakers.

Internationalism wasn't just a nice idea- it was helping workers win better pay and conditions across Britain, Europe, and the world. From the bronze workers of Paris and Hamburg's cigar makers to New York's sewing machine workers and engineers in Newcastle, striking workers across the world won with the help of the International's appeals to other groups of workers to prevent strike-breaking and offer solidarity funds.

The First International collapsed in the wake of the Paris Commune, as a factional divide, repression in France, and disinterest from British trade union leaders in building the group all weakened the organisation.

There had been a growing divide in the organisation between those who wanted a centralised organisation with a strong leadership, and those who wanted it to act as a voluntary coordinating body between groups. Those in the former wing tended towards Marxist ideas, and those in the

Women Workers in the First International

There was a strong strain of sexism within part of the First International – several of its leading French members, for example, were opposed to the idea that women should do paid work outside the house. They were opposed by women like Virginie Barbet, who helped organise an important strike of women silk-spinners in Lyon, France, in June, 1869. The striking women were promised strike funds from abroad if they voted to join the First International, which they duly did. However, the promised funds were not sent to women strikers, and were instead used to build the local branch of the organisation rather than to support their dispute.

There were many women played an important role in shaping the First International. One of them was Victoria Woodhull, who was born in rural Ohio, USA, in 1838. She came from a family of petty thieves and con artists, and grew up in extreme poverty. She worked as a clairvoyant, not a particularly lucrative trade, but after giving a hot stock tip to prominent industrialist Cornelius Vanderbilt (most likely a result of her sex worker friends passing on insider information from their wealthy clients rather than her abilities to see into the future), she was given a small fortune which she used to set up a radical newspaper that supported racial and sexual equality, and democratic and labour rights.

She founded a New York section of the International in the US which organised some impressive solidarity demonstrations with the Paris Commune in the face of police violence and harassment. She also published the first English translation of the Communist Manifesto in her newspaper, and helped get the organisation a lot of publicity. However, others within the US section gradually pushed her out of the group, claiming her demands for women's equality and the right to 'free love' (non-monogamy) would alienate ordinary workers.

latter camp leaned towards anarchist and syndicalist ideas, with Mikhail Bakunin serving as a figurehead.

This divide grew as the Commune was crushed, with both sides taking very different lessons from its defeat. A number of activists within the ranks, including Marx, felt that the Commune failed, in part, due to a lack of effective and militant centralised political leadership which could build a new state.

The International's General Council organised a conference in London in 1871, which few anarchists were invited to, and passed a motion calling on the International to support the formation of workers' political parties which could capture state power. Anarchist-leaning sections of the international in Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland objected, and called their own conference at which they demanded a review of the structures of the International through a congress.

This congress took place in The Hague in 1872. The anarchists were in the minority, and were accused of forming a secret international-within-the-international. Their leading figures were expelled, and a separate anarchist-leaning international was soon formed separately from the Marxists' international. Marx also proposed a motion which moved the headquarters of the International to New York. Coordination with the more-active European sections became much more difficult in the wake of this move. Both the 'red' and 'black' internationals withered away by the end of the decade.

While the international had a short lifespan, it had shown how valuable international organisation could be, and would remain an inspiration for labour activists for years after.



Victoria Woodhull played an important role in connecting European and American workers through the International, but her opponents (both right-wing politicians and fellow activists) used sexist ideas to slander her.

Industrial Unionism

The trade unions connected to the First International were, generally speaking, 'craft unions'. These unions organised small, specific groups of workers who took responsibility over lots of different parts of their job; cabinet-makers, boot-makers, hatters, lace-workers, and so on. Their culture often reflected the guilds and journeymen associations which came before them.

Many unions established in the mid-1800s were craft unions. These unions, like the guilds of old, were often worried that their industry could be 'swamped' by unskilled workers, lowering both the quality of their products and their wages. They had very high membership dues, meaning only the better-off workers could join, and limited access to the trade through highly-restricted apprenticeship schemes. Their strength came from their ability to control the nature of the work and access to it- if less people could do their job, then they could demand higher wages for doing it.

The relatively-high wages of members in these skilled jobs with little competition for work, meant that they could pay high union dues which could support full-time officials. These officials tried to

ensure that their unions' funds weren't seized by the government or drained by long strikes. In the minds of many of these leaders, their unions needed to be respectable and act within the law if they wanted to continue being of use to their members.

More conservative than the general unions and machine-smashers of the early 1800s, these unions preferred to use negotiation and arbitration rather than strikes and protests for collective bargaining. Many tried to cooperate with company management to ensure that they could retain the gains they had won in the workplace. From the 1860s joint arbitration boards with delegates from the unions became more common in Europe and North America- the managers hoped that the union leaders would keep their members from getting militant if they had official representation.

However, the craft unions faced a big challenge- **The Second Industrial Revolution**. Beginning in the 1870s-1880s, a series of new inventions changed the world of work once more. Advances in chemicals allowed oil to be refined, new fertilizers to be produced, the growth of plastics and rubber production. The invention of dynamite changed the way that quarries, mining, oil extraction, and tunnel-building worked. Electric power, the use of concrete, and mechanised tools all became widespread, allowing the growth of new types of factories, larger than ever before. This meant that workers no longer needed years of training to be able to do a job- who needs a skilled carpenter when a mechanical saw gets the same results?

Use of the telegraph and the telephone became more common, and rail networks grew massively, making the world a smaller place. As a result, giant integrated companies started growing, expanding across countries and over borders, knocking many of their smaller rivals out of business. Some of these formed trusts and cartels, and started taking on new functions. Instead of just manufacturing one product, some expanded to include transportation, manufacturing of parts and machinery, extracting raw materials, and so on.

The big companies used new management techniques- a skilled artisan was no longer responsible for deciding who to bring on to a project or how the work would be done- instead company-appointed managers decided how to do the job.

These changes led to a rise of a new type of union- the industrial union. Unlike their older cousins in the craft unions, industrial unions organised all workers in an industry, regardless of skill-level or position. As they had less control over training, job requirements, and the nature of the work than the artisans of the craft unions, the way they organised had to be different. They relied on coordinated and well-timed strikes, which could shut down an entire workplace or sector. Because of the nature of their workplaces, and the needs of their members, industrial unions tended to be more militant than the craft unions (although not always).

"These unskilled are very different chaps from the fossilised brothers of the old trade unions; not a trace of the old formalist spirit, of the craft exclusiveness"

Letter from Engels to Herman Schlüter, 1890

The growth of industrial unions was a worldwide phenomenon. In Argentina the first national industrial union, the *Confederación de Ferrocarrileros*, was created just after 1900. In the USA, the Knights of Labor helped spread the idea of industrial unionism. It had started as a secretive organisation in the 1870s- members joined through secret rituals and were given fantastical titles (the leader was called the Grand Master Workman), like the older unions in Britain. However, by 1886, it had grown to over 1 million members, organised in industrial unions, and was leading a

series of strikes, boycotts, and political campaigns across the country. It would decline a few years later, as the more-moderate American Federation of Labor (AFL) proved better at getting recognition agreements with companies and avoiding violent suppression by state governments. While being a largely US-based group, during its heyday the Knights also attempted to create international links and overseas branches.

The Knights' glassmakers' union was particularly strong, and during the 1880s it worked with European unions to prevent strikebreaking and ensure exchanges of union membership cards (this allowed migrant unionists to be registered as a member of the equivalent union in their new country). In 1884 they held a conference with Belgian, French, Italian and English glassworkers, and set up an international alliance. The Belgian and English sections soon rebranded themselves as branches of the Knights, and workers from other trades joined them- coal miners, tin workers, lace makers, and many more. By 1889 they had 10,000 members in the UK, as well as growing sections in New Zealand and Australia- the New Zealand section became very powerful in the 1890s, and even designed new welfare and labour laws for the country. Small groups in France and Italy were a part of the network too, regularly sending reports to be published in the Knights' American journal.

However, the Knights' attempts to expand internationally in Europe crumbled by the early 1890s. Within the US they were facing increasingly violent repression which led to the collapse of two major strikes in 1886 and 1887, demoralising the movement. A rival craft union federation, the American Federation of Labor, split from the Knights and began poaching its members, while pursuing more moderate tactics. With the main organisation in threat, European-based unions saw little reason to become affiliates.

In most countries, industrial unions did not become the only type of union. In Germany up until World War II both craft and industrial unions existed side-by-side. In the USA, the major trade union federation, the AFL, remained a craft union federation, and was very conservative in its politics.



Mass pickets, often used by industrial unions, were supported during the 1889 London Docks Strikes by local communities and international donations.

The Great London Docks Strike, 1889

A wave of strikes in 1889 and 1890 spurred on the growth of industrial unions in Britain. Perhaps the most famous of these was the London Docks strike, a five-week dispute which drew in hundreds of thousands of workers across the shipping and transport industries, and caught the attention of workers across the world.

Working on the docks was back-breakingly hard work, and also very insecure. Workers would gather at the docks in the morning to find out if they were needed for the day. If they weren't picked to work, they weren't paid. Today we would call them informal workers.

In August 1889, the workers at West India Dock were told that their bonus pay was being cut, causing outrage. Socialist activist Ben Tillett led a group of them out on August 14th, organising them through the small Dockers' Union he had set up two years before.

The Dockers' Union demanded guaranteed minimum hours, an increase in pay, better overtime rates, and union recognition. They called on other workers to come out, and over 130,000 strikers joined in just two weeks. Dockside warehouses, factories, and workshops stood still, while abandoned ships waited in the docks.

15,000 pickets were kept on hand to block the docks and prevent others going in to work. There were huge demonstrations that roved through the capital, carrying banners covered in rotting fish heads and onions, symbols of what they were forced to eat due to poverty pay and infrequent work. In working-class areas, signs were strung across streets telling landlords they could forget about collecting the rent until after the strike.

As the strike reached the three-week mark, funds were running low, and hunger was growing. International solidarity was key to it continuing. In Australia, workers and trade unionists heard about the dispute, and started raising funds to support the British strikers. Over £30,000 (around \$3 million in today's money) was donated, meaning the movement could continue and even support more workers to join the pickets. Within a fortnight they had won.

The success of the dockers (and the matchstick workers the previous year- see page 45) inspired a wave of strikes among previously unorganised workers in the UK. There were 517 strikes in 1888 but over 1211 in 1889, three-quarters of which won most of their demands.

These successes convinced unorganised workers to join and found unions on a scale not seen before- trade union membership jumped from 700,000 to 1.5 million in Britain in just 4 years. Some of these industrial unions were so popular that workers from other trades asked to join, turning them into general unions. This growth led some craft unions to embrace change, and they loosened up membership requirements and reduced their dues. What's more, the leaders of the dockers saw the value of international solidarity, and began working with others to set up the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), which remains a powerful global union today.

The Second International

The second industrial revolution made it easier for people to communicate and organise at a national level. Workers in many different towns and cities were now working for the same company. Trade union federations and large socialist parties grew in Central and Western Europe throughout the 1880s. There had been several international meetings of trade unionists in the 1880s, at which the lack of coordination between workers' political parties had grown more concerning to attendees. The time seemed ripe to create a new body which could coordinate these national workers' movements across borders. July 14th, 1889 was the date set to remedy this issue. The conference would take place in Paris, 100 years since the storming of the Bastille prison had opened up a new chapter in human history.

Two international workers' conferences actually ended up taking place that day in separate ballrooms in Paris, one for the 'Marxists', and the other for the 'Possibilists'. The 'Possibilists' felt that socialists could join with other political parties to achieve limited reforms, while the 'Marxists' believed in independent workers' parties. It is the latter congress which is viewed by many as the 'true' founding congress-400 delegates from over 20 different countries were welcomed by Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, who announced:

"We gather here under the banner of the red flag, the flag of the international proletariat. Here you are not in capitalist France... Here in this room you are in one of the capitals of the international proletariat, of international socialism."

Those present that day agreed to keep organising international congresses, with the next to take place in 1891.

At this second congress, held in Brussels, the Marxists and Possibilitists reunited. What's more, the delegates present decided to launch a campaign for an eight-hour day for every worker in the world. They chose May 1st as the date for an international wave of strikes and protests.

At the first ever May Day in Britain there were two rival demonstrations. One was led by the old craft unions, while the other was headed by the newly-founded, radical, gas workers' union (the forerunner of today's GMB). The gas workers held a loud and lively protest, filled with banners and music, while the craft unions struggled to get their members to join their own parade.

Despite these kinds of petty squabbles, the protestors in the various countries seemed pleased with the day's results. It became an annual event- not just to fight for the eight-hour day, but to celebrate the power of workers around the world.

As socialists started coordinating actions and discussing and debating more frequently, it was decided that there needed to be a permanent body to organise within. At the international congress in 1900 the International Socialist Bureau was formed, made of representatives from the different countries' socialist parties. Both the congresses and the Bureau are what are referred to as the 'Second International'

Although parties and representatives from countries such as the USA, Turkey, India, and Japan also took part, the International remained a largely-European affair. The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (the German Social-Democratic Party, known as the **SPD**) was a particularly strong organisation at the time, and tended to be very influential in the international movements of the

1890s up until World War I. It was able to regain its position after the end of the war, but the destruction of the trade unions and workers' organisations by the Nazis in 1933 halted this.

The Second International and the Division of Parties and Unions

Initially, like the First International before it, different types of groups were represented in the Second International's Congresses. Trade Unions, Friendly Societies, Co-operatives, and Socialist Parties all took part. Originally there was a lot of overlap between what these groups did- trade unions might fund funerals, co-ops might run candidates in elections, and so on. But by about 1900, these different types of groups' roles had been more-clearly separated, with each setting up their own international. The International Socialist Bureau organised solely with political parties.

The strict division of roles between trade unions and political parties where the former deals solely with workplace issues, and the latter deals with politics and laws, was accepted by large parts of the movement. Many socialists looked to the SPD (the largest socialist movement in the world) for inspiration, and it was the model that they had used. This model came about partly out of necessity- anti-socialist laws in Germany meant that any attempts by unions to voice their support for a socialist vision of society would lead to them getting banned, and members being imprisoned, fined, or fired. The SPD had set up many of the unions, and was considered to be the leader of the unions, but they were to focus on their own specific tasks.

However this model was never accepted by everyone. Groups influenced by syndicalism (see page 38), such as the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), believed unions should mobilise workers to change society, not just their workplaces. In Britain, powerful trade union leaders felt they should control the party- not the other way round. In practice, many unions have taken political stances independent of 'their' parties.

International Trade Secretariats- the Origins of the Global Union Federations

Some of the union representatives attending those early congresses of the Second International decided to organise fringe meetings for workers doing similar jobs. At these meetings, new international organisations were set up to coordinate between unions of these workers in different countries. These became known as the International Trade Secretariats (ITS's), the first permanently organised form of international trade union solidarity. Twenty-eight had been formed by 1911, with a total membership of over 6 million workers. Many of the first ITS's were formed by craft unions, like those of the printers, cigar-makers, and hatters.

Their main activities were organising solidarity during strikes and exchanging information on trade conditions and labour laws. At times they helped to raise funds for striking workers from across Europe, and prevented the use of foreign workers to break strikes. In their early years they were often more focused on the exchange of information, earning them the nickname 'the post-box internationals'.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has been one of the longest-standing of these international organisations. It was founded in 1896 after negotiations between dock workers in Hamburg, the British dockers' leader Joseph Havelock Wilson, striking dockers in Rotterdam, and the Swedish organiser Charles Lindley. They all agreed to send delegates from their unions to the London conference of the Second International, due to be held that year.

At the congress, sailors' and dockers' union representatives from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Britain, Sweden, and the USA met in a hotel in central London, and pledged to build an international federation. The radical and energetic Tom Mann was elected its first president.

They did not have an easy start. Belgian authorities immediately banned the non-Belgian leaders of the ITF from entering the country, and violently arrested Ben Tillett (famed leader of the 1889 docks' strikes) on his arrival. Early ITF attempts to support its members' strikes were generally unsuccessful, and shipping owners were successful at organising internationally to import strike-breakers to beat the unions. Tom Mann, who was unable to receive a proper wage from the ITF, moved to Australia to become a full-time organiser in 1901, demoralising many members.

Mann was replaced by a German leader, Hermann Jochade, who relocated the headquarters to Berlin. Jochade was far more conservative than Mann. Under his leadership the ITF would not support strikes in one country by calling for sympathy strikes or preventing the importation of foreign workers to break strikes. Instead, he focused on developing a strong international centre, which could support efforts to lobby national governments by organising the international exchange of advice and information. This strategy was very controversial- the French leaders said the ITF was being treated as a friendly society rather than a union, and the Austrians even nicknamed Jochade 'the slow train'.

