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The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions:
Structure, Ideology and Capacity to Act

by

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Meinem guten Geist,

meinem bess'eren Ich!

(from *Widmung*, by Friedrich Rückert and Robert Schumann)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis shows the ways in which the strategies and tactics of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) have evolved, in response to changes in the world economy and society and as part of the development of an international industrial relations system. It uses a series of cases to examine key features of the organisation and to show how it has responded to important challenges. These include: the creation of a separate European trade union organisation and the nature of the ICFTU's relation to it; the relations and the search for unity between the ICFTU and its Christian rival, the WCL; the campaign against apartheid in South Africa and violations of human rights in Chile and other countries; the rise of women's participation and representation within the world body, and most importantly, the development of the international trade union movement's campaign against the multinational corporations and around the theme of 'globalisation'. I conclude that the ICFTU is constrained on all sides as an organisation – through limited independent powers of action, disunity among its affiliates, the decline in the membership and influences of national unions, the scarcity of resources, and other factors – but that it has been able to act effectively under certain circumstances and when certain key conditions are met, such as the willingness to act among affiliated unions that was built up around the problem of apartheid, or the leading role played by the confederation in promoting women's equality.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAFLI	American Asia Free Labor Institute
AATUF	All African Trade Union Federation
ABVV-FGTB	<i>Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond/Fédération Générale des Travailleurs de Belgique</i>
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFRO	African Regional Organisation (ICFTU)
AFSCME	American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
AIFLD	American Institute for Free Labor Development
ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
APRO	Asian-Pacific Regional Organisation (ICFTU)
ARO	Asian Regional Organisation (ICFTU)
BATU	Brotherhood of Asian Trade Unionists
BEF	Belgian francs
BIAC	Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD
CC.OO.	<i>Comisiones Obreras</i> (Spain)
CDT	<i>Central Democrática de Trabajadores</i> (Chile)
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions
CFDT	<i>Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail</i>
CGIL	<i>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro</i>
CGS	<i>Confederación General de Sindicatos</i> (El Salvador)
CGT	<i>Confédération générale du travail</i> (France)
CGT	<i>Confederación General del Trabajo de la República Argentina</i>
CGT	<i>Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores</i> (Uruguay)
CGT	<i>Confederación General de Trabajadores</i> (Brazil)
CICISL	<i>Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Lavoratori</i>
CIME	Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprise
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations (USA)
CISL	<i>Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Lavoratori</i>
CIT	<i>Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores</i>
CLAT	<i>Confederación Latino-americana de Trabajadores</i>
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CNS	<i>Comité de Coordinadora Nacional Sindical</i> (Chile)
COMACH	<i>Confederación Marítima de Chile</i>
COSATU	Confederation of South African Trade Unions
CPT	<i>Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores</i>
CTC	<i>Confederación de Trabajadores de Colombia</i>
CTF	<i>Central de Trabajadores Federados</i> (Guatemala)
CTM	<i>Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico</i>
CTV	<i>Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela</i>
CUSA	Council of Unions of South African
CUT	<i>Central Unica de Trabajadores</i> (Chile)
CWC	Ceylon Workers' Congress
DEKE	Democratic Trade Union Movement (Greece)
DGB	<i>Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</i>
DISK	Federation of Progressive Trade Unions (Turkey)

EB	Executive Board (ICFTU)
ECFTU	European Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (UN)
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
ELA-STV	<i>Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna- Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascas</i>
EPA	European Productivity Agency
EPZ	export processing zone
ERO	European Regional Organisation (ICFTU)
ESC	Economic and Social Committee (ICFTU)
ESMA	Essential Services Maintenance Act (India)
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation (UN)
FBSI	<i>Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia</i>
FENAZU	<i>Federación Nacional de la Industria Azucarera (Chile)</i>
FGPC	Finance and General Purposes Committee (ICFTU)
FIFA	International Federation of Football Associations
FKTU	Federation of Korean Trade Unions
FNV	<i>Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging</i>
FO	<i>Force ouvrière (France)</i>
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
FUDT-CUT	<i>Frente Unitario de Trabajadores Democráticas (Colombia)</i>
GASBIINDO	<i>Gabungan Serikat2 Buruh Islam Indonesia</i>
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GOBSI	<i>Gerakan Organisasi Buruh Sjarikat Islam Indonesia</i>
GSEE	General Confederation of Labour of Greece
HMS	<i>Hind Mazdoor Sabha (India)</i>
ICEM	International Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Federation
ICF	International Chemical and General Workers' Federation
ICEF	International Chemical, Energy and General Workers' Federation
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICP	Industry Cooperative Programme
IFBWW	International Federation of Building and Woodworkers
IFCTU	International Federation of Christian Trade Unions
IFFTU	International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions
IFPAAW	International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers
IFPCW	International Federation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers
IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
IGF	International Graphical Federation
IISG	Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis
ILO	International Labour Organisation/Office
IMF	International Metalworkers' Federation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
ISF	International Solidarity Fund (ICFTU)
ITF	International Transportworkers' Federation
ITGLWF	International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation
ITS	international trade secretariat
ITUS	International Trade Union Secretariat
IUF	International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World (North America)
JILAF	Japan International Labour Foundation

KBIM	<i>Kongres Buruh Islam Merdeka (Indonesia)</i>
LCFTU	Lesotho Congress of Free Trade Unions
LO	<i>Landsorganisationen (Sweden, Denmark, Norway)</i>
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
MNC	multinational company
MNE	multinational enterprise
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MTUC	Malaysian Trade Union Congress
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions (South Africa)
NGG	<i>Industriegewerkschaft Nahrung Genuss und Gaststätte (Germany)</i>
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NKV	<i>Nederlands Katholiek Vakverbond</i>
NTUC	National Trades Union Congress (Singapore)
NUMSA	National Union of Mineworkers of South Africa
NVV	<i>Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen</i>
NZCTU	New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
NZFoL	New Zealand Federation of Labour
OATUU	Organisation for African Trade Union Unity
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
ÖGB	<i>Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund</i>
OGB-L	<i>Onofhängege Gewerkschafts-Bond Lëtzebuerg</i>
ONSL	<i>Organisation nationale des syndicats libres (Burkina Faso)</i>
ORIT	<i>Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores (ICFTU)</i>
OVSL	<i>Organisation voltaïque des syndicats libres (Haute Volta)</i>
PCI	<i>Partito comunista italiano</i>
PTTI	Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SADCC	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SAK	<i>Suomen Ammattiydistysten Keskusliito (Finland)</i>
SARBUMUSI	<i>Sarikat Buruh Muslimin Indonesia</i>
SBSI	<i>Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia</i>
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association (India)
SGB	<i>Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund</i>
SI	Socialist International
SPSI	<i>Federasi Sarikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia</i>
TASS	Technical and Supervisory Section (Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers) (UK)
TCO	<i>Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation (Sweden)</i>
TIE	Transnationals Information Exchange
TUAC	Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD
TUC	Trades Union Congress (UK)
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
UAW	United Auto Workers (North America)
UGT	<i>Unión General de Trabajadores (Spain)</i>
UGTP	<i>União Geral de Trabalhadores de Portugal</i>
UGTT	<i>Union générale tunisienne de travail</i>
UIL	<i>Unione Italiana del Lavovo</i>
UMWA	United Mine Workers of America
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Commission for Trade and Development

UNTA	<i>União Nacional dos Trabalhadores de Angola</i>
WCC	world company council
WCL	World Confederation of Labour
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Chapter 1

Introduction and Overview:

The Study and Practice of International Trade Unionism

This chapter presents the most important theoretical approaches to the study of international trade unionism, and the major arguments among scholars and practitioners. In order both to orient this study of the ICFTU within a tradition, and to show how it contributes an original perspective on the subject. As this thesis is primarily based on research in original sources rather than a review of secondary literature, I do not intend to undertake here a detailed analysis of each theoretical approach or an extensive critique of each author. Rather, I will pose a number of questions arising from the existing literature, and in the conclusion will attempt to show in what ways the study of the ICFTU might lead us to a better understanding of the nature of trade union internationalism and the conditions under which it operates.

From the time of Marx and other early scholars and activists of the labour movement, the study of trade union internationalism has been inextricable from its practice and from the world views of those studying it. There are few studies of the subject that claim to portray it objectively. On the contrary, the earliest approach, and one which continues to condition the way the subject is viewed today, has been described by one present-day critic as ‘confusing the “ought to be” with the “is”’; that is, appealing to the spirit of proletarian internationalism rather than examining the conditions under which it manifests itself (Cohen 1987: 8). This approach has influenced all who have followed, whether by agreeing or by disagreeing with it. Many writers, particularly Edo Fimmen or Charles Levinson, both influential leaders as well as observers of the international trade union movement, have focused above all on what the international trade union movement *ought* to be doing, and have regarded anything short of this as a sign of weakness and failure. This is only

natural on the part of those whose task it is to provide direction to the movement, but many supposedly objective academic observers have followed this same procedure, whether consciously or not. Starting from the prescription for proletarian internationalism, then proceeding to the reality, has inevitably led these observers to adopt a posture of pessimism, and much of their work focuses on all the obstacles to effective internationalism, from outside influence to inner deceit.

Few, very few, have approached the subject from the other direction: What is the nature of the international labour movement, and under what conditions does it operate? What are the goals it has set for itself, and how can it act effectively to achieve these goals? The advantage of such an approach is suggested by Cohen:

These major questions, relevant to any coherent understanding of the international role of the working class, cannot be answered by traditionally conceived studies of industrial relations or by rhetorical appeals to the spirit of worker internationalism.... The conditions under which a genuine international labour movement can arise depend both on the changes wrought by capital itself in its drive to globalisation, and on the capacity for workers to respond effectively to such changes... (Cohen 1987: 23).

In this thesis, I shall not attempt to examine the changes wrought by capital; this has been done or is being done by others more competent than I, nor is it really feasible for a study carried out by one person to analyse the actions of large numbers of individual workers. My task will rather be to analyse the actions of one of those international union federations 'acting in the name' of the workers, and to examine the extent to which its actions have been effective in achieving the goals it has set for itself. I trust that this examination will shed some light on the potential for the international labour movement, as it is presently constituted, to address the challenges of the increasingly interdependent world economy.

The study/historiography of international trade unionism

The study of the international trade union movement in itself provides an interesting subject for study, for it has been concentrated in very specific periods, countries and political traditions. To a great extent, the periods of study correspond to the periods of intense action on the part of the international movement, and these in turn correspond to changes in the world political economy (Olle and Schöller 1987:26-28). After the classic writings of Marx, Engels and others of their school in the late nineteenth century, which was also the period of the first efforts at trade union and socialist internationalism, the next important period for both study and action was after the first world war, when Edo Fimmen, general secretary of the International Federation of Trade Unions, wrote his seminal *Labour's Alternative: The United States of Europe or Europe Unlimited* (1924). Rarely have theory and praxis combined so successfully as in the case of Fimmen, who proceeded to carry out his own recommendations for action as general secretary of the International Transportworkers Federation (Reinalda 1997: 11-37, Koch-Baumgarten 1997: 52-67). Indeed, his theoretical contributions to the study of trade union internationalism remain perceptive and pertinent today.

Fimmen's ideas did not catch on in his own time, and the next major period of action and study occurred from the late 1950s through the 1970s, with a strong focus on the response of the international trade union movement to the growth of multinational corporations (MNCs) and their perceived negative impact on the trade union movement. This period was incredibly rich in both academic studies and speeches and writings by trade unionists, with a considerable overlap and exchange between the two. Indeed, one trade unionist wryly observed that '... one will soon be able to fill libraries with publications on multinational companies,' implying that a surfeit of

information might discourage action.¹ This was far from the case at the time, however, as the period was marked by a rise in socialist and radical ideologies and movements, coinciding with a period of shop-floor labour militancy within a still expanding economy. While Fimmen was forgotten, Charles Levinson, the dynamic general secretary of the International Federation of Chemical and General Workers' Unions (ICEF), caught the spirit of the times with two major publications: *Capital, Inflation and the Multinationals* (1971), and *International Trade Unionism* (1972).² The latter book proved extremely influential, although not always in a positive sense, as we shall see below.

Around the same time, radical social scientists expressed dissatisfaction with traditional theories of sociology and industrial relations, with their assumptions about the normal workings of collective bargaining and society; the rise in labour militancy and the expansion of working class action into new areas fit in well with their preoccupations. Distinctive centres of research into the international labour movement emerged, particularly in Germany and The Netherlands. These included German scholars and activists like Werner Olle, Ernst Piehl, and Kurt Tudyka (who was based in The Netherlands). Former trade union officials like Peter Waterman, at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, and Åke Wedin, an official of the Swedish LO who was also associated with the University of Gothenburg, furthered the study of international labour affairs, together with academics with a strong interest in the labour movement, such as Robin Cohen, Harvie Ramsay and Nigel Haworth. These writers, and others in France, the Americas and elsewhere, were critical of much previous work on the subject, which was either purely narrative and historical in

¹ Eugen Loderer, president of the German union *IG Metall* and of the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF), at the ICFTU's 11th world Congress, October 1975 (ICFTU: 1975, 512-513). Almost in anticipation of the fatalism that was to overtake the labour movement 20 years later, he went on to say: "... From the forecasts of many authors one has the impression that it is the top managers alone of about a hundred central holding companies which have the economical and political say in the world. Without doubt this is exaggerated, but it is useful because it has woken people up... Such assessments, however, do have a hidden danger because they give the impression that the problem seemingly to be solved is gigantic in proportion. The result of this can be resignation..."

approach, as for example in Georges Lefranc's *Les expériences syndicales internationales des origines à nos jours* (1952), or adopted a conventional industrial relations approach, as in the work of John Windmuller and Adolph Sturmthal.³ One of the most comprehensive attempts to develop a theory of the international trade union movement was by John Logue, who was associated with a group of labour historians at the University of Gothenburg which also included the former LO official Åke Wedin (Logue 1980; Wedin 1974). Other important contributions to a theory of international labour were made by Waterman, Olle, and others of the 'new international labour studies', as will be examined more closely below.

Curiously, both the study and the practice of the international trade union movement around the MNCs experienced a sharp decline in the 1980s. While this thesis is not primarily an examination of the historiography of the subject, it is nonetheless important to ask how and why this occurred, for the decline in the study was joined to a decline in the engagement of labour and political activists, and consequently a shift in the practice of the movement itself. This issue will be addressed in more detail in the main body of the thesis; suffice it to say here that the widespread economic crises in the industrialised countries and the rise of neo-liberal governments in the late 1970s and 1980s provoked, or perhaps revealed, a profound weakening of trade unionism and trade union militancy. The internationalisation of the economy, and the influence of the multinational corporations did not go away; on the contrary, their power increased dramatically with the wave of deregulation brought in by the new conservative governments. However, the focus of the international labour movement itself increasingly shifted to other aspects of the MNCs'

² In fact, a considerable amount of the research for both books was done by James Catterson, Research Officer of the ICEF.