Despite the conservatism of the leadership, the members still wanted the ITF to live up to its early aspirations. In 1910, a strike which began in British ports was spread through the ITF's networks- soon Belgian, Dutch, Danish, and Norwegian dockers and sailors joined in, with over 1 million workers taking part in the international strike. These were very successful disputes, and the unions involved nearly doubled their membership. The ITF was proving itself to be effective.

The ITS's were not controlled by any political parties, but they had close links with the socialist parties and shared many of their views. The Building Workers' International held its congresses at the same time as the Second International's. The International Association of Textile Workers, headquartered in Manchester, banned Christian trade unions from joining as they did not believe in socialist principles.

The spread of industrial unionism also impacted the ITS's. As many of the smaller craft unions merged into national industrial or even multi-industrial unions, the existence of ITS's dedicated to organising particular job roles became outdated. What's more, the number of tasks that they had taken on meant that they needed a decent income to fund research, education, communications, office space, and the employment of staff (most ITS's did not have a full-time general secretary until after World War II).

Many of the smaller ITS's merged together to form organisations which spanned entire industries. In 1920 the bakers', brewers', and meat-workers' ITS's merged to form the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). A resolution passed at the founding congress shows how the changes in industry had led to the changes in union organising:

“The concentration of production of a wide range of foodstuffs in single, large-scale enterprises is a more and more frequent phenomenon, and ... this concentration of production has been taken into account in a number of countries by the merging of the labour organisations of these industries to form food workers’ associations.”

The ITS’s became the strongest and longest-lasting international labour organisations. Their sector-specific nature helped ensure this. Issues like the transfer of union membership for workers who crossed borders, or how to deal with safety issues in a certain trade, got close attention and were best understood by workers within that industry. They still exist today, and are now called the Global Union Federations.

A Trade Union International

As well as these sector-based organisations, many trade unionists wanted an international body where the national federations could coordinate. Leaders of the British TUC, with their distaste for socialism, and the French CGT, with their dislike of political parties, were particularly keen on an international for trade unionists only.

In 1901, trade union leaders from Northern Europe got together and established the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC). It published annual reports in English, French and German on the growth of the labour movement in different countries and important legislation. It also raised funds to support strikes- in 1913 Dutch tobacco workers received £2,470 from the ISNTUC (over \$170,000 in today’s money), helping them to win a strike.

However, the organisation faced serious problems. Reports sent in by national union federations (to be used in the ISNTUC publications) were often late, vague in detail, or not submitted at all. The German leaders regularly fought with the syndicalists from the French CGT and Dutch Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat (National Labour Secretariat), who wanted the body to take stances on broader issues like war and socialism.

The ISNTUC also had difficulty working out which union federations could take part. They had a policy that every country should have one national centre, which should then take its rightful place with them. In countries like Bulgaria and the USA, radical socialist and syndicalist union federations rivalled more moderate federations, creating tensions over which group to accept. Often the more moderate choice won out, such as the AFL being chosen over the revolutionary IWW (see below). It was also tricky when it came to the unions of the Austrian Empire, where Czech-speaking unions resented the German-speaking unions’ leadership of the movement, as it mirrored German-speakers’ power within the Empire.

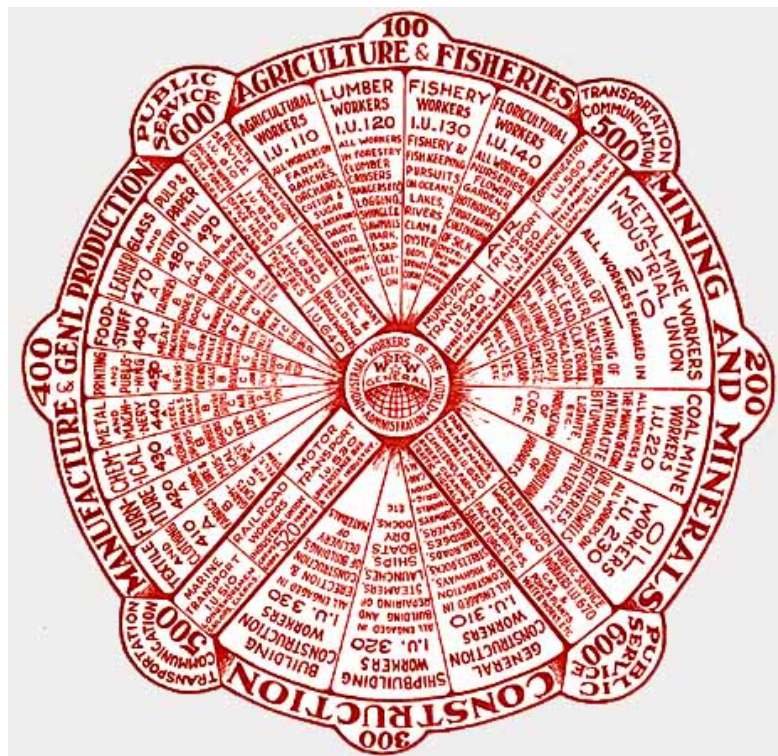
Despite these arguments, there were signs of growth. The ITS’s became more involved in the ISNTUC, eventually sending delegates to its international conferences. In 1913, it was renamed the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). It had members in twenty countries (all European, except for the USA’s AFL), with a total membership of around 7.7 million.

Revolutionary Syndicalism and the IWW

The second industrial revolution didn't just pave the way for the growth of social-democratic* unions and parties, it also gave birth to alternative labour movements and ideas. Syndicalism was one of these.

Syndicalism was a militant movement with lots of local and national varieties. Syndicalists generally shared several main ideas. They emphasised the importance of class struggle and anti-capitalism- they wanted workers and their unions to run the factories and workshops and a revolution to bring this about. They also said that strikes were more effective in bringing an end to capitalism than pushing for changes to the law through political parties. They felt it was better to organise workers in the workplace to confront their bosses and gain more control.

In some countries, syndicalists set up their own unions. In France, the CGT became the major national trade union centre, becoming an inspiration to syndicalists around the world. Many French socialists chose to join the CGT rather than setting up a rival socialist centre. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or 'Wobblies') became a major force in the American labour movement, challenging the AFL's leadership. They also organised seamen across borders, with IWW members and branches present in ports in the Caribbean, South America, and Australia. In



This diagram was designed by a radical Catholic priest and founding member of the IWW, Father Thomas Hagerty, and shows how they felt unions should be organised into various industrial departments. The leaders of the AFL sarcastically named it 'Hagerty's Wheel of Fortune'

Canada, socialists set up a revolutionary union called the One Big Union. In Japan, syndicalism and anarchism were very influential ideas during the early years of the labour movement. The syndicalist unions often organised on industrial lines, and kept their gains by strike action rather than joining bodies for collective bargaining with their employers.

These unions were often smaller than their social-democratic rivals. The French CGT was an exception, as was the Spanish Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT). They were, however, an important part of the labour movement, especially between 1900 and the 1920s.

In Latin America they were particularly important. In Argentina, an explicitly anarchist-syndicalist trade union centre was the biggest in the country from the late 1800s up until the 1920s.

* Although today the term 'social-democrat' is often used to indicate that someone is a labour moderate, it was once interchangeable with the term 'socialist'. In this book it is used in this historic sense.

Anarchism had been a growing movement in the country since the 1870s. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, a number of French anarchists took refuge in Argentina, and began organising and publishing a regular newspaper. They were soon joined by Spanish and Italian radical migrants, including famous Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta who had fled imprisonment in 1885 by smuggling himself on board a ship bound for Buenos Aires in a crate of sewing machines. Adverts of their meetings regularly appeared in newspapers published as far away as Switzerland.

In 1901 they were able to set up the Federación Obrera Argentina (FOA), a syndicalist national union centre to coordinate the growing numbers of strikes across the country. At its 1905 annual conference the group was renamed Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA) to show that it rejected national borders, and the delegates voted for an explicitly anarchist manifesto.

While many of the Latin American syndicalist unions declined in power in the 1920s along with their European cousins, some syndicalist unions remained strong after this period- the CNT remained a very powerful force in Spain, and even today there are examples of well-organised IWW branches and syndicalist unions.

They often attracted workers who were employed in casual or seasonal work like dockers, builders, and agricultural workers. These workers frequently shifted trades, so it made little sense to join craft unions, and as they often changed bosses when they changed jobs, they did not depend on goodwill to keep their position- they could take a more confrontational approach.

The unions also attracted workers who were frustrated by the socialist/ social-democratic parties and their affiliated unions. In Italy, the Socialist Party tended to focus on winning piecemeal gains for workers in the industrialised north, frustrating agricultural workers in the south, who joined the syndicalist *Unione Sindacale Italiana* in greater numbers.

In Ireland, a kind of modified syndicalism became popular due to the influence of Jim Larkin, a well-known militant union leader and independence activist. Larkin was born in Liverpool to Irish parents, and had become a member of the Liverpool-based National Union of Dock Labourers. He was sent to Ireland to organise for the union (due to the easy transport between Ireland and Liverpool, organising workers in both places was important to prevent strike-breakers being used). However, he was kicked out of the union in November 1908, for launching strikes without approval and offering support to branches which had not yet been recognised by the British-based leadership.

He set up the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union one month later, and aimed to bring all the unorganised workers of Ireland into 'one big union'. He was never a pure syndicalist - he urged the Irish TUC to set up a Labour Party in Ireland so that workers' unions and parties could work together both for socialism and independence from British rule. But he did believe that unions should organise all workers, and that strikes should be a tool in ending capitalism.

The ITGWU proved effective, using syndicalist tactics such as unannounced walkouts, sympathy striking, and mass picketing to win. The union had 30,000 members in 1913, and had become extremely powerful in Dublin. Members of the Employers' Federation often backed down and accepted union demands once the ITGWU started targeting their workplaces. The union was opposed by William Murphy, the owner of the Dublin United Tramway Company and the newspaper *Irish Independent*, who was determined to crush it. He met with other members of the Employers' Federation and encouraged them to join his efforts.

On August 19th, 1913 he sacked all unionised workers in his printing rooms, and around 100 union men from the delivery section of the tram company. Larkin quickly called out all union members from the rest of Murphy's company, and planned a series of sympathy strikes. The Employers' Federation locked-out their workforces as soon as it looked like a sympathy strike was on the horizon, and demanded that their workers leave the ITGWU.

The local government was also determined that the union be crushed. Many pickets were violently forced off the streets by the police. Larkin was arrested for seditious behaviour and libel. Union meetings were banned. Larkin was released on bail on the condition that he not address any more crowds.

On August 31st, police were closely monitoring the hotel at which a union rally was being held in case Larkin turned up to speak. He snuck in by pretending to be an old, deaf priest, disguised with stage makeup, a fake beard, and a walking stick. Once in he climbed up to a balcony, ripped off his fake beard, and giving a rousing speech, before escaping out of a back entrance. The meeting was then violently attacked by the truncheon-swinging police, killing two workers, and injuring over 300. In response, Larkin organised an 'Irish Citizen Army', armed with wooden clubs, that protected the picket lines and demonstrations throughout the dispute.

The lockout dragged on for seven months. While the British TUC sent funds over, it refused appeals to organise sympathy strikes in British branches of the companies involved. Many workers, facing starvation, agreed to sign contracts promising not to join the ITGWU in exchange for being able to return to work.

Although there were no major explicitly syndicalist unions within Britain, this did not prevent its supporters from working to spread their ideas or forge international connections. The Independent Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) organised an international conference in London in 1913 so syndicalist unions in different countries could work together.

It was badly-organised and nearly split the ISEL with accusations of funds being stolen. The lack of proper preparations annoyed visiting delegates. The CGT refused to attend- it was already a member of the ISNTUC, and the leading figures didn't want a new syndicalist International forming in case it caused a split with the socialists in their ranks. Some CGT-affiliated unions still went, along with Dutch, German, Italian, Russian, Swedish, Danish, Argentinian, Cuban, Brazilian, and Spanish delegates. They drafted and released an anti-capitalist, revolutionary manifesto, and decided to set up an international committee to publish a joint newsletter, but stopped short of declaring a new international union for fear of upsetting the CGT.

While syndicalism as an organised movement declined



The Spanish CNT remains one of the largest syndicalist unions today. Their logo's colours show their beliefs- the red symbolises the power of workers, and the black symbolises their anarchist ideals.

in the 1920s, the workers' radicalism and frustration it had been based on continued to be important in the labour movement. There are still some significant syndicalist union federations today, such as the CNT in Spain. In 2018 syndicalist unions based in Spain, Italy, Greece, Germany, Argentina, Poland, Canada, and the USA established an international organisation known as the International Confederation of Labour.

Christian Unions

Syndicalists were not the only ones to challenge the socialist leadership of the labour movement. From the 1890s, Christian trade unions started to grow in various European countries. They were mainly set up and led by Catholics, who were worried about the growth of socialism (which rejected the idea that the church should have political power or large amounts of land), but saw that it was becoming popular because of the growing misery and poverty amongst workers.

In 1891 the pope issued a letter to the entire Catholic Church called *Rerum Novarum*. It made clear that the church rejected socialism; it called for the rich and poor to work together for a common good, and said that there was nothing wrong with people owning businesses and factories. But it also said that inequality, dangerous working conditions, and poverty were wrong. It approved of trade unions and collective bargaining, and said progressive laws should be brought in to make sure workers weren't exploited.

Christian unions soon sprung up across Europe. In some places they were controlled directly by the Catholic Church, and only open to Catholics. In others they were inspired by the church but not controlled by it, and were open to other Christians and religious groups joining. They were particularly strong in Belgium, Germany, and Italy. In Germany after World War I, about 20% of all workers were in unions that were part of the Christian German Union Federation.

In their early years they were often more attractive to 'respectable' white-collar workers, and religious workers who were put off by the atheist ideas of many socialists. But they were able to win some blue-collar support as well- a Dutch priest called Willem Nolans organised miners into a Christian union which successfully pushed the government to set up cheap, decent, housing for their members.

Because they were inspired by the idea that rich people and poor people should work together, the Christian unions were often less confrontational than either their socialist or syndicalist counterparts. In particular they wanted to create joint management boards of workers and employers, rather than lead strikes.

This wasn't always the case- in some places these unions were quite radical. Guido Miglioli led a movement of rural Catholic workers in Italy just after World War I which called themselves '**The Extremists**'. They launched a series of strikes against big rural landowners and led peasants to occupy the big estates, facing down extreme violence from far-right thugs hired by the bosses to stop their movement. They forced an agreement in 1921 where big rural estates' ownership would be split- 70% to the workers and 30% to the existing landowners.

The Christian unions formed a rival international to the social-democrats in 1919 at the Hague- the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU). While they had sizeable numbers of

members in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands, they were always a small minority compared to social-democratic unions.

After World War II, the IFCTU began working in the Global South, including in countries where Christianity was not a major faith. They reformed the organisation, declaring that it was no longer exclusively Christian, and rebranded as the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). In 2006 the WCL merged with the social-democratic international union confederation to form the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

Bundism

In 1897, 13 delegates from illegal Jewish trade unions throughout the Russian Empire gathered in secret in an attic in Vilnius (the capital of modern Lithuania). At this meeting they formed the Jewish General Labour Bund- a socialist party for Jewish people. They grew in size over the next 30-40 years, organising within Yiddish-speaking Jewish communities across Russia, Europe, and North America.

At first their largest section was in the Russian Empire. Within the Empire, Jews were prevented from moving around by anti-Semitic laws, and had to live in towns and cities in an area known as the 'Pale of Settlement'. They were barred from local governments, most were banned from getting a decent education, and they were frequently attacked by violent mobs, often supported by the police, in bloody riots known as 'pogroms'.

While the Bund solely organised Jewish people, it saw itself as part of the broader Russian socialist movement. They sent delegates to the founding meeting of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, and regularly attended party congresses.

The Bund wanted to create a socialist state in which every ethnic/national group, including Jews, had some form of self-government and cultural independence. They promoted and celebrated the Yiddish language and Jewish culture, they organised Jewish workers to fight for better conditions at work and greater democracy in society, and they organised self-defence groups to defend Jewish communities from violent anti-Semites.

After World War I, Poland regained its independence, leading to the separation of the Polish and Russian Bunds. The Russian organisation split- some joined the communists as the Kombund, while others remained outside and were eventually suppressed. In Poland, around 10% of the population was Jewish, and the Bund was a major player in Jewish political life.

The Polish Bund organised socialist youth groups, sports clubs, and cultural associations. Its members organised and led unions in many industries- textiles, leather work, and construction to name but a few. Their trade union members often pooled part of their wages to cover sick pay for one another and to provide support to those who had larger families.

Bundists organised Jewish sections of Polish unions, working as a part of the wider labour movement rather than splitting it. They had some notable successes- when the Warsaw City Council took over a provisions office which distributed food, it started to lay off the Jewish employees. Bundists appealed to their Polish fellow trade unionists and together the groups threatened action, halting the council's attempt to discriminate.



A Bundist Election Poster from Kyiv, Ukraine, 1918. The slogan at the top reads 'Wherever we live is our home!'

As they had in Russia, Bundists organised self-defence groups to protect Jewish communities, demonstrations, and individuals from attack by violent anti-Semites. The militia they organised was well-disciplined, armed, and put to the good of the people, helping to prevent working class people from being evicted by greedy landlords, for example.

Some of their members managed to gain elected positions within local governments, and prominent figures such as Henryk Erlich were key figures in the international labour movement.

During World War II, Poland was invaded by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. While some Bundists were able to flee to the United States, helped by comrades largely based in New York, most were unable to leave. Some fled the German armies to enter the Soviet-occupied zone, escaping the horrors of the Holocaust. However, Stalin was determined to eradicate any political opposition- leading Bundists were arrested by the secret police despite their hope of refuge within the so-called 'workers state'. Two key Bundist activists - Henryk Erlich and Victor

Alter- were killed on Stalin's orders.

Those who remained within German-occupied territories did their best to resist the Nazis. Many hoped to build a unified Jewish-Polish resistance movement, but the Nazis' policy of forcing Jews into isolated ghettos prevented this. Bundist members kept organising, and many took part in the uprising against the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, and the city-wide Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

The population which sustained Bundism was almost entirely eradicated by the Nazis. After the end of the war, many of those who were connected to the organisation were targeted by Stalin as potential rivals for political control of Poland. The Bund in Central and Eastern Europe was finished. Some small groups of Bundists still survive to today, such as the Jewish Socialists Group in the UK and some based around the YIVO institute in New York.

Labour and Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is often thought of as a far-right idea. Indeed, many on the extreme right have claimed that the left is controlled by Jews and that the workers' movement is a pawn of an imagined Jewish conspiracy to control the world.

However, despite the association of the far-right with the most extreme forms of racism and anti-Semitism, that does not mean that these ideas have not appeared within the labour movement, or that members of trade unions and workers organisations are immune to anti-Semitic ideas.

Conspiracy theories about 'Jewish bankers' who secretly control governments and make our lives worse can be easily picked up on by people who feel powerless, are worried about poverty, and want someone to blame. German socialists in the late 1800s famously called anti-Semitism the "*socialism of fools*," because it was a kind of perverse anti-capitalism.

Anti-Semitism was on the rise in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Since the French Revolution many states had gotten rid of anti-Semitic laws. Some conservatives saw this as proof that Jews secretly controlled the movements that had grown up over the period— liberalism, socialism, democracy, trade unionism. They started using anti-Semitic ideas and arguments more frequently than before.

The Russian Empire was particularly anti-Semitic, as detailed in the previous section. The Tsar and his state published vicious anti-Semitic propaganda both in Russia and overseas, and brought in new anti-Semitic laws while other states were beginning to get rid of theirs.

The international labour movement found it easy to condemn the blatant anti-Semitism of Russia, which was famously hostile to progressive and labour forces. In 1904 the Socialist International voted on a motion proposed by Bundists to condemn Russian anti-Semitic laws and pogroms, for example. It had previously condemned the infamously-bloody Kishinev pogrom of the previous year.

However, when anti-Semitism was not connected to a state power or right-wing movement who had targeted democrats or the labour movement, labour activists could be apathetic, or at times even worryingly supportive of anti-Semitic ideas.

In England, the Social Democratic Federation had a strong anti-Semitic tendency. Henry Hyndman, the leading figure, blamed British imperialist wars on secret groups of Jews controlling the government and the press. In the Netherlands, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, leader of the Social Democratic League, regularly published anti-Semitic tropes in his newspaper, even claiming the German social democrats were controlled by Jewish bankers. Mikhail Bakunin, a major figure in both Russian and international anarchism, alleged that 'parasitical' Jews ran capitalism and would run any state-socialist society. In France, Charles Fourier, a major early socialist thinker, claimed that Jews were responsible for capitalism.

This attitude also affected international organisations. At an 1891 conference of the Second International in Brussels, Abraham Cahan, a Jewish trade unionist based in New York, proposed a resolution condemning anti-Semitism as an attempt to divide workers. He was vigorously opposed. French socialist Albert Regnard told the Congress that 'Jewish bankers' were a 'threat to all of us'. Cahan's motion wasn't passed, being defeated by one which condemned anti-Semitism, and 'philosemitism'.

Jewish workers and activists, some of whom had fled Russia due to its anti-Semitic society, organised against these poisonous attitudes. In Britain, Jewish socialists such as Theodore Rothstein played an important role in getting rid of reactionary leaders of the Social Democratic Federation during WWI. What's more the increasingly-visible Jewish labour movement embodied in organisations such as the Bund or the US-based Workmen's Circle (which numbered some 87,000 strong in 1925), helped make non-Jewish labour activists increasingly aware of the size and scope of the Jewish working class.

Confronting anti-Semitism remains an issue for the labour movement today. Sometimes you will hear people blame the Rothschilds for global poverty, or claim that George Soros is behind any

political campaign they don't like. Some say that Israel or Zionists are behind every smear against the workers' movement or act of military aggression by a major state.

This way of thinking is dangerous. Some members of the Rothschild family, Gorge Soros, and the Israeli state have done terrible things, to be sure. However, they are not all-powerful entities behind every evil thing in the world. A hyper-fixation on these individuals and institutions at best is a failure to understand capitalism as a way that the world is structured, and at worst leads to a worldview that suggests that Jews are part of a secret shadowy all-powerful network which works against everyone else. Many popular conspiracy theories have anti-Semitic undertones or are openly anti-Semitic, and are becoming more popular in an era where the labour movement has lost ground in being able to educate people and explain the roots of their oppression.

Women's Unions and Socialist Feminism

Despite the prominence of men in unions' leaderships, women have always played an important part in the labour movement. Some of the most significant campaigns that helped to draw people into the movement, improve working conditions, and build connections between different groups of workers and across borders were led by women. But the union movement has also been home to men who were hostile to women's involvement, meaning women often had to fight to be a part of it.

There was an assumption amongst many men that women should stay at home, and that men should earn enough to support their wives and children ('the family wage'). In 1875, Henry Broadhurst, leader of the TUC, declared that the aim of trade unions should be to *"bring about a condition... where wives and daughters would be in their proper sphere at home."*

Employers often paid women lower wages to do the same jobs as men (and in many cases, still do today). Some male trade unionists, rather than attempting to help their women co-workers organise for better wages and conditions, tried to exclude them from the workplaces and the unions, thinking it would keep men's wages higher. Carpet workers in Kidderminster went on strike in 1874 because women were being hired on lower wages than men. Letters were sent to the local newspaper promising violence against the women and their families, while the factory was picketed by men. The men won, and the newly-hired women were all fired.

Women were not passive, and challenged their treatment in the workplace and exclusion from the unions. In Britain, The Women's Trade Union League (founded in 1874) challenged this exclusion, and successfully lobbied for the first women delegates to attend a TUC congress. When they were excluded from men's unions, they set up their own and showed that they could be powerful fighters for change.

In 1888, the 'matchstick girls' of the Bryant & May Factory in London went on strike. These young women workers received abysmal pay, were regularly fined by managers for making mistakes on the production line, and were being made sick by the use of dangerous chemicals in the workplace ('Phossy Jaw', brought on by white phosphorous, caused brain damage, loss of teeth, and collapse of the jaw- it was extraordinarily painful).

The young women went on a wildcat strike after an article about their treatment was published in a socialist newspaper, and their bosses fired women who refused to sign a statement claiming that the

article was filled with lies. They formed a union, sent delegates to parliament, picketed the factory, and marched up and down the main streets of London promising to hang their employers if they didn't get what they want. They soon won, and their victory inspired other groups of workers who had been excluded from the unions to organise, campaign, and strike,.

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, women's work in fighting for better conditions in the workplace, as well as the growing use of mass production methods, led to an end to gender-segregation in many of the general unions in Britain.

Women workers didn't just organise at the national level. There is in fact a long history of women organising internationally to campaign for a more equal world. In 1852, women from Europe and America came together to publish *Sisterly Voices*, a magazine which campaigned for international peace. In 1888, The International Congress of Women was formed on the initiative of US-based feminists, and fought for women's equality in the workplace and in access to education. These campaigns were often organised by middle- and upper-class women, but drew in large numbers of working-class supporters. Other groups such as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (established in Berlin in 1904) would follow soon after, drawing together both working-class and middle-class women into border-crossing networks that fought for women's human rights.

Soon, explicitly socialist and working-class women's organisations were formed. Clara Zetkin, a socialist and trade unionist from Germany, helped to establish the Socialist Women's International in 1907. There were many men within the socialist movement who had opposed the movement for women's suffrage as it was often led by the middle-classes rather than the workers. Zetkin and her comrades challenged this idea at congresses of the SPD, and soon full adult suffrage for men and women was accepted as a key demand of the workers' movement.

At an International Conference of Working Women held in Copenhagen in 1910, Clara Zetkin asked over 100 women from 17 countries – representing unions, socialist parties and women's working clubs – to pass a motion for an International Working Women's Day. They did so, unanimously, and so International Women's Day (as its now known) was born. At the first International Working Women's Day in 1911, over 1 million women across Europe took part in rallies, protests, and demonstrations. Women and their allies demanded equal pay, the right to vote, and a socialist society.

Women became important figures within the international labour movement, with leaders such as Rosa Luxemburg becoming well-known beyond the borders of their home countries. Luxemburg was born in the areas of Poland which had been absorbed by Russia, and had helped to establish one of the major socialist parties in the region. She had to flee to Zurich due to political repression, and moved to Berlin in 1898 due to her desire to be part of the growing German socialist movement. She was both a renowned intellectual as well as a leading light of the left-wing of the SPD. She grew famous for her disdain for secretive and bureaucratic leaders within the socialist movement, and her life-long fight for a truly democratic socialism.

More than Unions and Parties: Labour as a Counter- Culture

*"Our days shall not be sweated from birth until life closes,
Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread, but give us roses."*

-James Oppenheim, 1911

The trade unions of the late 1800s didn't exist in a vacuum. They were part of an anti-capitalist labour movement which organised around all aspects of workers' lives. They set up their own sports teams, book clubs, choirs, bands, and co-operative holiday associations.

Socialist and trade unionist **sports' groups** were very common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their organisers hoped these groups would improve the workers' health, provide some fun and distraction from their hard lives, and promote socialist values of workers' cooperation and community. They were meant to be a taste of what a socialist society might be like.

A Socialist Gymnastics Union was set up in the USA in 1850. In 1893 workers' gymnastics and cycling societies were formed in Germany. In 1895 The *Clarion* newspaper organised its famous cycling clubs for workers in Britain. In Vienna, a workers' hiking association was founded that year, and before long similar groups popped up all over central Europe. In 1913, delegates from Belgian, English, French, German, and Italian labour sports groups set up the Socialist International of Physical Education. Although World War I

prevented the group's work, it was re-established as the Socialist Workers' Sports International in 1920.

These organisations became huge. In Germany there were over 350,000 worker sportsmen and women in the years before World War I. In 1925, there was a Workers' Olympics held in Frankfurt which attracted over 150,000 spectators- more than the 'official' Olympics in Paris the previous year. In the 1930s, the British Labour Party and trade unions organised a very popular annual 'Workers' Wimbledon', which allowed working people to take part in the traditionally upper-class sport.

It wasn't just sports though. **Music** was taken up by the workers' movement, both for fun and as a way to spread the message. In the USA, Joe Hill, a Swedish immigrant and a member of the IWW, became famous for writing songs that were sung on picket lines and in workers' halls across the country. He would take old religious hymns and swap out the lyrics so that they attacked capitalism and promoted trade unionism. In Germany, socialist choirs did similarly- they would take old patriotic songs and change the words to promote the workers' cause.

"You can make a speech-people forget it the next day. You put the information in a leaflet-people hold onto it for a week and throw it away. But if you write a song and put that information in a song, people hear it, remember it, sing it-it lives on" – Joe Hill



Over 100,000 workers took part in the 1931 Workers' Olympiad, held in Vienna, Austria.

Trade unions and socialist groups would often raise funds to purchase or rent halls to run their own **social clubs**. These often had libraries, cafes, pubs, and reading rooms on site. They sometimes organised cards' nights and dances. Being a part of the workers movement was about more than branch meetings and picket lines- it was about being part of a wider community.

The popularity of these clubs and associations terrified the enemies of the workers. When Mussolini and his fascists came to power in Italy, the first thing they targeted was not the unions or the socialist parties, but the workers' clubs and sports groups. They saw how effective they were at bringing new people into the movement, and keeping alive a socialist culture, and knew they had to be stopped.

These parts of the workers' movement aren't as prominent as they once were, but across some parts of the world they still play a major role. In Italy you can still find *Palestre Popolari* (popular gyms) which are run by anti-capitalists in working-class neighbourhoods, with at least seven in Rome. In Athens, Greece, the White Tiger Muay Thai Camp proudly declares itself an 'anti-fascist gym' which aims to connect Greek and migrant workers and train to resist the rise of the far-right.

The labour movement has also contained a workers' educational movement. The League of the Just, whose leading German members were exiled from Paris in 1839 and moved to London, established a German Workers' Educational Association for fellow exiles and migrants in 1840. While mainly aimed at German-speakers, its doors and classes were open to workers of any background. It taught on a wide range of subjects – workers could take piano classes and learn about art history, or learn about how the sugar industry's chemical processes worked.

However the group was not just about teaching workers about culture or science- its members wanted a communist society. Karl Marx would eventually join the organisation, and would give lectures on political economy and philosophy. Lessons focused on making workers see themselves as part of a global working class, not just as labourers in a particular industry. It both educated workers, and helped to organise them as revolutionaries and labour activists.

The group renamed itself the Communist Workers' Educational Association as its doors opened to workers of every nationality. It survived until WWI, when many of its German leading figures were imprisoned by the British state.

The group contained within it some very different types of education, which have since been picked up by different workers' organisations. Some focus more on technical education- developing workers' industrial skills so that their

“In the workers’ society there were to be found, besides German and Swiss, also ... Scandinavians, Dutch, Hungarians, Czechs, Southern Slavs, and also Russians and Alsatians. In 1847 the regular frequenters included a British grenadier of the Guards in uniform. The society soon called itself the Communist Workers’ Educational Association, and the membership cards bore the inscription “All Men Are Brothers”, in at least twenty languages, even if not without mistakes here and there.”

Frederick Engels describes the Communist Workers' Educational Association, 1847

company can perform better and hopefully avoid job losses. Others criticise this approach and say the goal of workers' education should be to develop a sense of solidarity and an understanding of capitalism and worker organising. Still others want to see workers' education develop workers into fuller people – to give them access to arts and ideas they may not have been able to access through their own schooling.

This tradition of international workers' education remains with us today, and has helped to create important connections between different groups of workers internationally, and also provided vital support to labour movement campaigns.

Many different groups of working-class activists, be they socialist, communist, or anarchist, have also formed organisations to provide aid and support to their fellow workers. They aimed to transform the idea of 'charity' into an act of solidarity.

In pre-revolutionary Russia, groups of anarchists, trade unionists, and socialists worked together in the 'Political Red Cross', which provided food and support to political prisoners. The regime was so brutal that even many rich liberals donated to those imprisoned, despite having little sympathy for their ideas. An eccentric German doctor famously handed out oranges and exotic fruits to prisoners transported along major roads. This group changed names a few times, but continued to exist until the late 1930s in Russia, when Stalin shot its leaders and shut it down. However, it gave birth to the international 'Anarchist Black Cross' movement, which provides aid and advocacy for imprisoned left-wing activists even today.

In 1936, Belgian socialists set up 'Entraide Socialiste' to provide support to refugees fleeing the violence unleashed by fascists in Spain. After World War II, they created an international organisation, known as **International Workers Aid** (IWA), which coordinated with similar bodies in other countries, which had created a wide network of support bodies- day-care centres, counselling services, social welfare programmes for disadvantaged groups, and prisoner support, to name a few.