³ Windmuller stands out as the earliest and most constant academic observer of the ICFTU, from soon after its foundation ("The Stockholm Congress of the ICFTU", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 7, 1954, 434-443) to 1987 (*The International Trade Union Movement*, Deventer: Kluwer) and beyond. But he appears to have been part of and to have founded no school, and to have had little impact on the group of radical social scientists working on international labour affairs in Europe and North America in the 1970s - 1990s. His strongest influence has probably been on the international group of scholars that undertook the first comprehensive study of the ICFTU, in particular Anthony Carew.

behaviour, for example their effect on the Third World and on development. Scholars, too, began to pay greater attention to other aspects of the issue, such as the profound changes in the nature and capacities of the nation state within an increasingly interdependent international system. Trade unionism, at least as the object of traditional institutional analysis, began to appear less interesting than the study of individual workers and other forms of social relationships aside from the world of work.

All this changed again in the 1990s, as the internationalisation of the economy returned as a significant area of research and action under the new name of 'globalisation'. It is not yet clear why interest in the subject made such a dramatic come-back after a relatively long absence from centre stage. According to Waterman, 'the Second Coming of international labour studies has more to do with the failure of Old Labour inter/nationalisms ... as well, possibly, as signs of life, in the Third World and elsewhere...' (Waterman, personal communication, 8.6.01). As an academic subject, the new 'new international labour studies' has significantly different characteristics from the earlier period. Much less attention has been devoted to the structures and organisations of the international trade union movement (with the important exception of the European Union). In keeping with the broader definition of social movements and the interest in new forms of social protest, much of the recent literature has focused on localised actions, or the articulation between local, national and international levels. Considerably more attention has been given to the newly industrialised countries of Asia and Latin America, and to other social movements, such as feminism and environmentalism. Those activists and scholars who have retained an involvement in the field from the 1970s and 1980s, such as Waterman, Munck and Cohen, have been joined by younger scholars. Labour activists and leaders are again playing a crucial role in the debate, not only figures like Dan Gallin, former general secretary of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) and Vic Thorpe, one of Levinson's successors as head of the ICEF

(now ICEM), but also entire organisations, like the Danish general workers' union SiD (SiD 1997).

There is clearly a great deal to learn from all those who have made up the field of international labour studies. The sections that follow will look more closely at the key themes to be approached in this study, with reference to the academic and labour figures mentioned above, with the aim of building up a framework for the study of the ICFTU within the international labour movement.

Theoretical perspectives on international trade unionism

The previous section has presented a chronological overview of the history of the study of international trade unionism, as carried out by scholars and practitioners alike. In this section, I shall present major theoretical orientations to this study, in particular those of particular relevance to the present work. Much emphasis will be given to the comparative characteristics of national and international levels of trade unionism, for the theoretical assumptions governing the study of trade unionism at the national level have generally provided the basis for the understanding of the international level, and this not always appropriately. I shall then look specifically at international trade unionism, and how the study of its structure and behaviour has been addressed.

A. The national and international levels

Most approaches to international trade unionism are to some extent founded on conceptions of trade unions at the national level, which provide interesting insights, but can also lead to false analogies, for the two are far from identical. In both cases, we are dealing with membership organisations which at the very least claim to be furthering the interests of their members. Similarly, most models of trade unionism claim to be based on some notion of democracy and

accountability. Studies of the various national patterns of trade unionism have shown how many variations in structure and organisation there are within this basic model, how complex in reality it is for trade unions to articulate the interests of their members, and how difficult it has often been to achieve internal union democracy (Hyman 1997).

A good starting point for the comparison between national and international trade unionism is the relation between the **organisation and its members**. In fact, the members of labour internationals like the ICFTU, WFTU and WCL are national centres (and through a complex form of association, International Trade Secretariats). Individual workers do not become members of the ICFTU, nor is its form of democratic control based on their direct intervention, except in so far as their consent is required for the adoption of policies by their national centres. Indeed, the ICFTU is not unlike most national centres in their relations to members; their affiliates or members are national unions, not individual workers, but the ICFTU is in this sense one step further removed from individual members. The distance from individual members has been an important area of debate, and has provided the basis for accusations that the ICFTU (not unlike its fellow internationals) is far removed from the concerns of individual members, as if this were somehow a deliberate choice and could be avoided by more forward-looking leadership (Thompson and Larson 1978). International trade secretariats, which have a different structure, are also based on the membership of unions rather than individuals, but significantly, these are individual industrial unions rather than national centres. There are important differences both in the way their relation to the membership is perceived and acted upon, and the type of actions that can be carried out. The comparison of the ICFTU (and its predecessors) and the ITSs is one of the most important areas of research and debate into the international trade union movement, and will be covered in greater depth in the main body of the thesis. From the point of view of the national/international dimension, a pertinent analogy might be the comparison of national centres and individual industrial unions, although their exact relationship varies a great deal in practice.

A related area of debate, regards the way in which national centres determine their international policy, and whether the members are genuinely informed and consulted in **international policy formation** (Coates and Topham 1980: Ch. 11). Academic observers and trade unionists alike have pointed out that this is a serious problem in many countries, whether because of the assumption of a lack of interest in international affairs on the part of members, or a veil of secrecy over trade union activities at the international level, particularly in the course of the Cold War. Although it can only be touched on briefly in the present study, the formation of international policy by national centres is an important issue, and must always be borne in mind. On most issues, it is the policies set by national centres that determine the actions of the leadership in the international arena, within such bodies as the ICFTU Executive Board. On rare occasions, particular international issues have become so critical to the labour movement as a whole, and have aroused the interest of individual workers and citizens to such an extent, that genuinely international action has emerged, however briefly. The international labour campaign around South Africa provides a good example of this. Such cases are the exception rather than the rule, but they demonstrate why the ultimate connection of the international organisation to the members on the ground cannot be ignored.

This leads us to the key question of the **authority and legitimacy** of trade unions, which is crucial to the study of national unionism, and has been most cogently approached at the international level by Windmuller (1967). As suggested above, the authority of trade unions depends on their democratic accountability to their members. The members must be confident that their interests are being represented by the union for it to have any authority. This has been referred to as internal authority (Martin 1980), and is the foundation of trade union legitimacy. At the same time, in order to be effective, unions must be regarded as representative by outside bodies, such as employers, parties and governments. This external authority is closely linked with internal authority - if

members support the union, employers and governments will also take the union seriously - but this relation is not always so straightforward. In some national systems, unions have relatively few members, yet they are integrated into social and political institutions that need union participation in order to be considered representative. In other national situations, trade unions have been called upon to grant legitimacy to the political system at a time of crisis. This phenomenon of political exchange (Baglioni 1987; Pizzorno 1978) could equally be applied to the international level. For example to the decisive period right after the Second World War. In 1949, at the same time as the split in the world labour movement which led to the creation of the ICFTU, the cooperation of western European unions was vital to the success of the European Recovery Programme (Carew 1987), and these unions were to varying degrees institutionalised in the decades that followed. This process occurred at the international level as well, as the ICFTU gained legitimacy as the spokesman for world labour and was enabled to act with an authority that was not granted to either of its rivals, the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU, later WCL) or the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Similarly, trade union internationals were required as interlocutors at the ILO, OECD, and other institutions operating at the international level, in an interdependent relationship which granted legitimacy to both parties.