As well as providing money, food, and supplies to support labour activists and refugees fleeing violence, the IWAS also tried to spread awareness about workers' movements, and lobbied international organisations and national governments to provide support for those fleeing violence and extreme poverty. In the 1960s they broadened their role, for example by supporting development projects in countries which had formerly been colonised and sending aid to areas affected by natural disasters. In 1995 they renamed the organisation SOLIDAR, which is still active to today, working with networks of NGO's to provide support to workers and lobby for their rights.

There have also been organisations which have brought working-class youth movements together internationally. The **International Falcon Movement** began life in the 1920s when groups from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia got together. These groups were made up of workers who wanted to change education to provide socialist values and teach children about solidarity and self-organisation. The organisation has expanded far beyond the borders of Europe since those early years, with member groups across Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

These groups often combine socialist education with instruction in crafts, skills, and outdoor activities, creating a socialist alternative to the scouting movement. They organise international summer camps so young people from around the world can meet. They have also lobbied for better rights for children, campaigning against child labour and exploitation, and playing an important role in getting the UN to adopt its Convention on the Rights of the Child. They have also campaigned

against militarism, promoted sex and drugs education, and support member organisations to fight social inequality.

Workers' and consumers' cooperatives have also played a key role in creating a labour movement which organised within and beyond the workplace.

In the 19th century, workers in new and growing industrial cities faced exploitation in the workplace and suffered from a lack of public services. Making things worse, food was often expensive and bad quality- milk was made to look whiter with chalk, flour for bread was bulked up with sawdust and toxic salts, and poisonous arsenic even made its way into beer and sweets. This was a particular problem in the UK- many suffered from diseases and conditions created by a bad diet, and others were made sick by toxic additions to their food.

In 1844 a group of workers got together in Rochdale, a textiles town in northern England, and decided that workers should pool their funds to get access to cheaper, better quality food. They were known as the 'Rochdale Pioneers', and laid down a set of principles that other cooperatives often adopted. The club was to be democratic, responsible to its members, independent, work with other coops, and aim to improve the communities and lives of all members.

Cooperatives had long existed in many forms and in many places. In Russia, for examples, early anarchists were inspired by land-cooperatives which had long existed in Russian villages. These cooperatives held the land of the village, letting them out to families to farm. However the modern movement traces its origins back to Rochdale.

The early movement was very left-wing, with its newspapers containing information on the trade union movement, discussions of how co-ops could become a basis for socialism, reports on anti-colonial struggles, and so on. They formed reading groups, social clubs, and even political parties.

The pioneers' model spread both across the UK and internationally. In the US the Knights of Labour set up and promoted consumer cooperatives. In Germany, groups of workers pooled their funds to create member-owned banks and housing estates. In France, an early attempt to bring together members of cooperatives from across Europe in 1867 was banned by Emperor Napoleon III. It was considered a threat to capitalist power.

The movement was not confined to Europe. In Argentina, migrant workers set up over 60 cooperatives by the end of the 1890s. Korea's first credit coöperate was formed in 1907. In India, credit unions grew in the early 1900s, pooling members' cash and providing cheap loans so that agricultural equipment could be bought by poor peasants. Ironically here the colonial state often encouraged rural cooperatives, as they hoped to prevent modern industry developing to rival that of the Europeans.

In 1895, representatives of over one



This stamp from Uruguay commemorates the 150th anniversary of the founding of the modern co-op movement. The building pictured was the store set up by the Rochdale Pioneers

million 'co-operators' got together in London and formed the International Cooperative Alliance. The organisation represented land, credit, consumer, and housing cooperatives, as well as workers' cooperatives. The ICA often proved to be more progressive than other parts of the movement. In 1897 it banned member organisations from excluding women. During World War I, its members refused to take sides in the war and instead continued communicating and organising together. In the era of decolonisation, many cooperatives worked across borders to support attempts to develop new, more-egalitarian economic systems in the former colonies.

This movement was at the peak of its influence in the era between and just following on from the two world wars. In France some nine million people were part of the cooperative movement in the 1920s. In Britain around the same number were signed up coop members in 1940. However, from the 1950s onwards, consumer co-ops were often out-performed by capitalist rivals capable of making greater profits and selling a wider variety of products.

The ICA exists but unfortunately has drifted a long way from its original vision of challenging capitalist production. At the 2012 international summit organised by the ICA, major corporations such as IBM, Microsoft, Google, and Ernst & Young were invited to sponsor the event. In an attempt to catch up with major corporations, many have shifted their models to become more similar to big businesses. Increasingly control has slipped away from the democratic majority of the members to a board of governors within larger co-ops that comprise the movement.

Early Environmentalism

Throughout the 19th century, the cities and factories kept growing in size and number. They were eyesores and health-hazards; large chimneys belched out toxic smoke, plants and fields were uprooted or else killed by fumes, sewage systems were poor, and workers' houses were often cramped, poorly-ventilated, and over-crowded.

In Britain, because this growth of towns and cities had happened earlier than in other countries, many socialists and labour activists worried that workers had been weakened- both physically and morally- by urban life.



The Austrian Socialist-Environmentalist Group 'Die Naturfreunde' ('Friends of Nature') grew to become an international organisation. Today it has over 350,000 members in 45 countries.

The Chartists, members of the British working-class movement for democracy, got very interested in this idea after their strikes and uprisings failed to bring change in 1839 and 1842. Some of their leaders called for members to go 'back to the land' and form rural communities without mechanised tools and modern production methods. Some even formed the 'Tropical Emigration Society' and tried to build socialist co-operative colonies in rural Venezuela using wind-and-wave-powered machines which they hoped would one day allow humanity to be liberated from work. This was spectacularly unsuccessful: the technology didn't work, many people got sick and died in these new lands, and most members abandoned the idea.

In other countries, as industrialism hit later, these ideas generally came later. In 1895, *Die Naturfreunde* ('Friends of Nature'), was set up in Austria by socialist artisans. They felt capitalism denied workers access to proper leisure time and the natural landscape, and so they organised group hikes through mountains and rural areas. This movement soon spread across borders to other German-speaking populations, and then even further beyond. Their members established hiking trails and put up signposts, chipped in to buy collective lodges so workers could stay in the countryside, and campaigned for rural areas to be preserved and open to everyone.

While these movements were very different from the environmentalism we know today, a desire to preserve nature, keep it accessible, and ensure it wasn't decimated for private profit was an important idea in the young labour movement of many countries.

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



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'

Lenin, were the most powerful force. This government was based on a series of workers' and peasants' councils ('Soviets'), rather than a parliament system.

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.

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.



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!'

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.

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.



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 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

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.

overturned by Stalin (for fear of appearing un-Leninist), in practice it ceased to exist.

Mikhail Tomsy, 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

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



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.

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 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



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.

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.

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



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.

Churchill was voted out immediately), their successors knew they knew they 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 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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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.

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

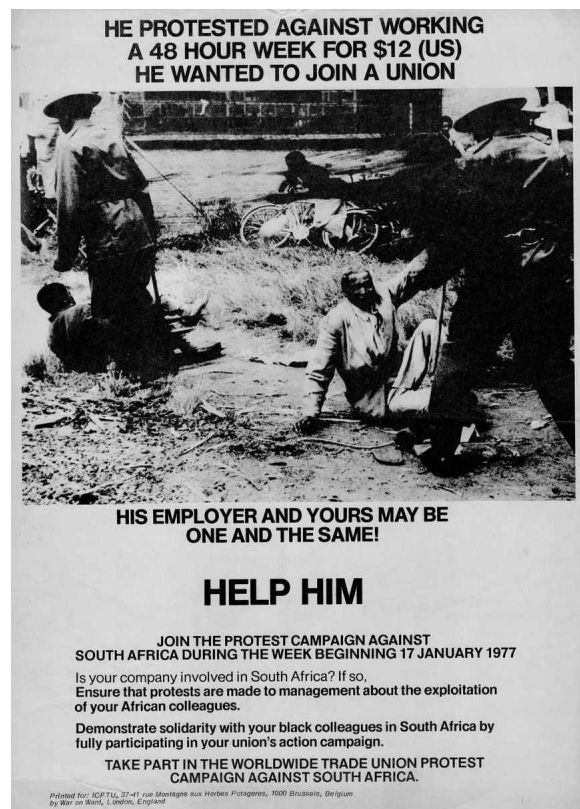
The case of apartheid shows the potential strength of the international labour movement. While South Africa had left the British Empire after World War II, it was still a state controlled by a minority of white colonists. Black people weren't allowed to vote or be involved in politics, worked worse jobs 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



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

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 (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.

The FES has substantial resources (although now beginning to reduce, in line with the decline in the SPD 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



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.

Guyana were supported by AIFLD-trained unionists.

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', 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

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.

union to control the workers. Despite this, throughout the 1970s wildcat strikes 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

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.

the organisation. It was clear that women were becoming an ever-larger part of the workforce, and often 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

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?

Chapter 4: Globalisation and Labour

Globalisation

International companies and international exploitation of workers have been around for a long time. After all, the many European empires and their wealth were built on the foundations of the African slave trade and colonial trading companies. The British, Dutch, French, Swedish, Danish, Portuguese and Austrians all had their own East Indies Companies set up between the 1600s and 1700s which ran supply lines stretching across continents. In 1848, Marx and Engels even wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* that:

“The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country . . . All old established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries... whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe.”

However, after World War II, international agreements reduced taxes and tariffs on international trade, making it even easier for companies to spread globally. Waves of deregulation and free trade deals between the 1970s and 2000s led to a huge growth in transnational corporations or **TNC's**.

These companies are based in many countries, and often use subsidiary companies or third parties to produce part of the product or service that they sell. This can sometimes make it a bit confusing to work out just who is involved in working for them, and how to organise for better conditions amongst workers in the firm.

The rise of the TNC has had a huge impact on world politics. It used to be the case that pressuring national governments to change trade policies, welfare programmes, and labour laws, was a very important part of improving workers' conditions and strength. But these companies exist far beyond the reaches of the nation-state. If they decide that a new labour law in one country gives unions too much say, or a new minimum wage law is too high, they can shift operations to another company where workers are more repressed and can be paid less. This can also happen within the company's suppliers- if workers in one factory successfully win better overtime pay or maternity leave, the TNC may just end their contract and move on to a factory where workers don't have these benefits.

What is a TNC?

Nike's shoes and clothing are manufactured in over 525 factories across 40 different countries- none of which Nike actually owns. These factories will source raw materials from nearby independent providers. The finished goods will be transported by a logistics company, and arrive at a Nike-owned distribution centre. They will then be sold – either directly to customers through Nike stores or their website, wholesale to other companies (Footlocker, for example), or to Nike subsidiaries. So while Nike might employ around 40,000 people worldwide, there are estimated to be over 1 million people producing their shoes and clothes in different factories.

In response, the ITS's, particularly those representing chemicals, metal and food workers began to realise that this required a new form of international organisation and international solidarity,

In 1972, Charles Levinson, the General Secretary of the International Federation of Chemical and General Workers Unions (ICEF) wrote a book in which he argued for the creation of *World Company Councils* - global union councils of representatives from different car manufacturers, helping local unions share information about their workplaces and coordinate demands and campaigns. Several were launched by ICEF and the International Metalworkers Federation, but with limited success.



The IUF continues organising Coca-Cola workers against company injustices today.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the International Union of Food Workers (IUF) launched (and won) the first major coordinated and sustained international solidarity campaign against a transnational company – Coca Cola – over the extreme violence towards, and murders of, trade unionists in Guatemala.

In the 1980s several ITS's adopted the strategy of persuading TNC's to adopt 'Codes of Conduct'- statements of their

ethical practices in relation to employment, the environment, and other issues. This was perhaps the

beginning of so-called 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR), where corporations set out guidelines for their ethical principles, appointed CSR managers supposedly to oversee good practice throughout the company and its supply chains. It also spawned an international industry of CSR research, monitoring programmes and conferences, often involving NGO's and academic institutions. Despite a minimal commitment to trade union rights, most of this had little to do with independent trade unionism and even when taken seriously, had little or no impact on corporate practice. Many Codes of Conduct are initiatives from companies rather than unions, as an attempt to claim that they have a social conscience and undermine union's claims. It was and remains to be a tool to attempt to prevent the emergence of genuine international collective bargaining.

In 1988, the IUF took a further step and signed the first of *International Framework Agreements* (IFAs) with a transnational corporation – Danone, the French milk product company. This was new- it contained a formal recognition of an ITS at an international level, and established international collective bargaining and procedures for the union to monitor the company. Central to the agreement were clauses guaranteeing training programmes for staff, a commitment to combat inequality between men and women workers, and an affirmation of the right of workers to organise unions and elect reps without the threat of harassment.

In the following years, numerous such agreements were signed. In some cases, such as the agreement between the IUF, Chiquita, and the Latin-American Coordination of Banana Workers' Unions, the ILO has played a role in facilitating and overseeing it.

IFAs are most common in companies based in Europe in industries which have traditionally had a strong union presence. However there have been important gains in sectors where unions have been less prominent- for example, in security. After a five-year long struggle with G4S, the security company, which involved, strikes, walkouts, legal cases, and even union pressure to shut down company operations. In some countries, Union Network International (UNI) managed to secure an IFA in 2008 which guaranteed employees the right to unionise, and saw new unions set up in Nepal, Congo, and Ghana, as well as improved severance pay in Mozambique and better overtime rates in Malawi. G4S was once a very hostile antiunion campaigner, but since 2008 has voluntarily recognised unions in collective bargaining arrangements on several occasions.

In theory, IFAs enable the ITS to report local cases where trade union rights are being denied, and the company at an international level will take immediate action to rectify the problem. This could include ending a contract with a subcontractor who violates the terms of the agreement. This is the case with the agreement struck between the French concrete and cement producer Lafarge, and the BWI.

In practice however, many such Agreements remained on paper, with the ITS or its national affiliates unable to take advantage of the opportunity to organise effectively enough. Nevertheless, this was not always true and there have been important victories as a result.

Neoliberalism

Globalisation was not just a change in the patterns of industrial production. It was the result of a political project, based on what became known as *neoliberalism*.

Neoliberal ideas started to be formed in the 1920s and 1930s, as right-wing economists and political thinkers feared both the Soviet Union and the growth of social welfare and market regulations in countries with strong workers' movements. They said that restrictions on free enterprise were not only bad for the economy, but would lead to tyranny.

After World War II, scared by the growth of both social-democracy and the advances of Communist states, the neoliberals started to get organised. In 1947, some of the most important and well-known thinkers involved in the cause- people like Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Karl Popper- gathered in Switzerland and formed the Mont Pelerin Society. They decided the best route to power would be by slowly advance their ideas through think-tanks, universities, publications, and acting as advisors to politicians.

They would get their opportunity to act in the 1970s, as the post-war era of economic growth began to end. Capitalists wanted access to cheaper labour and new markets to get their way out of the slump.

A group of American right-wing academic economists, led by Friedman at the University of Chicago, became well-known for their arguments that the state shouldn't control industries, provide services or welfare, or reduce unemployment, and that attempts by trade unions to keep wages high and control production were stifling the economy. They said that restrictions on businesses were a restriction on freedom and tried to justify their plans to increase profits for the rich as a fight for liberty. Their ideas resonated with those who wanted to wage war on workers' conditions.

The first testing ground for their ideas would be in Latin America, and in particular, Chile. Following the 1973 coup against Salvador Allende's democratically elected socialist government, many thousands of activists, trade unionists, and politicians had been tortured killed or 'disappeared', and nearly 200,000 people fled the country. The new regime, led by General Pinochet, enthusiastically embraced Friedman's ideas. With the left and the independent unions crushed, they privatised most industries, gave companies access to Chile's natural resources, massively reduced taxes and tariffs, and stripped back social welfare spending. Unemployment rocketed, wages were reduced, and instability became the norm.



Neoliberalism went hand-in-hand with extreme state violence. In this picture from 1988, protestors in the Netherlands demand an end for Reagan's support for the Nicaraguan Contras.

By the 1980s, other politicians had started to follow suit- most famously Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Both made defeating the unions their top priority, to prevent workers from having any control of policy. In 1981, Reagan fired 11,000 air traffic workers who were on strike for better pay and hours and banned them from ever getting any public-sector jobs again. Thatcher attacked the miners in

1984, destroying the power of one of Britain's most militant unions. A whole series of anti-union laws, which made striking and picketing more difficult and left unions vulnerable to huge fines, changed the balance of power in Britain.