Authority and legitimacy are the foundation of trade union **power**. Only if the members are convinced that the union is acting on their behalf, and are willing to apply collective pressure to implement the union's goals can those goals be achieved. This **willingness to act** of the members is most obvious in the case of strikes, but applies to many other areas as well (Offe and Wiesenthal 1985). The power of unions in the political arena, for example, depends to a great extent on the ability of union leaders to deliver the votes of their members. Of course, this has been more problematic in some national systems than others, and the voting behaviour of union members has become much less predictable overall. It is important to note that not all union action relates immediately to the members' willingness to act: a strike requires the participation of members: a

deal struck behind the scenes does not. Many unions, particularly those in the public sector, rely on lobbying and the influencing of government policy much more than on traditional collective bargaining (Gumbrell-McCormick 1996; Keller and Henneberger 1995). However, even the bargaining carried out by union leaders behind closed doors depends in the end on the support, or the anticipation of support, from the membership. Further, the willingness to act requires a feeling of collectivity and **solidarity** among the members, whose commitment to any action that may be inconvenient to themselves will grow the more they feel involved in the decision-making process. and in action. This point is no less valid for trade union internationals: they must have the support of their members, the national affiliates, for any significant action; their power is weakened and their capacity for action blocked if key affiliates disagree. Yet only occasionally, as noted above, do they depend directly on the collective action of individual members, limiting the capacity for action at the international level.

The capacity to act and the **means of action** available provide perhaps the most striking contrast between trade unionism at the national and international levels. In the most common model of trade unionism, the union exerts leverage through the threat of its members to withdraw their labour; its goal is to reach a satisfactory deal for its members through collective bargaining. Clearly, this model no longer applies to all national situations, if it ever did so. Anglo-Saxon models of industrial relations with their heavy emphasis on collective bargaining have been much criticised in recent decades for the implication that negotiations take place in a vacuum, unaffected by outside social forces and the state (Hyman 1975). Indeed, methods of trade union action such as lobbying of public opinion and government place much more emphasis on the state than on the employers. This observation applies *a fortiori* to trade union action at the international level. While there have been a few cases of international strike action and, more rarely, of international collective bargaining, such cases are exceedingly rare and limited in scope. Even the possibilities that have

been created for international collective bargaining at the European Union level have had but limited results (Dølvik 1997; Martin and Ross 1999; Visser 1996).

International collective bargaining, with at least the threat of international strikes, was indeed an important goal for some leading figures of the international labour movement, in particular Edo Fimmen and Charles Levinson, but it was seen as an ultimate objective or weapon, not one that was immediately achievable. International industrial action and collective bargaining would require long preparation, through a number of intermediary stages (Levinson 1972: 112-141). This misunderstanding of the time scale proposed for international collective bargaining led to the dismissal of the idea as impractical, and in Levinson's case formed the basis for severe critiques from both within and without the labour movement (Etty and Tudyka 1974; Northrup and Rowan 1979). In fact, even as an ultimate goal, international collective bargaining has never been the primary goal of the international labour movement as a whole. It is therefore curious that a number of academics have placed such stress on it as the ultimate purpose of international trade unionism (Ramsay 1999). In my own view, actual cases of international industrial action and collective bargaining are too exceptional to form a reliable basis for the evaluation of the international trade union movement's capacity to act. Further, it would be inappropriate to use international strike actions and collective bargaining as the basis for any judgment of the success or failure of that movement if they have not been among the goals professed by most leaders. Most importantly, I would argue that the emphasis on international industrial action and collective bargaining by many scholars represents a misconception of the specific nature of international trade unionism by regarding it as equivalent to national trade unionism, and also shows a misunderstanding of complexities of contemporary national trade unionism. This issue will be a central theme throughout the thesis, especially in the discussion of the international labour movement's actions around the multinational corporations, where recent attempts to carry out international strikes or

collective bargaining will be examined as part of the broader strategy of the ICFTU and its affiliates.

B. Specificity of the international level

This overview of how the concepts used to study trade unionism at the national level help us to understand the international level shows that, while there is much that is comparable - the relation between the organisation and its members; the foundation of the organisation's legitimacy; the basis of trade union power - there is much that is not. As we have just seen, the misapplication of conceptions appropriate for unions at the national level to the international level, without the necessary adjustments, can lead to a distorted picture of the international level and of how it works. I shall now move on to the main theoretical questions that have arisen with regard to the study of the international trade union movement itself.

The purpose of international organisation

Not all observers of the international labour movement have asked the question: 'Why do trade unions organise internationally?' Windmuller, in particular, presents the functions of international trade unionism - the way it works - as if function were the same thing as purpose (Windmuller 1967; see also Reinalda 1997). Many of those involved in the movement themselves have taken for granted that international organisation is 'a good thing', and have concerned themselves with improving its effectiveness. How this can be done without some notion of purpose is not clear, but the purpose is often implied rather than stated. Those theorists who have sought to answer the question have tended to base themselves on often unspoken theories of rational action and self interest, and have themselves taken a great deal for granted. They tend to confuse the motivations and calculations of individual members with those of trade union organisations, and to assume that

decisions are taken primarily on the basis of national situations. These assumptions call into question the explanatory value of at least some of the approaches mentioned below.

The motivations or purposes for international trade union organisation and action that are most often enumerated by observers and practitioners alike fall into the following categories: economic self-interest; political self-interest; and institutional self-interest. The first, **economic self interest**, has taken many forms. A simplistic interpretation of the ideas of Marx and Engels led Fimmen (and to some degree Levinson) to believe that the trade unions would organise internationally because the development of capitalism would create the objective conditions under which they would be obliged to do so. While there is much more to Fimmen's ideas than this, his somewhat teleological view is now seen as an over-simplification, a prediction that has not been justified in practice. Yet many recent approaches show little more theoretical sophistication in their unthinking approach to economic motivations for action. Logue's *Toward a Theory of Trade Union Internationalism*, which has been extremely influential among students of the international labour movement, is based on a view of trade unions as organisations representing the short-term economic interests of their members, with the underlying assumption that only economic motives are rational. This leads him to the conclusion that trade unions will only act internationally if they are unable to achieve their goals at the national level (Logue 1980: 11). Clearly, there is something to this, but as Reinalda has convincingly shown, this approach fails to explain much of the past century of the international labour movement (Reinalda 1997, 17-20).

Much more subtle is the approach of Ramsay and Haworth, which derives more from contemporary rational choice theory than from simplified Marxist determinism. Their work looks in detail at the changing patterns of ownership and control of individual companies and industrial sectors and explores the varying interests of workers in different sectors at different times (Haworth and Ramsay 1986, 1988; Ramsay 1997, 1999: 209-212). A number of other writers

have also broken down economic self interest as a motivation for international organisation according to industrial sector and types of worker. The classic explanation for international action relates to the elimination of competition over labour costs within a given company or industry. It closely fits the reasons given by trade union leaders in the engineering and chemical industries (Piehl 1973, 1974b; Bendiner 1987), which were indeed the most internationally-minded from the 1950s through the 1970s. A closely related explanation is the presence of multi-national corporations (MNCs) in such sectors, and the need for workers to organise a counter-power (Levinson 1972). This type of self interest can be said to apply most directly to industries that are in the exposed sector of national economies, that is, those most open to foreign competition (Crouch 1993). Yet it is not appropriate as an explanation for international organisation in many other industrial sectors, including some of those which were the first to organise internationally, such as typographers (van der Linden 2000: 526-7). The emphasis on economic self-interest clearly has only limited explanatory power.