Major industries were soon sold off, financial regulations were loosened, unemployment soared, and soon the rich were making far more money than had been possible since World War II. In many countries in the Global North, permanent contracts were replaced with short-term ones, while agency labour increased. Organising workers in an industry around common goals became more difficult as there were huge differences in the forms of employment and conditions. What's more, entire industries were shifted across the globe to states with weaker unions and less democratic rights.

Neoliberalism became 'common sense' for many governments, as it was promoted by well-funded think tanks, powerful politicians, and business leaders. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank made loans to debt-saddled countries on the condition that they slash spending on public services, state housing, healthcare, education, and welfare, reduce corporate taxes, and open up their industries to be bought out by foreign companies.

The type of trade unionism developed in the wake of World War II was increasingly under attack. Closed shop agreements were gone. Government subsidies for education and international development were stripped back. Unions were given less say in public bodies, or else removed from

them entirely. The social-democratic parties also reduced their connections to unions, creating a gap between the two wings of the workers' movement. The rules of the game had changed.

Trade Unions in the Global South

With globalisation and the rise of the TNC's from the late 1970s to early 1990s, a new wave of trade unionism spread across the countries of the Global South.

Many of these formerly-colonised countries were undemocratic- either ruled by outright dictators or sham democracies where the winner was chosen before the vote. Often their regimes had been set up or were propped up by one or the other big Cold War power. Unions in these countries were often extremely limited in what they could do because of state pressure and violence, and in some cases were just tools of the state. Wages were low, workers were kept in line through terror, and regulations were lax- it was much cheaper to run factories and operations in these conditions than in the West.

The new wave of Global South unionism in the 1980s was focused on both fighting for democracy and fighting to improve workers' conditions- an approach demonstrated by COSATU, which was a part of this wave of new, militant unionism.

In South Korea, independent trade unionism had been crushed by a series of dictatorial governments since the end of World War II. The only legal union was the state-controlled Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) which often worked hand-in-hand with factory managers. Working and living conditions were very bad, and there were few legal ways to challenge them.

However, in 1987, an explosion of worker militancy caught the government off-guard. It began when the ruling Democratic Justice Party announced that it would choose the next President. Students took to the streets in protest, and were soon joined by huge numbers of workers. The government backed down, promising open presidential elections.

Korean workers then targeted the industrial system. New unions were set up at several Hyundai plants, launching militant and confrontational strikes. This set off a chain reaction- between June and October there were some 3,500 illegal strikes involving 1.2 million workers. For the next two years, strikes rocked the country, with 3,400 new unions being set up.

Workers occupied and blockaded their factories. Managers and factory owners were taken hostage to make sure that the police would not block food and water from being brought in. Strikers armed themselves and prepared defences to stop the government's riot police and paramilitary thugs.

The young unions would strike first, and then decide their demands democratically during the occupations. As well as wage increases and an end to forced overtime and military-style factory discipline, strikers demanded their FKTU branch be broken up and their new union be recognised.

The FKTU was affiliated to the ICFTU and the ITS's, making the situation difficult for sympathisers to independent trade unionism in the international movement. Any official visit had to be done through visiting the hostile state-controlled unions. Christian organisations and labour NGO's played an important role by providing information to the international organisations and offering resources to the growing movement.

Gradually workers started linking their factory-based unions together, forming the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) in 1995. In 1999 the confederation was legally recognised, and has fought tirelessly to protect and extend democracy, as well as to improve workers' conditions. KCTU members still struggle for this today- as recently as 2016 the government imprisoned several of its leaders for supporting and organising anti-government protests.

In Brazil there was also a wave of 'new unionism' in the 1980s. The trade unions had been under state control since the 1930s, but in 1964 things got worse when a military coup installed a vicious, right-wing dictatorship.

TNC's took advantage, setting up highly-profitable factories, and the workforce in key industries quadrupled in size. This growth was accomplished on the back of appalling conditions. Strikes were made illegal and low wages enforced by law. The unions were purged of left-wing leaders and activists, and torture, assassinations, and imprisonment were used to keep workers compliant.

However, in the late 1970s, workers set up underground factory committees which organised by secretly passing out hand-written notes and by holding clandestine meetings in factory restrooms. In 1978, metal workers in the Saab-Scania plant in São Paulo went into work but refused to switch on the machines. They demanded higher wages and condemned the dictatorship's restrictions on organising. They were soon followed by workers at Ford, Volkswagen, and Mercedes-Benz.

In 1978 over 1 million Brazilians went on strike, led by the committees. They were supported by left-wing sections of the Catholic Church, community groups, and pro-democracy campaigners. The churches provided meeting spaces, set up 'pastoral labour groups,' and demanded the release of imprisoned workers' leaders.

As the government's response became more violent, the committees began organising in communities, not just factories. Soon they started demanding independent workers' delegates be posted in the factories. The movement kept growing, with committee militants even getting enough support to win control of several key unions. The former Brazilian president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (often known simply as Lula), first came to public attention as a committee militant, and was so well-respected that he soon won leadership of the metal workers' union.

In 1983 a new union federation- the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT)- was created. The CUT helped to build a pro-democracy coalition of different NGO's, activists, unions, factory committees, parties, community groups, and social movements. They were successful, forcing real elections and a new constitution to be drawn up in 1988. The CUT made sure that the right to strike and the right to worker representation were enshrined in Brazil's new constitution.





The strike at the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk, 1980, was the starting point for the movement which created the first independent trade union within the Soviet bloc.

Meanwhile, in Poland, an independent trade union was at the centre of a democratic movement which would end Stalinist rule. It began in August 1980 when 17,000 workers staged a strike in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, protesting the firing of Anna Walentinowicz, an underground union activist. Workers in over 200 local factories joined in, forming strike committees and workplace councils. They demanded reforms, including an end to censorship and the right to form independent trade unions. The strike spread nationally, with other workers' councils making similar demands.

The government eventually signed an agreement with the strike leaders, granting workers the right to organise unions. In September 1980 the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarity (or 'NSZZ Solidarność') was launched as the first independent trade union in a Soviet Bloc country which survived longer than a few months.

Over the next year, 9 million people joined – a quarter of the country's population. Strikes became a regular feature of life, and were used to free imprisoned activists, get better pay and conditions, and challenge corrupt officials.

In December 1981 the government declared martial law, outlawed Solidarność and imprisoned its leaders. The movement went underground and fractured into different local groups, each working independently. The arrested leaders were replaced, with many women organisers taking up key roles. Despite now being illegal, Solidarność's local groups carried out protests, vigils, parades, marches and strikes, produced leaflets, and even used radio, music, and films to spread their ideas.

Western labour movements offered their support to Solidarność. Both the ICFTU and the WCL called on their members to protest the Polish government's repression and to send funds and resources. The anti-communist AFL-CIO worked with the US government and created the Polish Workers Aid Fund, becoming an important foreign supporter of the new union. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation 'Landsorganisationen i Sverige' was the young union's most important backer.

The Polish government was forced to negotiate with the union leaders in 1989. It was not able to stop the movement. After two months of discussions, an agreement was signed announcing major political reforms, and which officially recognized Solidarność once again. An agreement was reached to hold free elections a few months later- the first ever in the Communist bloc.

In Indonesia, new trade unions were formed in opposition to the state-controlled federation FBSI (*Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including one named

Setiakawan ('Solidarity') in tribute to the Polish movement. They were often founded by human rights NGO's, lawyers, and student activists.

The threat of violence, arrest, and death were never far away- President Suharto's regime had come to power on the back of a series of mass killings in 1965 of communists, ethnic Chinese people, left-wingers, and women's rights activists, which had resulted in at least 500,000 deaths (some estimate 2-3 million were killed). The dictatorship was committed to using extreme violence, and used it frequently to keep workers in line and foreign investment rolling in.

Members of the new movement had to work 'under the radar', with activists often bouncing between different safe houses, and taking indirect routes to meetings to outmanoeuvre the military's many spies.

While many of the initial unions collapsed due to government repression, the networks of workers, labour activists, lawyers, and NGO's helped launch a further series of independent unions in the 1990s, helping to bring down Suharto's military dictatorship in 1998 as part of a fraught alliance with students, intellectuals, and journalists.

In Taiwan, 1987 saw workers also fight poor conditions and the state-controlled union federation – the Chinese Federation of Labour (CFL). The CFL had colluded with the bosses to keep pay and conditions low. Unpaid overtime was widespread, with many people working 25 hours extra per week.

Taiwan is an island near China, which had been ruled by the Kuomintang party (KMT) since 1945. The KMT were originally based in mainland China, but fled to Taiwan after being beaten by the Communists during the civil war. They maintained that they were the real Chinese government and promoters of 'true' Chinese culture, discriminating against indigenous Taiwanese peoples.

They declared martial law and crushed opponents through extreme violence known as the 'white terror.' The labour movement, pro-democracy campaigners, and rival political groups were all suppressed. All strikes were banned. The KMT controlled union leadership elections, dissolved 'problematic' unions and vetoed disloyal union leaders. Many unelected CFL leaders had been in power since the KMT first set up in Taiwan.

In the 1980s, as Taiwanese exports grew, American businesses and unions became worried about cheap Taiwanese goods' impact on US industries. The American government hinted that they would tax Taiwanese imports if their prices were kept low by suppressing workers. So, in 1987 the Taiwanese government ended martial law. AFL-CIO lobbying saw strikes legalised, although there continued to be strict rules around them.

Those who had grown up under martial law seized this opportunity. From 1987, they set up new independent unions in the largely-unorganised private sector, and organised takeovers of KMT-controlled unions in the public sector. In the Spring of 1988, a wave of industrial action hit Taiwan.

One of the biggest battles was at Mialoi Transport Company, where a fare increase was not accompanied by a wage increase. Workers didn't have the legal mandate to strike. Instead, they called an 'Emergency General Meeting' which all union members had a legal right to attend – the meeting went on for 8 days! They found a way to strike without declaring a strike.

However, the KMT and the transport company wanted to make an example of these workers to end the wave of militancy. The meeting was declared illegal, and 250 workers were sacked. The police were called in to attack and arrest the pickets.

But the workers gained support from a coalition of labour NGO's, religious groups, and independent unions. They raised funds to support the strikers, and church figures lobbied for the release of imprisoned picketers. Eventually, the strikes spread across the transport sector. The KMT and the company backed down and rehired all the sacked workers.



Taiwanese trade unionists protest for a higher minimum wage and better pensions. May Day, 2021.

The new unions were able to make real improvements, and by 1989 manufacturing wages had risen by 60%. But they were still small and fragmented organisations. As they grew in number, many wanted to create a new national centre. This was very difficult - the KMT still controlled thousands of workplace unions and the legal system prevented confederation without their presence.

For some time there were several coordinating bodies including the 'Brotherhood Union', and 'Association of Union Cadres.' In 1988, the 'National Federation of Independent Trade Unions' was established, but it was soon dissolved due to cultural and political tensions. The KMT-controlled CFL continued to represent Taiwanese workers within the ICFTU and the ITS's.

It wasn't until 1998 that four major unions were able to establish an alternative national centre - the Taiwan Confederation of Trade Unions. In 2000 it was legally recognised, a year which also saw the KMT removed from the national leadership of the CFL, and replaced by the leaders who gained recognition and experience during the strikes of the late 1980s.

Internationally, this emergence of new trade unions, largely independent of the Cold War rivalries (both between Communist and non-Communist camps, as well as those within the non-Communist bloc), were a source of great hope and inspiration for many in the democratic left of the trade union movement. Many hoped that it marked a significant shift away from the historical dominance of the European and American movements and the colonial legacies of the Global South. Perhaps, it was thought, it would bring new radical perspectives into the international trade union federations with a stronger political agenda, opposition to neoliberalism, and commitment to democratic socialism.

It was also hoped that international networks and solidarity links could be built between these new unions, breaking the idea that solidarity was simply a pattern of paternalistic Western union support for poor under-developed unions in the South.

Various NGO initiatives attempted to support this idea, such as Australia-Asia Worker Links; the International Labour Research & Information Group, based in Cape Town; the Dutch-based Transnational Information Exchange; Asia Labour Monitor in Hong Kong; among others.

The democratic left within the ITS's were also encouraged by developments in the South, and many of the new more militant unions were encouraged to affiliate.

There was also an attempt to build a more formal alliance between the new unions, the Australia-based Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR), which has held conferences every few years since 1991, involving representatives of many of these new unions, along with the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

The early enthusiasm was later dampened as some of these new unions and federations faced major internal problems. COSATU became submerged in controversy and in-fighting over its rampant corruption and its political alliance with the ruling African National Congress (which had embraced neoliberalism), while Solidarność was captured by the Catholic right-wing and ended up supporting neoliberal policies.

Social Movement Unionism

The growth of trade unions in the Global South where members fought both in the workplace and in the community, often in alliance with other types of campaigning groups, for the benefit of the whole working class, was not necessarily new. As we have seen in chapter 1, this kind of alliance-building and non-workplace action had a long history dating back to struggles against slavery and colonialism and for a democratic society.

However, the new growth of this type of trade unionism between the 1970s and 1990s, particularly in Brazil, South Africa, and the Philippines, gave many hope that it could be the beginnings of a new model of democratic and militant trade unionism which would be adopted globally. Often called 'social movement unionism', it was a very important idea during the 1990s and 2000s, and still commands support today. Some hope it can help the unions of the Global North overcome declining numbers and influence by partnering with community groups and social movements, to fight for the interests of the community and the working class, not just their members.

The 'anti-globalisation' movement saw trade unions and environmentalist groups work together- for example when 'teamsters and turtles' marched together in Seattle against the presence of the World Trade Organisation in 1999. The World Social Forums, prominent in the early 2000s, and often held in Brazil, attempt to spread the model of union-social movement alliances to challenge globalisation. However, self-imposed rules on not taking action or making unified statements, as well as some activists' unease with the dominance of NGOs, has led to their decline.

The model of Social Movement Unionism works well for those unions and social movements with a healthy democratic culture, grassroots members playing an active role, and which share a radical political outlook about the need to transform society. The success of unions in defeating dictatorships in Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines, was precisely because of these factors.

However, where unions or social movement partners are focused on very limited issues, or rely on lobbying efforts or being part of formal industrial or political structures, alliances will not be able to

overcome the problems of political outlooks and strategy, or the absence of strong left-wing political tendencies.



In 1999, trade unionists and environmentalists marched together to protest the World Trade Organisation in Seattle.

The Collapse of the Soviet Union

While workers in the capitalist states were fighting the impact of neoliberalism, the workers of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc states were confronting the dictatorships. These regimes had faced and put down protests against their rule over many years, but in the 1980s a series of movements exploded on a scale not seen before. Many were directly inspired by the growth of Solidarność.

Across the Eastern Bloc, protest movements demanding democratic reforms sprung up, and independent trade unions began to be formed. Strikes, mass protests, and blockades challenged Communist rule. In the past the Red Army would have been sent in to crush this dissent, but the scale of these movements, plus a new reforming spirit amongst Communist Party leaders, prevented such a crackdown.

Within Russia, Communist Party chairman Mikhail Gorbachev started a process of democratic reforms in the late 1980s. When workers felt that these reforms were not fast enough or deep enough, they went on strike or else formed independent unions and NGO's to pressure the government. 1989 was a key year- hundreds of thousands of miners downed tools and formed a network of strike committees, lawyers formed an independent union, and even the state-operated cooperative movement was split by democratic reformers. The following years saw workers and progressive intellectuals coordinating and protesting, demanding an end to Communist Party rule and further democratic reforms.

They were successful, and soon reforms were passed which allowed for more independent journalism, the creation of new political parties, a free parliament and local governments, and an independent court system which could force politicians to follow the law. Gorbachev also wanted an economy similar to those of the Scandinavian countries, with some private businesses allowed.

Communist hardliners opposed Gorbachev, and in 1991 they sent tanks into Moscow to surround parliament. Workers came out to defend their new democracy against this violence. Famously, the newly-elected Russian president Boris Yeltsin stood on top of a tank and called for mass strikes and

protests to defend the new democracy. The coup failed thanks to workers' resistance and the Soviet Union soon collapsed.

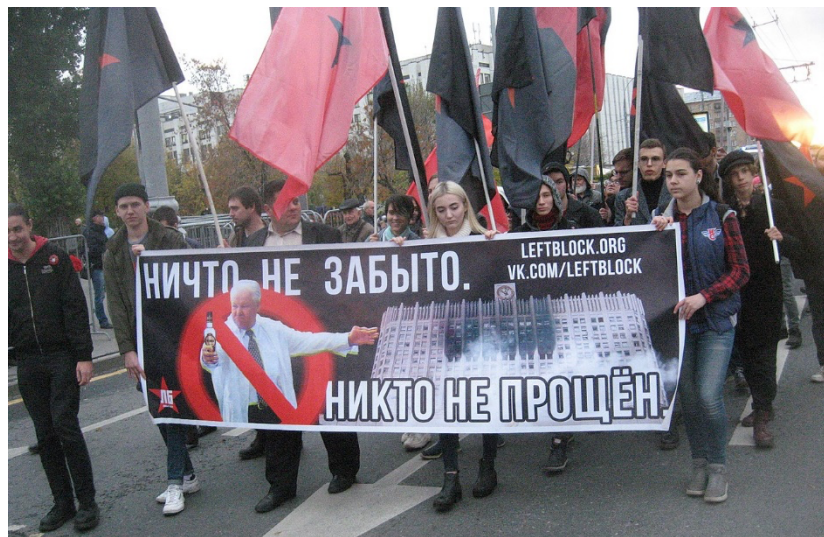
In Eastern Germany, the hated Berlin Wall was torn down by people wanting to travel and work freely. In Czechoslovakia, a general strike ended Communist rule. In Romania, street protests and riots saw the army join with workers and students to turn on the dictatorship. The Cold War was ended not by the American military or the propping up of right-wing regimes, but ordinary people organising and demanding change.

People had taken action because they wanted an end to dictatorship, not necessarily because they wanted a capitalist system. Solidarność had said explicitly that they would turn state industries in democratic workers' cooperatives, for example.

But after the fall of communism, a wave of neoliberal 'reforms' swept the region. The countries of the former Eastern Bloc needed loans and debt relief, and the International Monetary Fund and World Bank demanded the reforms in return.

State-owned industries were sold off, foreign investment was encouraged, and welfare and social spending were drastically reduced. This had a devastating effect for many- in Poland, food prices shot up by 500% after the reforms came in. In Russia, one-third of the population fell below the poverty line. Non-payment of wages and corruption became an everyday problem. Yeltsin's neoliberal reforms were so unpopular that he ordered the army to dissolve the parliament, crush street protests, and threaten political opponents. He ordered the shelling of parliament by tanks in 1993 to prevent further opposition to his right-wing reforms. The workers of the former Soviet bloc now had a new set of challenges to contend with.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states also had a huge impact on the labour movement, and by the early 1990s, WFTU had appeared to have collapsed completely, having lost the state-controlled unions that made up over 90% of its membership. A few years later the French CGT, the biggest member which wasn't state-controlled, also left. While the WFTU still exists today, it is tiny, and still dominated by state-controlled unions (like those of Iran, Cuba, and Syria).



Protestors march in Russia, 2019, commemorating those who died at the hands of the state to enforce neoliberal reform. Their banner reads 'Nothing is forgotten. No one is forgiven.'

Globalisation and the Breakdown of Post-Colonial Alliances

Alliances between nationalist and labour movements that had won independence in the colonised world began to fracture as globalisation pushed these states to adopt right-wing policies. This was particularly true in Africa, where many of the nationalist parties who had taken power formed one-

party states. These party-states had often incorporated the trade unions into their structures, in a similar way to the Soviet Union. The nationalist leaders often came from university-educated students and civil servants who had looked to Soviet history as an inspirational example of how to industrialise and develop.

In Ghana, a militant labour movement had helped get rid of British rule and put Kwame Nkrumah in power in 1957. In 1958, a new trade union law was passed, which banned the right to strike and turned the Ghana TUC into a tool of the new regime, which could pick and choose leaders, close down unions they didn't like, and so on. Many of the older trade union leaders had been trained in the Soviet Union and consciously pursued this model, all done in the name of building 'African Socialism'.

This pattern was followed by other African nations, leaving many national trade union centres as tools of the state, or constantly struggling to keep some degree of independence. In Tanzania, the trade union opposition to the government's attempts to incorporate them led to the national centre being shut down, and replaced with a new 'National Union of Tanganyika Workers' in 1964. The General-Secretary became the Minister of Labour, and the government held on to the right to fire officials as they chose. In Kenya, the Central Organization of Trade Unions was set up to replace independent unions in 1965, with the country's president holding the right to appoint its general secretary. This was also true in Francophone Africa; for example, in Senegal the head of the trade union movement sat in the Council of Ministers.

This pattern also affected the work of internationals in the region. The Ghanaian unions helped to set up a regional organisation called the All-Africa Trade Union Federation (AATUF) in 1961. All unions which affiliated to it were ordered to leave both the ICFTU and the WFTU (although the WFTU only had two affiliates on the continent, and it was seen as a move against the ICFTU specifically). The party-state unions joined this organisation, and banned their national unions from joining the ICFTU. The international movement attempted to work through the ILO and bilateral campaigns to support African trade unionists who were attempting to build strength which might challenge state control. The ILO encouraged unity between the AATUF and a group of supporters of the ICFTU in 1973, forming the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU).

These relationships between the party-states, their unions, and working-class supporters began to unwind as economic crises during the 1970s and 1980s saw African nations saddled with huge amounts of debt, and many were told to accept Structural Adjustment Programmes by the IMF and World Bank. This included austerity and the end of food subsidies, leading to hunger and anger in many nations. As the unions had been incorporated into state structures, often protests against them came from outside of the union movement, such as during the Egyptian 'Bread Intifada' of 1977.

However in some states, such as Zambia, the unions were still in a position to be able to help organise and lead resistance. After a series of food riots caused by austerity and an end to subsidies in 1986, the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) followed up with a strike wave through the early months of 1987. Despite having ironically helped to first set up the ZCTU, the ruling United National Independence Party accused the unions of being disruptors and traitors. Fortunately, they weren't strong enough to beat back the wave of strikes, and announced on May Day 1987 that they were reversing their policy of austerity measures.

The ZCTU would keep pushing on, however, working with women's groups and churches to organise a series of rallies and political strikes which brought an end to one-party rule through the course of 1990-1991. Zambia was far from the only African state to experience this kind of process- some 35 regimes were toppled between 1990 and 1994.

The split between nationalist and labour movements reached a tragic height with the Marikana massacre of August 2012. The South African Police shot dead 34 miners taking part in a wildcat strike at the Lonmin platinum mine in South Africa. Over 270 of their comrades were arrested, and initially charged with being responsible for the murders. Although the ANC and South African Communist Party remain powerful, many of their members became wealthy by continuing to manage the same kind of exploitative economy that existed under



Apartheid. This has created deep divisions with grassroots workers whose organisation and struggle brought down the hated regime, and yet still suffer from poor pay and unsafe conditions today.

Today the OATUU continues to represent those unions still tied to their governments. Perhaps not surprisingly, they work with the ACFTU, the Chinese state-controlled union federation, which has sponsored a regional training centre for them.

From International Federations to 'Global Unions'

With the rise of TNC's, the attacks on unions' power in the West, a global decline in union membership, and the spread of capitalism into the former-Soviet states, the ITS's had a huge task ahead of them. In the 1950s and 60s, many of them seemed content to just restrict themselves to exchanging information about conditions in different countries, which occasionally raised the odd bit of solidarity cash for campaigns, and only had a small staff. They would need to become far more proactive in these new conditions.

There were some exceptions of course. The ITF's huge size, its border-crossing seafaring membership, and the political culture developed by early radical leaders like Tom Mann and Edo Fimmen, meant that it was both more able and willing to act internationally. Indeed, as early as 1911 it was organising coordinated strikes in different countries.

There were also the metal workers', chemical workers', and food and drink workers' ITS's, which had all been led by left-wing figures in the 1960s and 1970s. As mentioned before, they had been some of the most proactive in tackling the TNC's early on.

During the 1980s it became clear that all the international federations were facing a dramatically new circumstances which demanded a change in role. There was a new demand for international organisation on a scale never seen before. The ITS's had to be restructured, given significant new responsibilities, and be more directly in touch with unions at a workplace, as well as national level.

The process of merger between ITS's, which had started early in the 20th century now accelerated. Some ITS's were simply too small and financially stretched to survive, such as the International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers, which merged into the IUF in 1994, and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation which merged with the federations covering metal, chemical, mining and energy industries. In 2005, the ITS's were re-branded, from the rather archaic International Trade Secretariats to Global Union Federations (GUF's).

More importantly, the logical response to international restructuring of industry and the growth of TNC's that crossed sectoral boundaries was to create broad international federations that could organise and coordinate between major sectors – as well as save money. As a result, a series of mergers were agreed to create two big GUF's – IndustriALL, formed in 2012 to cover manufacturing and extractive industries, and UNI Global (originally called Union Network International), formed in 2000 to cover private sector service industries. Public sector unions were already covered by Public Services International, which had been formed in 1907, and Education International.

Smaller GUF's represent unions in food, hotels, restaurants, catering, tobacco and agriculture (the IUF), construction and the timber industry (Building & Woodworkers International - BWI). There also remain some GUF's which are still closer to their craft union origins- such as those for journalists (International Federation of Journalists - IFJ), and musicians and actors (International Arts & Entertainment Alliance). In addition, linked closely to the IUF, a new GUF was launched in 2009: the International Domestic Workers Federation – IDWF (see pages 121-122)

Most independent unions in the world are affiliated to one or more of the GUF's. In the case of large general workers' unions, they can be affiliated to several GUF's.

The restructuring of ITS's into today's GUF's also has political consequences. Like all unions, each ITS had a distinct political culture, sometimes shaped by the impact and character of the leadership, and sometimes as the direct result of the industry represented and its trade union culture. The size of the global transport sector, and the border-crossing nature of many sailors' lives, has helped create a culture of militant internationalism which often defined the ITF, for example.

In the creation of 'super-GUF's', like any union merger process, conflicting political currents have to be subsumed or managed, and there is a danger that the process leads to an overall watering down of politics, a retreat into vague generalities or general depoliticization – far from the overtly socialist ideals and principles of the ITS's when formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

International Trade Union Unity

While the Global Union Federations were transforming in an attempt to meet the challenges of industrial restructuring, the federations representing national trade union centres were taking stock of the implications of the collapse of the WFTU, the shifts in the global political landscape, and the potential of creating a unified single over-arching confederation representing the entire trade union movement.

Although many of the ICFTU unions had connections with socialist parties, it was never a socialist organisation. It promoted 'free trade unionism', but nobody could quite agree what that meant. For the AFL-CIO it meant no connection to any political parties, but the European trade unions

disagreed. For the unions in the colonial world, it meant freedom from the empires and their puppet rulers, which meant involvement in a liberation movement. For many it had meant freedom from the church, but there were affiliates such as the Italian CISL which were religious. Despite opposition to state-controlled unionism, state-controlled unions from anti-Communist regimes were members. There was no unity, except for opposition to communism.

The WCL was in a similar position. In 1968 it had stopped being explicitly Christian as it had begun to work with Muslims and Buddhists in Africa and Asia. Instead, it became open to anyone who was religious and a worker. It had tried to sell itself as an alternative to both the Soviet-dominated WFTU and the ICFTU, which in areas like Latin America, was widely regarded as a puppet of the USA. With no WFTU, it too lost one of its key reasons to exist.

Leaders in both the ICFTU and WCL started discussing the possibility of merging the two internationals. Many of their European affiliates were already working together through the ETUC (as were several ex-WFTU unions), and leading figures from ETUC were some of the biggest players in the unity process.

There were other factors which pushed the two internationals together. Unions in many countries were shrinking in strength and numbers. International institutions were playing a greater role than ever before. A larger, unified, organisation which could claim to be the authentic voice of organised workers made sense.

What's more, there was pressure from below. Several of the WCL's national union affiliates had joined the ITS's/GUF's and had already begun working alongside ICFTU members internationally. The IUF, for example, had gained new affiliates in the 1980s from both Belgium and the Netherlands—two of the WCL's most important bases.

In 2006, after several years of discussion and negotiation, the ICFTU and WCL both dissolved their organisations and, with the addition of some previously independent or former WFTU-affiliated union federations (notably the French CGT and Italian CGIL), launched the International Trade Union Confederation – ITUC.

As with the ICFTU, the primary role that the ITUC has given itself is to represent the world's trade union movement in the major inter-governmental organisations (United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, World Bank, etc) and coordinate policy and campaigns on general cross-sectoral issues, such as the environment, women's rights, and trade union rights.

The ITUC's role in industrial issues is limited, and most GUF leaders remain keen to preserve their autonomy and independence (indeed this had been a barrier to unity as WCL leaders initially wanted the new organisation to have control over the GUF's). Yet as the influence of the trade union movement in the inter-governmental institutions has waned with the decline in membership and power, and with the decline in power of the inter-governmental institutions themselves, the ITUC has itself had to re-examine its role.

Much effort has been spent in trying to assert the ITUC as the representative voice of all workers in the world, which has been translated into all the trade unions in the world. But this presents a major difficulty. Some of the largest trade union national centres are state-controlled or allied to the state and repressive, such as the ACFTU (see below) and the Russian FNPR federation. Efforts to engage such so-called union federations are hugely controversial and many believe undermines the ITUC's credentials in defending and promoting democratic and independent trade unionism.

'Social Dialogue' and 'Decent Work'

'Social dialogue' has come to dominate the political strategy of the ITUC, reflecting the ETUC's founding principles of institutionalised negotiation between unions, employers and the state, and the ILO's tripartite structure and mission. In some unions, the language of 'social dialogue' and 'social partnership' has replaced that of collective bargaining.



Despite world-wide campaigns by trade unions and GUF's to organise McDonald's workers and fight against poverty wages, the ILO has allowed them to sponsor a 'Decent Work for Youth' Scheme

However, with the collapse of communist states, the decline in union power and the international shift to the right, governments and employers are increasingly confident to

ignore the trade union movement, and attitudes against unions and international labour standards have hardened. Union representatives struggle to get a seat at the table, let alone have any real influence on the agenda.

Central to the ITUC strategy has been the promotion of '**Decent Work**', a programme adopted by the ILO with ICFTU backing in 1998, which attempts to develop a 'fair globalisation' in which the core labour standards of freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining etc, are placed at the centre of government policy worldwide. It includes the development of ILO 'Decent Work Programmes' in target countries (almost all in the Global South and former Eastern Bloc) in an attempt to lift living standards, promote better working conditions and secure workers' rights.

Unfortunately, the ILO faces declining budgets and decreasing support from governments. ILO programmes to support the organisational capacity of unions, which were substantial in the post-war period up until the 1990s, have in effect disappeared.

The ILO is increasingly attempting to fill the funding gaps by turning to global corporations. Astonishingly, this includes a 'Decent Work for Youth' scheme sponsored by McDonalds. Ian Hodson, President of the UK's Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (which is organising young McDonald's workers for a decent wage), condemned the hypocrisy in 2018:

"We are disappointed to read of the tie up between the ILO and McDonalds who are global exploiters... Its employment practices are not a model to be praised. McDonalds operates a fierce anti-union strategy which includes union busting tactics again in breach of what is expected of a decent employer."

The 'New' Organising Agenda

Trade union membership numbers have been in decline since the 1970s. The end of closed shops, the legal restrictions on industrial action, the shutting down of tripartite bodies, the removal of subsidies, and the refusal of increasing numbers of large employers to negotiate have all had an impact. In 1979, British unions had nearly 12 million members- by 1990 they had around 9 million. The American unions lost nearly 5 million members in the same period.

Leaders of the American service sector union, the SEIU, decided they need to change course to stop this decline. They said that the old ways of negotiating with bosses and running unions were dead in the water. Instead of relying on good faith to get long-standing agreements with companies and the government, negotiated by paid union officials (known as the '**servicing model**') they wanted more of a confrontational, activist approach, drawing on the writings and training methodologies of community organiser Saul Alinsky in his famous book *Rules for Radicals*.

They invested in hiring and training teams of organisers. These organisers would focus on bringing new members into the union, often through home visits and one-on-one meetings, and on winning union recognition in workplaces through media-savvy campaigns. The aim was to recruit members who could grow the union and fight for their own needs without relying on full-time officials. With this done, paid organisers could then be sent on to new sectors/industries to run campaigns there.

This 'organising model' or 'organising agenda' had some early successes- the SEIU launched the 'Justice for Janitors' campaign in the 1980s, picking up new recruits and getting their union recognised in many workplaces across the USA. In Los Angeles, union membership amongst janitors soared from 17% to over 80% within a few years, bucking national trends.