Political self-interest has been seen by many students of the labour movement in the Cold War as an even more important motivation for international trade union action than economic interest. Studies of the movement in the post-war period have either concentrated on the motivations of labour leaders themselves, growing out of their own ideological convictions or war-time experience (MacShane 1992a; Carew 1987), or on the motivations of governments, in explaining the increase in international trade union activities (Logue 1980; Thompson and Larson 1978). Most of the debate on this issue has been between those who see labour as an unwitting tool of the great powers, and those who see it as a willing participant, even an initiator of the Cold War. Wedin's study of the ICFTU in the early 1960s stands out in its portrayal of the complex interdependence between political and trade union leaders and interests (Wedin 1974). The intensity of this debate over the past 20 years or so, reflects strongly diverging evaluations of the Cold War itself, between those who believe that labour was 'used' as a tool for underhanded activities by government, and

those who still maintain that labour 'fought the good fight' (interview notes: Vanderveken). While the nature of this debate is ideological, recent empirical research, such as Carew's study of labour under the Marshall Plan (1987), has shown the subtle inter-penetration of political and trade union elites in the post-war world, and the degree to which the values and hence the perception of self-interest of leaders have been intermingled.

Both academics and trade unionists have tended to assume that the circumstances of the Cold War were unusual, representing a departure from 'normal trade unionism', whether in terms of the predominance of political factors or the absence of labour unity. Few writers have examined the inter-connection of political and economic motivations at the international level over a longer period: MacShane's work on the international metalworkers' federation is an important exception, going beyond the immediate preoccupations of the post-war period to show the divisions within the labour movement that preceded it (MacShane 1992a). The narrow focus on the role of international labour in the Cold War has also meant the relative neglect of other interesting questions regarding political motivations for international labour action. More attention could be paid to the role of national political factors in influencing international action, as in Devin's work on the international programmes of the French trade union confederations, with each seeking to enhance its own national position in relation to the others through its use of international links (Devin 1990). Other writers have sought to demonstrate how international organisation has been used for essentially national purposes - to add prestige, to placate a minority within the union, or to provide 'perks' for union officials (Logue 1980, Thomson and Larson 1978) - as part of a more general critique of official labour internationalism. Wedin, on the basis of his experience of international trade unionism as well as his research on the period of Arne Geijer's presidency of the ICFTU, focuses on the domination of the movement by the AFL from the time of Gompers onwards (Wedin 1974, 14-6, 67-8). Many theoretical questions remain unexplored, however, in particular the role of

ideology, which is not the same as political self interest, although it has often been confused with it. I will return to this question below.

Closely related to these political factors is **institutional self interest**, by which trade unions seek to defend their own interests as institutions. All organisations tend to develop an institutional inertia, and do not continue to justify their own reason for existence once they have been established. In this respect, the formal dissolution of the IFTU and its replacement by WFTU in 1945 was highly unusual, as have been the frequent reviews of the ICFTU's structure and purpose and its appeals for legitimacy. It is understandable why organisations like the ICFTU would seek to protect their own institutional self interest and defend themselves, but why do national centres feel the need to defend them? The answer to this question is usually linked to the protection of political self interest as above, by which small elites in control of national centres seek to maintain their control over the international sphere. But as international action need not take place through organisations like the ICFTU or the ITSs, this argument is rather weak when used to explain the motivations of national leaders. A more fruitful line of enquiry is the effect of time lag on the structures of the international labour movement - the persistence of organisations past their original reason for existence, or the long-term effects of structures that were set up to handle specific circumstances once those circumstances have changed, for example the peculiar structure and composition of the ICFTU's regional organisation for the Americas, ORIT. This is one of the questions that most occupied Fimmen, who already in the 1920s queried the separate organisational existence of the IFTU and the ITSs, and it is all the more pertinent today. (Lorwin 1929, 476-7; ETTY 1976).

While economic, political and institutional self-interest all have some explanatory value in the study of the purpose of international trade unionism, all three are inadequate in so far as they concentrate on self-interest, which is difficult enough to define when referring to individuals, but is almost impossible to identify in the case of organisations (Devin 1990, 72-3). Further, each type of

argument takes a great deal for granted, and leaves a great deal unexplained. Fortunately, while the most common, these three approaches are not the only ones that students of the international labour movement have used. Lorwin, who wrote one of the first studies of the subject (1929), takes a different approach by concentrating on the efforts of the international labour movement to regulate labour at the international level, through its role as a major component in an international industrial relations system. To a degree, Lorwin bases his argument on the extension of national trade unionism to the international level (Lorwin 1929: 458-9), but he avoids the pitfalls of assuming that the two are directly comparable in every respect, and pays a great deal of attention to the specific characteristics of different industries⁴ and of the international system as it was then constituted. As he says of internationalism itself, **regulation** is both a programme and a method (Lorwin 1929, 3-4); that is, it is a *motivation* for individuals involved in the movement, and it is the *purpose* of the international labour movement's action as a collectivity. '... As a method, it meant that organized workers in different countries might be able to obtain their particular national objectives by means of internationally co-ordinated action. Labor presumably could use internationalism to increase its powers of trade union action in separate countries; to fix the rules of world competition to its advantage; to enlarge its share in world politics; or to accelerate in different countries the process of social reorganization. As a program, internationalism meant a social ideal which was thought of as growing out of the conditions of working class life, and which labor was called upon to put into effect.' (Lorwin 1929, 3-4.). Reinalda makes a similar point when he identifies participation in an international industrial relations system as a dimension beyond the simple accumulation of different individual and national interests (Reinalda 1997, 18, 21-3). Reinalda also identifies a link between Lorwin and Fimmen, in their depiction of a labour movement becoming increasingly internationalist in the context of the expanding

⁴ See Lorwin, pp. 470-472 on the motivations for international action of workers in four types of industries, very similar to those identified by Haworth and Ramsay 50 years later: narrow craft-based industries with little interest in international organisation; industries that are domestically-based but affected by international migration of labour; industries that work for world markets and depend on export; and transport workers, who have greater potential for effective international action than any other sector.

internationalisation of the economy and the establishment of inter-governmental organisations. Lorwin differs from Fimmen in the absence of economic determinism from his model, but both place a strong emphasis on the collective purpose of the labour movement as seeking to raise standards for workers across the world as part of an international system of labour regulation (and without stating it, while remaining within an international capitalist system).

Lorwin's theoretical approach combines individual with collective interests, and is particularly useful in the understanding of **ideology** as a motivation for international action. Ideology is a more complex concept than political self interest, and goes far beyond the protection of particular groups or individuals. It provides a framework for the mediation of individual interests and motivations, and like regulation, is best seen as a collective rather than an individual purpose for action.

Solidarity is a closely linked concept, referring both to the principle of common action with others and the identification of one's own interests with theirs (Hyman 1999; Munck 2000a; Ramsay 1997; Waterman 1998; Zoll 1996) Both concepts relate in turn to **identity** - the identity of an individual, of a class or an organisation. At the national level, ideology has played an essential role in the formation of labour movements, and continues to provide the basis for trade union identity, cohesion, and programmes of action. It is all the more vital for the labour movement at the international level, because it lacks the cohesion and the strong sense of identity of most national and some industrial organisations.