The SEIU wanted to spread this model within the American movement, and managed to get the AFL-CIO to set up the Organizing Institute to train union officials in 1989. Their attempts to change the AFL-CIO weren't as successful as they hoped, so they led a group of unions in a split in 2005, founding Change to Win as an alternative national centre.

The 'organising model' also spread internationally, with American unionists travelling across the world to preach its success. The TUC and the Australian Council of Trade Unions have both set up organising schools based on these ideas. SEIU set up partnerships with trade unions in the Netherlands, Germany, UK, Ireland, and New Zealand, to name but a few, and has helped shape the strategy of UNI, one of the largest GUF's. The 'organising model' has not, however, lived up to its own promises. Often it has slowed membership losses, but not stopped or reversed this trend. In Australia, the US, and the UK, both the overall numbers of trade unionists, and the overall percentage of trade union members in the workforce, are lower than when the organising model was first promoted by their national centres.

The organising model was, in fact, designed specifically for US industrial relations, making it difficult to neatly copy in other countries. In the USA, workers gain union recognition and the right to collective bargaining after a vote in which over 50% of workers in the balloted company or workplace vote in favour of the union. In these circumstances, organising an energetic campaign to meet all the potential workers to be balloted, winning them a seat at the negotiating table, and moving on



The SEIU is one of the organisations most responsible for the global spread of the idea of the 'organising model' as a way of fixing the problems of the labour movement.

to the next workplace makes some sense. It makes a lot less sense when this is not the model of labour relations.

While going back to the 'servicing model' is not possible due to changing laws and industrial conditions, or even desirable (as it often kept members passive and uninvolved in the union), the 'organising model' comes with its own problems.

While the model promises to give power to members, often they get no say in the strategy – what industries/ workplaces are to be targeted, what conditions are being fought for, and so on. Some people have referred to this as a 'managed activism' – while grassroots unionists are more involved than in the servicing model, they are still directed by the existing union leaders.

The focus on growth in membership above all else has led to some unions accepting questionable deals with companies in return for permission to recruit in them. The SEIU famously won the right to organise within a Californian chain of retirement homes, but workers discovered that their union-negotiated contracts banned them from either striking or whistleblowing on dangerous practices.

Another danger comes from the idea that the 'organising model' is a clear, straightforward, all-inclusive way of doing things. It is maybe better to see it as a toolbox. It contains different tools suited to different tasks, which can be useful in some situations but not in others. As a bundle of different techniques, they can be combined with other techniques- organising to change laws, building alliances with community groups, providing services, and so on, which are not often presented as part of the 'model'.

Perhaps the biggest issue is that the reliance on 'organising' to overcome union weakness means that the question of what the union should be organising *for* gets ignored. Globalisation, the climate crisis, the rise of the far-right, the hollowing-out of democracy, and a global attack on workers' power and influence are key questions which unions need to grapple with and address to grow. Improved recruitment techniques cannot solve these issues by themselves.

International Workers' Education and Globalisation

During the era of globalisation, some unions have unfortunately responded with nationalistic ideas. In the Global North, some unions have said that to stop de-industrialisation, workers should cooperate with management and learn more technical skills to prevent jobs being moved overseas. This has seen a rise in workers' education programmes within national trade unions and trade union centres focused on 'human resources' style skills' improvement. In other cases, some unions have focused solely on teaching 'organising methods' with no attempt to develop political education or analysis.

However, some organisations are still providing an alternative, and using education to encourage a greater understanding of how globalisation affects the entire global working class, and encouraging joint action across borders. The International Federation of Workers' Educational Associations (IFWEA), set up after World War II, and the Global Labour University provide two examples of this.

Beginning in 1997, IFWEA established a series of International Studies Circles. These are small groups of around 8 to 12 people, where everyone is encouraged to take part, sharing their experiences and ideas around a particular topic. They are not action bodies, but the opportunity to share personal experiences of conditions, ideas for change, and analyses of situations, which often helps

participants to work together or in their own organisations to effect change. The IFWEA scheme encouraged groups in different regions to discuss the same topic and then use the internet to share the ideas they had developed.

For example, representatives from workers' education organisations from Taiwan, Korea, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Australia all met together to design a curriculum for a course on the nature of globalisation and responses to it. They then ran the courses in their respective countries and shared the discussion notes and responses with one another. These types of courses not only encourage people to work together across borders, but to see themselves as part of a global working class, as the connections between their experiences and opportunities to unite against the same problems become clearer.

Some IFWEA affiliates have also initiated bilateral relationships and programmes. These include Denmark's *Arbejderbevaegelsens Internationale Forum* (AIF), which spends over half its budget on organising in other countries. It organises educational programmes and acts as a lobbying body for international workers' interests. When union members in the Philippines were fired by Carlsberg for organising, AIF lobbied the Danish Carlsberg workers' union to take solidarity actions, for example.

The Global Labour University was formed in 2002 to take a model of cooperation between academics and the labour movement to the international level. It aimed to tool up the labour movement with a greater understanding of globalisation and its impact on the labour market. It began as an initiative from within the ILO, and has grown into a network involving many universities, Global Union Federations, national union centres, and NGO's such as the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

It has achieved remarkable successes in setting up advanced studies programmes in Germany, Brazil, South Africa, India, and the USA. It holds annual conferences and regular summer schools, commissions research papers, and in the past few years has expanded its influence further through launching Massively Open Online Courses, which bring expert knowledge about labour and capital to an even wider audience through internet-based courses. It has acted as a space where trade unionists and researchers from across the Global South can come together and share ideas and get their voices heard internationally.

Labour Environmentalism

The effects of the climate crisis become more obvious with every year. Droughts, floods, wildfires, extreme heat, and monsoons are becoming more frequent and severe as greenhouse gas emissions raise global temperatures and destroy the environment. Heavy chemicals, fossil fuels, processed metals, plastics, and other forms of industrial waste are poisoning people, animals, and the earth.

Over the past fifty years, many labour organisations have become increasingly aware of the urgency of the climate crisis and are increasingly taking an active role to try to reduce carbon emissions and environmental pollution, while still protecting workers' livelihoods and conditions.

In the 1980s, workers in the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) union (now part of United Steelworkers), popularised a now-common term in the movement – a 'just transition'. A New Jersey chemical plant was shut down due to its toxic impact, and the union demanded that laid-off workers should have their income protected and receive access to training. The union, led by the radical Tony Mazzocchi, called for workers not just to receive support as industries shifted to become greener,

but demanded that they help shape the transition to a new, sustainable economy. The approach was strongly influenced by previous experience of the plant's destructive effect on the health of the workers and the local community.



Since then, the idea of a 'Just Transition' has become more popular within labour movement and is now the dominant framework for trade union campaigning and organising around environmental issues. In 2016, the ITUC set up the Just Transition Centre. They work to bring representatives of workers, businesses, communities, and governments together to discuss how to create more green jobs, train workers so that they have the skills for a green

economy, and to protect those threatened by climate change. A decade of lobbying saw the idea adopted into the text of the 2015 Paris Agreement (a legally-binding international commitment to limit the impact of climate change).

This 'social dialogue' approach, as seen in the Just Transition Centre, emphasises that private businesses can profit from the transition to a greener society by expanding into new areas, and call for that process to be supported and for it to be done with jobs creation in mind. They call for working with businesses but also granting more power to governments to promote new industrial jobs. But this approach also reduced the space for workers to have a direct voice. One of the Just Transition Centre's key business representatives, for example, is Richard Branson, who personally intervened to prevent the Transport Workers Union organising in his Virgin America company.

The term 'Just Transition' is no longer used only to describe a process of green industrial transformation led by workers. Businesses are increasingly co-opting the term, using it to describe a 'greener' vision of capitalism in which business incentives are doled out to companies who reduce their carbon footprint or damaging industrial outputs. Their financial resources mean that they are able to dominate the conversation, for example through sponsoring UN COP meetings (where international climate policies are discussed and coordinated) and flooding them with lobbyists. Where governments don't invest in transition policies, private companies are able to take advantage through greenwashing their actions and presenting themselves as the leaders on the issue.

The 'social dialogue' approach is not used by everyone- more radical groups emphasise a 'social power' approach. Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED), for example, aims to resist fossil fuel companies rather than treat them as social partners. They seek to increase public ownership of natural resources, in particular energy, to get them out of the hands of those who deplete and use them in a way which damages the earth and our communities. TUED conducts research and works with labour movement organisations, encouraging them to adopt policies and approaches which can draw on the strength of the workers' movement to mobilise against big-business polluters and their government backers. This model emphasises building up workers' democratic ownership and control over the earth's resources.

Some unions and workers' organisations are taking action on this basis. The COP 26 Conference, held in Glasgow, Scotland, in October 2021, was met by a demonstration of over 150,000 people, mobilised by the Climate Justice Coalition. The coalition worked with others to coordinate over 800

actions and protests around the world, held widely-accessed workshops and meetings, and organised information to be distributed and ideas for organising to be exchanged. The COP 27, held in Cairo, Egypt in November 2022, will also be targeted by a coalition of trade unions, indigenous rights groups, and environmental campaigners. A counter-summit is being organised by a coalition of informal workers' organisations, community groups, and NGOs under the slogan 'Reflect! Resist! Rise!'

The 'social power' model, while not universally accepted by international groups or national unions and federations, is closest in spirit to the early environmentalism discussed in chapter 1, where socialists and radicals demanded worker control of and access to the resources of the earth. Re-articulating this spirit today would mean emphasising doing away with a system of unequal access to, and profit-driven management of, natural resources. It means arguing for workers and their representative organisations to democratically determine what a more sustainable world would look like and how it would operate, without concern for the growth and profits of either established or emerging businesses.

Post-Communist Unions –Stagnation and Repression in Eastern Europe

Union decline is not just a Western issue. Since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, trade unionists have faced major hurdles in Eastern Europe.

Damaging neoliberal reforms have had a major impact on workers' organisations. Trade unions lost their former roles as providers of social welfare and benefits. The new owners of the private industries are often hostile to unions' presence. Collective bargaining structures were rarely set up (with the exception of Slovenia), and where they were, management generally refused meaningful negotiations. The huge numbers of unemployed people desperate for work made it very difficult for those unions that pressed for better conditions to get their way.

What's more, there were difficulties caused by a lack of experience. The old state unions didn't have to organise their members for collective action to support their negotiations – this tradition of the workers' movement had been almost non-existent in Russia.

Both the former state-run unions and new, independent unions have struggled to make gains in this environment. In some cases because they actively supported the neoliberal reforms, in others because their power has been curbed by the reforms. Both have struggled with the fact that unions and pro-labour language are associated by many with the old regime. Many workers accepted the idea that there would be a difficult period after the transition from the old regimes, which gave bosses and politicians a chance to go on the offensive. In Poland, Solidarność lost support and members as they backed the neoliberal reforms. The leaders of the movement came to power after the introduction of democracy, but did not give unions a place in the new society. They felt that strong, militant unions would put off foreign investors and derail the country's shift to capitalism.

In Russia, the former state union, the FNPR, cozied up to first Yeltsin, and then Putin. Though it is no longer state-controlled, the old culture of keeping workers compliant so union leaders can stay close to the government hasn't gone away. Some constituent unions have been able to use this to their advantage, gaining some legal cover for organising efforts, although the FNPR still contains many 'yellow unions' as well.

A new, independent national centre called the KTR was formed in 1995. They have struggled to grow- the government passed a labour law in 2002 which basically gave the FNPR the right to be the sole representative of workers in collective bargaining. Striking has been made much more difficult through legal changes. The KTR and the strong auto workers' union, which have received funding and support from the GUF's, have been



The KTR-affiliated Interregional Trade Union (MPRA) organised auto-workers and was well-represented in the Ford plant of Vsevolozhsk. In 2018 they were disbanded after being accused of being 'foreign agents'.

targeted by laws which ban 'foreign actors' from being involved in Russian politics. Workers have faced extreme violence from the riot police for striking and occupying, and leading labour lawyers and activists have been arrested and some even killed by the growing far-right.

Despite these threats to the KTR, some of its member unions are still doing important work. Healthcare workers, Teachers, and Academics are all organising- not necessarily around workplace conditions, but about social issues. Academics are fighting attempts to censor their profession, teachers to reform the education system, and healthcare workers to ensure more people get better treatment. Novoprof, an affiliate of the IUF, is doing important work organising workers within the fast-food sector. Their organisers are multilingual and work closely with Central Asian unions to ensure that migrants are not exploited along with Russian workers.

The ETUC has run training and education events for Eastern European unions, often with a focus on how they can engage in 'social dialogue'. In the early 1990s these were funded by the EU's PHARE program, which aimed to get Poland and Hungary ready to join the EU. With EU encouragement, tripartite bodies have been set up in many of the former Communist countries. These bodies often have little power in reality, and unions frequently complain that joint decisions are ignored by employers and the state. Ironically, the ETUC was telling Eastern European workers to trust in a model which was increasingly not working in Western Europe either!

The GUF's have also made efforts to support the unions in the region, with several setting up regional offices in Russia in the early 1990s. The ICEM (the chemical workers, now a part of IndustriALL) and the IUF were very proactive, setting up educational programmes through which they built networks of independent trade unionist allies.

However, since the late 1990s, parts of Eastern Europe have seen a return to undemocratic and authoritarian rule. The GUF's and ITUC all left Russia after threatening visits from the police. In Ukraine, pro-Russian separatists regularly attempt to intimidate trade unionists in areas they control.

In Kazakhstan, protesting oil workers in Zhanaozen were shot and killed by the police in December 2011. However, the Kazakhstani movement has not been easily crushed by either the regime of

Nazarbayev or his successor, Tokayev. In 2014, the state made independent unions illegal, and the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Kazakhstan was shut down in 2017. Despite this, organisation continues. In 2021 there were 60 large strikes in the oil and energy sector, and in 2022 a strike in Zhanaozen against the rising cost of energy set off a huge protest movement which occupied public squares, blocked roads, and marched on government buildings. The government first called a state of emergency, asked Putin to support their crackdowns, and then agreed to a cap on energy prices, hoping to calm the situation.

While there are some successes in the region, the association of unions with Stalinism, the impact of neoliberalism on unions' ability to organise and negotiate, the collaboration of some with right-wing governments, the lack of traditions of collective organising during the Soviet era, and growing authoritarianism create many barriers to growth.

'Constructive Engagement' in China

While international labour is struggling to overcome the damage done by state-controlled unionism in Eastern Europe, in China it is very much a live issue.

Since the 1970s, China has opened up its economy to foreign investment. Many transnational companies now have factories and plants in the country, connecting Chinese workers into global supply chains. The Chinese government help to keep these companies' workers in line so that the country is seen as an attractive place to invest. Some people have called this system 'market Stalinism' as it combines neoliberalism with strict political control by the Communist party-state.

The All-Chinese Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is the only official 'union' body in the country-attempts to establish independent unions have often been stamped out violently. For example, the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation was formed during the infamous Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, launching a city-wide strike which terrified the authorities. After a bloody crackdown on the striking workers and protestors, the leaders of the new union were arrested, and many have since fled or been forced out of the country.

While the ACFTU does sometimes lobby for better labour laws and conditions, its main goal is to serve the party-state by making sure that productivity stays high and that workers do not protest or slack off. It also provides some welfare and benefits to workers.

Its leaders are usually trained in the ranks of the Communist Party, rather than having worked their way up through the unions. Many local leaders are ex-army and use military training techniques to keep workers in line. In some cases, local branch leaders and factory managers are friends or family members.

Despite being a trade union in name only, the ACFTU is becoming more involved in the international labour movement. More and more trade unions (including national unions, national centres, and GUF's) are establishing regular contact with the ACFTU. According to the *People's Daily*, a Chinese state-run newspaper, between 1994 and 1998 Chinese trade unions established 'cooperative relations' with 419 trade unions from 131 countries. Pictures of foreign delegations meeting ACFTU leaders are regularly splashed across the pages of the Chinese press, granting the body prestige.

The ACFTU is increasingly active in the ILO, and runs events, programmes, and workshops alongside the ILO's bureau for workers' activities (ACTRAV). This is despite China not honouring many of the

ILO's Conventions and Recommendations. Although not a member of the ITUC, the ACFTU developed connections with many of the GUF's, with only the IUF refusing to engage with the state-controlled union.

At an ITUC congress in Berlin in 2013, representatives of ACFTU and the (still independent) Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) both attended. The HKCTU was barred from speaking about the situation in China, as the ITUC had guaranteed the ACFTU that they would not be criticised during the event.