It has often been observed that some of the ITSs - primarily the transport workers - enjoy a strong feeling of identity and that this contributes much to their success. However, other trades have been internationally-minded without this advantage - for example metal or chemical workers - and feelings of international solidarity have been effective - for example in the case of South Africa - with even fewer obvious common traits. It is ideology that plays the vital role of linking all other interests and motivations into a cohesive whole, in order to articulate a common project or

programme. Lorwin, Fimmen and other early writers on international labour stressed this common project of the international labour movement as a response to the *competition* inherent in the world economy, and the achievement of international standards as a response to the danger of *combination* among industrialists, an idea that was taken up by Levinson and others in their struggle against the multinationals. The achievement of this common project was obscured by the emphasis on narrow political ideology in the period of the Cold War, but did not entirely disappear, as we shall see below. The search for a new basis for organisational cohesion in the post-cold war era has meant a return to the notion of a defining project of the international labour movement in response to what is now called globalisation and in defence of social democracy (interview notes: Debunne).

The meaning of internationalism

We must next ask what we mean by **international** (as opposed to internationalism) in the context of international trade unionism. Is it directly international, in the sense of individuals acting without regard to nationality or the nation-state, that is, **transnational**? Or is it **federal**, in the sense of individuals gathering together through national groups to act in common with other national groups? This is what Waterman has termed 'inter-nationalism' (Waterman, personal communication, 6.01). International trade unionism has almost always meant the latter, just as most national trade unionism has taken the form of members of individual unions acting federally with other unions through the national centre. There are a number of exceptions to this form of organisation at the national level - sometimes national centres preceded individual unions and set them up; sometimes the national centre is the basis of identity and authority, rather than individual unions. These cases occur in highly politicised systems with several national centres, or in countries with an all-powerful single national centre. More rarely, unions have sought to organise all workers directly, without the intermediary of a national centre, as in the case of the mainly north

American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the early 20th century. Such cases are rare at the national level; they are practically non-existent at the international level. I can think of no significant example of unions organising workers across borders without some form of organisation by national groups. International action is somewhat different from organisation in this respect and is at least potentially possible without a national basis, but even highly localised actions - for example at the US-Mexican border or the Italian-German-French borders - have tended to be organised by individual national unions or their local or regional bodies. Be that as it may, truly international organisation of the direct transnational as opposed to the federal kind has been expressed as a goal by some leaders of the international labour movement, most notably Fimmen, and has been taken up in recent years by Waterman (1998, 349-77).⁵

There is, however, a world of difference between **strong federalism** and **weak federalism**, which in the context of national states is also referred to as intergovernmentalism. At the national level, individual unions almost always delegate some powers to the national centre, for example over financial or administrative matters; many go far beyond this by endowing national centres with powers to conduct collective bargaining, industrial and political action. National unions taking part in trade union internationals do not tend to delegate powers beyond an absolute minimum.

Certainly they agree to pay dues to the international and accept the collective choice of leadership, although not always with good grace. But in practice they have rarely if ever agreed to delegate any substantial national powers of policy-making or negotiation to the internationals, except in so far as the ideologically polarised international trade unionism of the Cold War imposed certain limits on the international policy and contacts of national affiliates. Here, too, many national centres have followed their own independent course, as we shall see in the case of détente. This lack of willingness to delegate any significant national powers applies equally to the internationals based on national centres, the ICFTU and its predecessors, and to those based on national unions, the

⁵ The distinction between direct and federal internationalism is not unlike that between direct and representative democracy - both depend on the action of individuals in order to succeed and tend

ITSS. Indeed, the failure of the metalworkers' unions to accept a form of strong federalism in the world company councils of the 1960s and 70s was one of the key reasons for their relative lack of success (Etty 1878a; Bendiner 1987).

Characteristics of international organisation

The most important characteristic of international (or inter-national) trade union organisation is therefore that it is based on the national level, with a weak federal system and very few powers of its own. Yet it still has a certain independence of action, in part because of its very distance from the preoccupations of most workers and trade unionists. From the beginning of the first trade union internationals at the end of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th, including both the early international trade secretariats and the confusingly named International Trade Union Secretariat, which grouped national centres, a system of representation was introduced whereby the top leaders, elected or otherwise, of national centres or of individual national unions represented their organisations within a committee or other formal body alongside other national representatives (Lorwin 1929, 401-3; Dreyfus 2000; Van Goethem 2000). In the early years, it was generally those who had come to prominence through trade union action within their own countries who also dominated the trade union internationals (Lorwin 1929, 474-5). As national organisations grew and became more professional, however, full time officials came to carry out the day to day international work involving correspondence and attendance at meetings (Windmuller 1967; Etty and Tudyka 1974).

By the time of the period of this study, international trade unionism as well as the international work of national trade unions had become highly professional, further removing thereby the international level of work from national and local preoccupations. At least since the post-war

to operate at a very local level; both are rare in practice but much admired in theory.

period, these international officials, called 'Garibaldis' by one former general secretary of the ICFTU (Friso, as quoted by Vanderveken, interview notes), have often been able to act with a great deal of autonomy in relation to their national centres, where domestic considerations tend to take centre stage (Harrod 1972, 61, cited in Logue 1980, 14). Further, their relations to governmental and inter-governmental bodies, from the foreign ministries of their respective countries to the EU and ILO, often play as important a role in their day-to-day work as relations within their own national centres (Logue 1980, 27-9). The scope for individual initiative of this type is more limited within the international organisations themselves, if only because international officials must balance the concerns of various national centres, but the international level of trade unionism must rely all the more on the diplomatic skills of individual officials in order to find acceptable common positions and lead the organisation in a particular direction. International work requires very specific skills, political and diplomatic as well as linguistic, that are not widespread within trade union circles. As John Vanderveken, former general secretary of the ICFTU observed, 'C'est un métier' (interview notes). Because of the specialised nature of the work, an elite core has grown up whose members come from a few small countries (the Low Countries, the Nordic Countries, and Germany) and whose careers rotate between the international departments of national centres, the regional and international trade union organisations, the UN and other inter-governmental institutions, and national governments. It is a small and inter-dependent circle, far from the circles that make up the national level of trade unionism.

Confederal and industrial forms of international organisation

Much has been made of the distinctions between international organisation by industries, through the ITSs, and by national centres. Indeed, in most cases organisation by industry preceded that by national centres, precisely because national centres were mostly founded after industrial organisations were already solidly in place (Devin 1990, 77; van der Linden 2000, 526-7). As was

seen in the previous section, there is a close parallel with the national level here in the immediacy and practicality of work by individual unions, the close relation to the grass roots. in comparison to the more general and political preoccupations of national centres. But here again the parallel is not so simple. When we look at the international level of organisation as a whole, and compare it with the national level, it is clear that the international confederations and ITSs have much in common, and are different from the national level in similar ways. Both types of organisation - industrial and confederal - depend on a core of highly specialised and linguistically gifted staff, the nature of whose work places them in contact with each other and with the international institutions, above all the ILO, as much if not more than it does with trade unionists active at the national level. Both types of organisation must seek a common ground between widely varying interests and political objectives of their national affiliates; both must handle political issues and controversies and represent their affiliates within other international bodies.