Those who engage the ACFTU often say that they have to, as transnational companies which they are organising against have workplaces out there. As the ACFTU is the only legal union, they have little choice in who they can work with. They claim that their engagements can help lead to change in the organisation's culture. They point to the ACFTU's attempts to organise in Wal-Mart in China, which the company originally objected to, as evidence that they can function as a real trade union.

However, after working out a deal with Wal-Mart, union branches in many stores were set up and run by Human Resources managers, who kept a low-wage regime in place. International engagement from other unions has not reformed the ACFTU, which is still led by unelected party loyalists and army officers.

Contact with the ACFTU legitimises a fake union which can now claim its international connections show its credentials. It also helps an organisation which allows the exploitation of its own members to shape the policies of labour groups around the world. Perhaps even worse, it prevents connections from being formed with independent trade unionists in China.

Organising in the Informal Economy

The ILO estimated in 2018 that over 60% of the world's workers—some 2 billion people—are part of the informal economy. So what is the informal economy? The ILO defines it as: *“All economic activities that are— in law or in practice — not covered or sufficiently covered by formal arrangements”*



Domestic Workers face some of the most difficult conditions to organise under. Many are isolated from fellow-workers and live in situations where they face legal and physical threats for organising. Through creative campaigning and strategies, and with support from others in the international labour movement, they have formed their own GUF.

Informal workers often have no formal contract, no job security, poor or non-existent social protection (pensions, maternity provision, health insurance, etc), and are denied fundamental rights. They may work for themselves or as part of a family, or work for an unregistered or unregulated company, or hold an informal role in a formal company. Some work out in public, like street vendors or unregulated taxi drivers, and are vulnerable to police harassment. Some are less visible, like home-based workers making clothes or traditional

handicrafts, or domestic workers, who are more-easily exploited because of their isolation. Women and migrants form a large part of the informal workforce, and informal work is much more common in the Global South.

In the past many thought that the informal economy would disappear as the world became more industrialised, but it has kept growing since the 1960s. The changes of neoliberalism- with big companies farming out production to a network of harder-to-trace smaller firms- has helped spur this growth.

Neoliberal policies saw unemployment rocket in Latin America in the 1980s, and in Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia throughout the 1990s and 2000s. This led to more people turning to informal work. The informal economy is also growing in the 'developed' world, with more people now working in the 'gig economy'. Many former workers are now 'independent contractors', working similar roles in worse conditions. Although not all precarious work is informal, all informal work is precarious.

In some countries there are even 'Special Economic Zones' where the usual laws, taxes, and regulations do not apply. Workers in these places have few legal routes to challenge the exploitation they face. They are often used by TNC's to produce goods to sell around the world.

This type of unprotected work has been very common throughout history. The London dockers of the 1889 strike mentioned in chapter 1 had no formal contract. The rural workers whose underground unions started as mutual aid funds had no rights at work or access to welfare. Jewish migrants in New York's tailoring industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s worked long days in unregulated sweatshops.

With the growth of unions and workers' power came labour rights, proper contracts, and government protection, making this type of employment less common in the 20th century in Europe and North America. Collective bargaining and government legislation helped to turn many into formal workers. However, because women and migrants for so long were excluded from unions and the workforce, many still worked in informal roles.

To organise, some workers have formed unions, while others have launched different types of organisations. Co-ops, clubs, meeting halls, voluntary associations, support groups, creches, and friendly societies are all used by informal workers. Often, informal workers' organisations play many different roles at once, and may not be registered as a union- these are sometimes called 'hybrid' organisations.

The Self Employed Women's' Association (SEWA), based in India, is perhaps the most famous example. It was officially established in 1972 by women workers in Gujarat, led by Ela Bhatt. Bhatt had been an organiser for the women's section of a textile union which had often helped women get vocational training and access to welfare. In the 1960s Bhatt started recruiting women informally working around the textile factories- rag-pickers, cart-pullers, and the like.

In 1971 these workers decided to set up SEWA, which brought together women from all parts of the informal economy, including street-vendors and handicraft producers. They were often poor and illiterate, harassed when working in public, and ripped off by middle-men and suppliers.

The next year they registered as an official union, despite government objections that they didn't have a common employer. They grew throughout the next decade, and in 1981 were kicked out of

the male-dominated textile union. They re-established themselves as an organisation run entirely by, and for, women.

“Although insulted at the way we had been thrown out, really, we felt most powerfully, an incredible sense of freedom”

Kalima Rose, ‘Where women are leaders’

SEWA is not your traditional union. To cater to its members’ needs it had to play many different roles. As well as taking part in collective bargaining and organising, it runs a democratic bank which offers members small loans, so self-employed women can gain access to more materials and better training, increasing their income. It helps set up cooperatives, creating more job opportunities and ensuring that these women can buy and sell at better prices. They have organised health and childcare cooperatives, literacy and technology training programmes, and lobbied local and national governments to reduce the burdens on their members’ lives (such as tackling corrupt police who demand bribes).

SEWA’s first international affiliation was with the IUF in 1983, following a visit of Ela Bhatt to Geneva and a meeting with IUF General Secretary Dan Gallin. At that time SEWA was not considered to be a union by other Indian unions, which opposed the affiliation. Among other things, SEWA was accused of gender discrimination because it did not accept men into membership. The IUF ignored these objections and supported SEWA’s fight for recognition on the international stage. At the 1988 congress of the ICFTU in Melbourne, Australia, the IUF was represented by Gallin and Renana Jabhwala of SEWA, and the IUF gave its 5 minutes allocated speaking time allocated to Renana.

In 1996, SEWA played a big role in getting the Home Work Convention passed through the ILO. This Convention said that home workers should have the same legal rights as all other workers- for example sick pay, minimum wages, pensions, health and safety standards, or the right to join a union. The next year they also helped to launch **Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing** (WIEGO), an international network which links up member-based organisations like unions and co-ops.

Domestic workers are a particularly vulnerable group in the informal economy. These are people who work in and for a household, and often do a range of jobs such as cooking, cleaning, nannying, driving, and so on. They often work by themselves in someone else’s house for long hours each day. They are frequently working far from their own home, with many millions crossing borders to get work- the ILO reckons that there are around 11.5 million migrant domestic workers globally, with around 8.5 million of these being women.

In some cases, employers confiscate their workers’ passports, lock them in their house, and/or physically abuse them. Domestic workers’ isolation, lack of legal protections, and inability to get social welfare puts them at particular risk. In Singapore, hundreds of migrant domestic workers have committed suicide rather than face continued abuse by their employers in high-rise flats.

However domestic workers are not weak or passive. They are organising, as all workers do. In 2009, a group called the International Domestic Workers’ Network was launched in Geneva, with the support of the IUF, WIEGO, the GLI, and members of the ILO. They aimed to connect domestic workers’ organisations from around the world, and bring them together to get the laws and conditions covering domestic work changed. They have had some remarkable successes. In 2011, they managed to get the Domestic Workers Convention passed by the ILO.

In 2013, they re-founded their network as the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), becoming the newest GUF. As of today, it represents over 500,000 members from 56 countries, who are organised in unions, networks, associations, and co-ops.

Informal workers were once seen by the mainstream of the labour movement as impossible to organise; unseemly; not real workers as they had no boss; even as potential strike-breakers. But the success of groups like WIEGO, SEWA, and the IDWF has caused many to rethink their attitude. All three of these organisations were supported on the international stage by the IUF, and later the Global Labour Institute (GLI), helping them gain recognition and prestige within the wider movement. Gallin, the former IUF General Secretary, even took a leading role in WIEGO after his retirement from the food workers' international.

The BWI has helped many of those who are employed informally or casually within the construction industry. The ITF launched an Informal Transport Workers Project in 2013, with the support of the GLI, which has brought over 100,000 informal workers into affiliated unions. It helped unions with experience of organising informal workers expand their reach and support unions in nearby countries.

ATGWU and the Power of Informal Workers

The ITF worked with the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU) in Uganda, helping them build their capacity to organise and to provide mentorship to unions in Kenya and Tanzania. ATGWU had previously had difficulty as the large bus companies had collapsed, giving way to new informal forms of public transport – motorcycle taxis known as 'boda bodas' and informal minibuses.

Before 2006, the leadership of the union hadn't paid much attention to informal workers, and between 2006-2012 were reluctant to spend money organising the sector. But in 2012, Aziz Kiryaa was elected as General Secretary, and pushed for more focus on the issue.

ATGWU realised that they could not rely on just recruiting workers from the informal economy one-by-one. They saw that many were already organised in credit unions, community groups, and associations. Instead, they began education and research work with these groups, learning more about their members' lives, how they organised, and what they needed. ITF-supported workshops helped draw many of these associations to ATGWU, and they affiliated their groups.

The ITF project has also been important in supporting ATGWU to help develop women as leaders within the trade union movement locally. All newly-affiliated associations were encouraged to set up women's committees, and recruitment of women working around the transport sector in informal roles has increased. There are now more women in union leadership positions, playing an active role in the union, and working in traditionally 'male' occupations than ever before.

However, because many unions were slow to organise informal workers or not sure how to go about it, NGO's often stepped in. In Britain, the Ethical Trading Initiative was launched in 1998 as a coalition of NGO's, companies, and unions to make sure that ILO standards were being kept to throughout TNC's supply chains.

In the USA, 'Workers' Centres' have emerged since the 1990s, and support (mainly) migrant day labourers- they often provide services (like healthcare and English lessons), training (for example, understanding your legal rights), and advocacy (targeting bad bosses and recruitment agencies). In the Philippines, the Labor Education and Research Network (LEARN) was founded in 1986 after the fall of the Marcos dictatorship, and helped provide education and training for a new generation of union activists often organising in the informal sector, helping to build alliances between unions and the unorganised.

In the textile trade, for a long time it was very hard to reach informal workers. Many were housed in barracks in Special Economic Zones in countries with repressive governments. The International Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers' Federation (now part of IndustriALL) worked with and within NGO's, such as the Clean Clothing Campaign, to draw attention to companies taking advantage of these groups of workers and hold them to account. Similarly, the ITF and the charity War on Want have worked together to support workers on cruise ships, where employees from the 'developing world' often face brutal conditions in precarious situations.

Informal workers have shown that they can organise, get results, and build lasting institutions. Their numbers are growing daily, while the formal economy shrinks. Making sure that the global labour movement supports their efforts will be key to rebuilding our strength, and ensuring that all workers are represented.

Digital Unions

Along with the rise of informal work, technological changes present new challenges and opportunities for the international labour movement. There are new and growing industries to organise, major changes in the way people work, and new possibilities for workers to connect across borders.

Large companies have been able to use tech to keep their workforce more divided and easier to control. In newer companies like Uber and Deliveroo, workers are technically self-employed, and are directed where to go by apps rather than managers. Amazon's deliveries work in a similar way. You could drive for any of them and technically never have to meet another driver or a supervisor.



ATGWU in Uganda demonstrated the importance of organising informal workers for trade union revitalisation. With support from the ITF, they have grown through collaboration with, and recruitment of, existing networks of workers.

Employees' journey times and breaks are monitored through an app, and this information feeds into an algorithm which decides which driver will be given what delivery. Failure to live up to company standards has gotten some people kicked off the apps for reasons that were never explained to them. Workers don't get to meet, are closely-monitored, and are more easily-disposed of with this system. This makes traditional organising much more difficult.

But new communications technology also gives workers the chance to organise more effectively than before. Although it is unevenly spread, around 4.5 billion people in the world have internet access, while 3.5 billion have smartphones. Companies can use this tech to isolate workers, but workers can also use it to connect with each other.

Deliveroo couriers have used messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram to set up group chats. They don't have a shop floor, so this kind of technology helps to connect them, giving them the chance to discuss working conditions and what they want to do. This has helped them to get people involved in campaigns, protests, and even strikes. Some workers have even organised cooperatives, such as the US-based 'The Drivers Cooperative', to provide alternatives to the gig economy model.

New tech can even be used to challenge some of the problems in the international labour movement. In the past it was very difficult to contact workers in the same firm who were based in another country. The metal workers' ITS, for example, had a rule that all contacts between countries had to go through their Geneva office. A union rep in Dagenham might have to go to a regional officer, who'd go to a national one, who'd contact the ITS/GUF, who'd contact a national organiser in a different country, to get a phone number for another regional officer, who could get the number of the rep in the other local plant. This process could take months.

As computers became more affordable, and the fibre and cable networks which connected them grew both in size and power, it became easier for workers to directly communicate. In the early days of the internet, it was often labour NGO's which set up new systems, using funds from the EU, left-wing church groups, and Labour-controlled local governments. The North West Transnationals Project, based in Manchester, used email to create direct connections between trade unions in the Global South and Global North. They also made workers' education resources with activists from many different countries chipping in by email. The Transnationals Information Exchange, set up in 1978, connected workers in different countries who shared an employer.

Worknet, set up in 1986, connected labour activists from a range of unions (including COSATU), parties, and support groups within South Africa. It also was connected to other digital networks, meaning they could make direct international appeals for solidarity. In Russia there was Glasnet, in Germany, Geonet, and in North America, Solinet. The connections between different digital networks kept growing.

The larger unions and older international structures lagged behind in getting to grips with this tech. Some people were keen to keep international connections in their own hands. Sometimes there was a distrust of computers or lack of knowledge about making use of them.

However, the ICEF was one of the earliest of the international unions to make use of the new technology. It established databases of companies' and workplaces' health and safety records which were shared with affiliates for collective bargaining purposes. News of disputes were posted on online message boards. Emails were used to exchange information rather than face-to-face meetings. This way of working has spread to the other GUF's since.

Since these early efforts, communications technology has advanced hugely. Workers regularly make use of pre-existing services to organise. Uber drivers set up WhatsApp groups to plan petitions, protests, and strikes like the Deliveroo couriers did. Wal-Mart workers used Facebook groups to share info and ideas to prevent the company from spying on them while they were at work.

There are also dedicated tools for the labour movement. The website coworker.org allows even un-unionised workers to create a petition which can then become the start of a campaign. Workers using the website have helped Uber drivers get tips and improved parental leave policies at Netflix. It is even creating a social media network for trade unions and their members.

There are plenty of innovators out there; *Notes from Below*, a collective which publishes a socialist journal, even organised with Game Workers Unite UK (a section of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain) to make a series of video games about labour organising.

The larger unions are starting to follow suit. Unite has launched Work, Voice, Pay, a website which contains information on companies, a database of collective agreements, campaigning resources and templates, and a pay claim generator.

While these kinds of tools aren't the be-all and end-all, they make direct communications between workers easier, and can allow us to share the information and research which can be crucial for a successful campaign.

Chapter 5: What Can we Learn from the Past? What is the Future?

We learn from the past in order to shape our future. A knowledge of the historic labour movement can help us to shape our sense of strategy, our tactics, and our political direction today.

As outlined in the introduction, we live in a period of growing crisis. The far-right is on the rise globally, war threatens ever-greater sections of humanity, environmental crisis is undermining the ability of human life to exist on the earth, the neoliberal restructuring of the world has undermined our conditions and rights while making organising more difficult, and increasingly huge national and regional and economic blocks are determined to confront one another, risking war and economic hardships for us all. The labour movement faces challenges on a scale not seen in many years.

However, as this text has aimed to demonstrate, there are a huge number of positive examples from both recent history and the more-distant past which can be drawn on to inspire further action and organisation today. Workers have defeated dictatorships, broadened and diversified the movement, organised across borders to improve conditions in TNC's, forced changes to laws and welfare structures, and built strong, fighting sections in industries and companies long thought to be unassailable.

At the Global Labour Institute, we made a conscious decision not to write a conclusion to this text, but instead to appeal to activists from the labour movement to contribute their conclusions. We want to hear what you think are the key lessons to be learned from history, and the ways that they can be incorporated in our struggles today.

Over the course of 2023, we will be organising with Global Union Federations, national, regional, and local trade union bodies, and labour NGO's to organise a series of discussions, workshops, and educational programmes. Participants in these events will be asked to make short contributions on what they think the value of labour history is to them, and their contributions will be collated into the physical version of the text which will be translated, printed, and distributed by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung during the course of the year.

If you are interested in taking part in this process, please do get in touch with us at gli-uk@global-labour.net and we would be happy to offer support and supplementary materials to facilitate this.



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This reference section is not intended to be comprehensive. Where there have been particular texts that were key influences on sub-sections or case studies they are listed under the title of the relevant sub-section. Where there have been texts that have informed multiple sub-sections or overarching approaches taken throughout the text, or else are of a potential general interest to readers, they are listed in the further reading section at the end of this appendix. This list includes individual texts from edited collections and journals where they have been particularly important, as well as references to entire collections where several contributions have been significant.

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