Many writers, from Fimmen onwards, have argued that the ITSs are more progressive, are closer to the base and have a greater capacity for practical action than the ICFTU and its predecessors. The view that the ITSs are more progressive is plausible in some respects, but it may have more to do with the political orientations and other attributes of individual ITS leaders than with the structural differences between the two types of organisation. Certain ITSs have a much more 'progressive' reputation than others, and the political orientations of individual ITSs change over time, sometimes dramatically. The second point, that the ITSs are closer to the base, is however based on a genuine structural difference: the connection from the top of the organisation to the individual member goes through fewer levels, i.e. from international body to national union to member, as opposed to international body to national centre to national union to member. Instead of dealing with national centres who must form common policies out of extremely disparate elements in different industries, the international only has to deal with individual unions with supposedly greater unity of interests. But this advantage may disappear entirely in the case of large

unions that cover a wide variety of industrial sectors, which wind up behaving more like national centres than individual unions. In practice, for the ITSs as for the confederations, the distance from the international to the individual worker is very great indeed.

The third point, that the ITSs have a greater capacity for practical action, is perhaps the most complex and difficult to evaluate of the three. It is based both on structural differences and on circumstantial factors. The organisation by individual industrial sectors does indeed facilitate industrial actions, but only in so far as the interests of different workers in different regions and in different sub-sectors genuinely do coincide. Further, the real potential for international industrial action, in the sense of strikes, boycotts, etc. is in most cases highly limited. In practice, just like the confederations, the ITSs must rely much more on representation within international organisations and pressure on public opinion, even for the success of supposedly 'industrial' action. The exchange of information about individual companies, and the coordination of collective bargaining aims within individual companies, is a much more typical form of action, and is indeed a form of action particularly suited to the ITSs which has often proved extremely effective (MacShane 1992b). But this too depends on the willingness to act, and the identification of common interests across a variety of national unions, and is the more likely to succeed the smaller the number of unions with potentially conflicting interests involved.

This points to perhaps the most important dilemma for the ITSs within the international trade union movement: they succeed best where they concentrate on the particular, which can create unity within an individual industry or sector, but can also divide the international movement as a whole - the '*Betriebsegoismus*' referred to by some industrial relations writers (Kothoff 1979; Piehl 1974a, 254). Just as the ITSs aim at the particular and are often at their most effective when they do so, so the international confederations must concern themselves with the general. Their dilemma is rather that the more they seek to universalise, the harder it is to find common positions and objectives that

have any meaning in practice; that are not simply 'the lowest common denominator'. Both types of organisation must seek to articulate interests and develop common policies and actions, but the obstacles they face in doing so are different. The ITSs cannot aim to act as the 'voice of labour' in the same way as the confederal organisations like the ICFTU; to be the 'voice' of metal workers or transport workers does not carry quite the same weight, except perhaps in the industry committees of the ILO. Only the confederal organisations dispose of the all-important ability to act as the voice or spokesman for international labour as a whole. It is primarily for this unique ability, and not only for its coordinating function, that it is important to study the confederal level of international trade unionism., no matter how much more effective the sectoral level may be in practical action.

The capacity to act of international organisation

This leads us to one last area of inquiry in the study of the international labour movement. Given the purpose of international organisation, the nature of international as opposed to national unionism, and the structure of the international movement, what then is international labour's capacity to act? At the national level, as we saw above, the capacity to act is ultimately determined by the willingness to act of the members, the internal cohesion of the organisation and its responsiveness to its members' concerns. This cannot apply in the same way to the international level, which is composed of organisations of organisations. While trade union action must depend ultimately on the individual members, in practice for the international organisation the main question is the willingness to act of the national affiliates and the ITSs, based on their view of the legitimacy and representativity of the international organisation and their estimate of the advisability of the action proposed.

The main factors in the effectiveness of the international labour movement have been well summarised by Windmuller: the importance of internal cohesion, on the basis of shared ideology

and goals; recognition and legitimacy, from the labour movement itself and from other actors in the international system; and access to appropriate instruments of action (Windmuller 1967, 88-103). From this perspective, it is easy to see why so many of those who have studied the international trade union movement have adopted a 'pessimistic' outlook (see Ramsay 1999). The main obstacle in the 1960s to 1980s appeared to be the lack of internal **cohesion**, which at that time was blamed on the Cold War split in both national and international trade union movements (Piehl 1974a, ETTY 1978a). This was seen as a crucial reason for the failure of many attempts at international action around the multinationals, because of the importance of some national unions that were outside the ICFTU. But the lack of cohesion does not end there: both writers and practitioners have emphasised the contrasting interests between unions in the industrialised countries and those in the Third World (Haworth and Ramsay 1988, 311, 318-321; Olle and Schöller 1987, 37-9). This issue has been of great importance in the implementation of the ICFTU's campaign around the social clause in the 1980s and 1990s. Beyond this, there have been significant differences of perspective among first world affiliates, in particular the AFL-CIO and the major European affiliates, forcefully underlined by Wedin (1974).

One of the most significant problems the international labour movement faces as it enters the 21st century is a loss of **recognition** and potentially a loss of **legitimacy**. This is very odd, because the ICFTU has gained more and more members and affiliates over the 1990s, and can now claim to be the most representative international confederation of all time. But as it has expanded in membership, it has lost cohesion, and has lost much of its impact with governments, other international actors and public opinion through broader changes in society as well as through its own actions. On a number of issues, newer NGOs have been much more visible to the public eye, and none more so than in the response to globalisation. The quiet work of the ICFTU receives less recognition than the actions of what it regards as smaller, less representative and less accountable single issue groups. Few observers have examined this relatively new phenomenon in detail. but

Waterman among others has suggested that it represents a failure of the traditional international organisations to respond to new developments in society and the growth of new social movements (Waterman 1999). However, the ICFTU and ITSs are still granted legitimacy by their affiliates and by inter-governmental organisations, in particular the ILO, where they continue to dominate the Workers' Group.

Windmuller's last point, access to appropriate **means of action**, originally referred mainly to the structure and resources of individual organisations like the ICFTU, and it is true that the paucity of resources delegated by national unions to the international movement is one of the most important restrictions on its ability to act. Looking beyond his perspective to a more general evaluation of the movement's means of action, however, it is even more important to look at the **instruments of action** available to the international movement in relation to those available to national unions.

Lorwin made an interesting comparison of these instruments, referring to the international movement's early successes in preventing workers from one country being brought in as strike-breakers in a dispute in another country as the 'international equivalent of picketing' (Lorwin 1929, 468). Fimmen refers to the organisation of international boycotts, one of the most important forms of action by the ITF during his period as general secretary, but Lorwin and others have since pointed out the limitations of this form of action, which has only been carried out with any success by transport workers (interview notes: Lewis; Lorwin 1929, 468). International strikes have been even more rare, although the provision of assistance to workers on strike in other countries has been fairly widespread, alongside publicity of strikers' demands and attempts to put pressure on the head offices of the companies involved.

As I mentioned above, much modern literature on international trade unionism has been concerned with the potentials for international collective bargaining (Ramsay 1999). Neither Fimmen nor Lorwin regarded this as imminent, but Levinson made it the focus of his influential work.

International Trade Unionism (1972, 96-141), and many academic observers since then have concentrated on this issue above all else. This has had a profound effect on the evaluation of the capacity to act of the international trade union movement as a whole, generally reinforcing the pessimist perspective. However, as early observers of the movement like Fimmen and Lorwin saw, there is nonetheless considerable potential for international solidarity action, such as assistance in industrial disputes, and for greater coordination of action, for example of collective bargaining demands. Added to this are the all-important functions of information and representation. An early ITF official, Max Zwalf, observed that the IFTU had started as a mail box, but soon became the equivalent of 'a well-organised post office' (Zwalf, quoted in Reinalda 1997, 12). This coordinating and information function may sound humdrum, but it is essential to any effective organisation, and even more essential to a modern international movement. Indeed, the international movement's capacity to act has expanded exponentially with the advent of modern communications technology (Lee 1997). Modern IT technology has been used to great effect by the ICFTU and by ITSs in the coordination of international disputes, such as that of ICEM at the international mining concern Rio Tinto, or the ITF in support of Australian dockers. The open access and essentially democratic nature of the internet has created new possibilities for international action, but has challenged existing chains of communication and authority within the international movement, as Lee and others have shown. (Lee 1997; Waterman 1988).

The capacity to act, and hence the future potential of the international labour movement, should not be evaluated solely on the basis of pale imitations of national level action, such as collective bargaining or strikes. As I have tried to show in this section, the international level is distinct and the types of action typical of the national level have to be adapted to the circumstances of the international level. Beyond this, there appear to be forms of action to which the international level is peculiarly suited, and for which international organisation is necessary. The international labour movement has a unique role to play in international industrial disputes, solidarity actions and

organising drives, as well as in representational work within international institutions. Further, only an international labour movement that is seen as truly representative has the capacity to develop a common strategy to unite trade unions from the developing and developed countries and respond to the challenge of the growing inequity of the world economy.⁶ The labour movement, despite all its limitations, remains the largest democratic and secular non-governmental movement in most of the world, making it particularly appropriate as a representative of workers' concerns. Whether or not it has lived up to its potential is another question, which will be examined in the main body of this thesis: the point here is that it has the capacity to act in a particularly international way and to fulfil certain international objectives.

Finally, as I suggested in my discussion of the purpose of international action, only an international actor like the ICFTU or the ITSs can be a full participant in an international industrial relations system. This system is composed of organisations like the ICFTU and other representatives of workers and employers, as well as the international institutions that have been put in place to regulate the international economy, the ILO and the Bretton Woods institutions, and those that have sought to establish global governance, the UN institutions and a number of international treaties. Increasingly, international public opinion and international NGOs have begun to play an important part in this international system. But as suggested above, only the ICFTU can at present claim the level of representativity of world labour called for to be able to act as its voice inside international institutions and within world public opinion, of articulating the interests of workers across all industrial sectors and in all regions of the world, and of formulating a coherent programme of action to be pursued at the international level. Yet the ICFTU's role in leading and pulling together all the varying components of the international movement has been practically ignored by scholars and practitioners alike. In this thesis, I will attempt to rectify this anomaly.

⁶ Wedin argues that the ICFTU succeeded in pursuing a genuinely multi-lateral policy for a few years in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, before succumbing to the pressures toward

Overview of the Thesis and Research Methods

This section presents a brief overview of the thesis and explains its sources and method. It is appropriate to begin with a few words about the somewhat unusual background to the thesis, which has had an effect on the result. After I had already begun work on one subject (an international comparison of public sector trade unionism), I was approached to take part in an international research project, under the auspices of the International Association of Labour History Institutions (IALHI) and the International Institute of Social History (IISG), into the history of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and its precursors. I was approached because I had previously worked in the international labour movement, as information officer of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). It is worth noting here that the standpoint of the IUF and its then general secretary, Dan Gallin, was often critical of the ICFTU, and this has no doubt influenced my point of view. Further, while the research project itself was independent, and our professional judgment and autonomy respected, it is also true that the ICFTU provided our group with assistance and access to archives; and in my case helped to arrange interviews. This, combined with our intention to publish the book on the occasion of the ICFTU's 50th anniversary, made this a 'friendly' (though not uncritical) study.

My own period for this semi-official history covered the years 1972 to the present, which had an impact on both the methods and the sources used. While some primary sources were not yet available to researchers, the closeness to the present day meant that many participants in the events were still alive. I was able to interview over 50 present and former trade unionists and other participants, from a variety of national and international

bilateralism, mainly through the actions of the AFL-CIO (Wedin 1974: 52-54, 69-71).

trade union organisations, in addition to the ICFTU itself. My main primary sources were the archives of the ICFTU, at the IISG in Amsterdam, the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick, as well as archives of the AFL-CIO, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Canadian Labour Congress, the *Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund* and the ETUC. Neither I nor my colleagues relied greatly on secondary sources, since ours was the first in-depth work on the subject.

In practice, the availability and nature of the resources used meant that there was far more information from a wider variety of sources on the 1970s and to some extent the 1980s than on the 1990s. One of the most important sources of information for the earlier period, the minutes of the ICFTU Executive Board, were extremely detailed reports of as many as 30 pages, but in the early 1980s the secretariat replaced these with much shorter minutes that were little more than summaries of decisions. Moreover, the collection of minutes of the Executive Board at the IISG archives only goes up to 1992, although there is other documentation available after this date, such as Congress reports. The ICFTU secretariat in Brussels also sent me a number of internal documents on specific subjects, especially on multinational corporations and women's activities. While this information was valuable, it cannot take the place of the comprehensive internal ICFTU documentation available prior to 1992.

As a result, the period of the 1990s depends to a much greater extent than either the 1970s or 1980s on oral testimony from staff and officers of the ICFTU, individual affiliates, and other participants in the events covered. It is therefore fitting to say something here about these interviews. The bibliography lists all the interviews carried out, arranged by organisation (there is some cross-referencing where the individual has changed positions). Dates of interviews are also given, except in circumstances where I spoke to the individual

so often that this was impractical. In fact, as can be seen from the list, there are a few individuals with whom I spoke ten or more times, and my thesis has thus relied on their views to a great extent. The names that stand out are: John Vanderveken, who was general secretary of the ICFTU from 1982 to 1992; Michael Walsh, international officer of the TUC until mid-1999; Tom ETTY, international secretary of the *Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging* (FNV); and Harold Lewis, general secretary of the International Transportworkers' Federation (ITF) until 1993. The accounts given by these individuals did not always agree, and at least for the period up to the mid-1980s it has often been possible to check their recollections of events against the available documentation, as well as against each other. I most certainly did not regard what they, or any other interviewees, told me as the whole truth, even while it was surely the truth for them. One of my main aims was indeed to show the differences in points of view between different individuals and organisations, and I have indicated where there were important differences of perspective among them. Almost all my interviews were recorded, and some of them (for example with Vanderveken) went on for several hours. I have used transcriptions, however, only when there has been some doubt about what the speaker said, or when using a direct quotation. Otherwise, I have relied on my notes, which went up to 20 pages in some instances.

Just as I relied on some interviews more than others, I relied on written testimony from some individuals and organisations more than others. The most important of these were *Sindicalista in un mondo ingiusto*, the memoirs of Enzo Friso, who was general secretary of the ICFTU from 1992 to 1995, and the archives of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Friso's memoirs were particularly helpful, because I was able to speak with him in person on only one occasion. In the case of the CLC archives, I was following the advice of my co-author Tony Carew, who had already made extensive use of these archives and found them comprehensive and reliable. They were most useful to me in providing a

perspective from outside Europe, including many candid internal communications, from an organisation that was deeply involved in the ICFTU at a time when the US national centre was outside it.

This raises the question of the overwhelmingly European nature of my sources, both in terms of the written documentation and the individuals I interviewed. This was certainly not deliberate, but was unavoidable under the practical circumstances of my research. I have tried to keep this European bias in mind, but am well aware that it may have affected my analysis of particular issues, such as the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, or the ICFTU's work around the social clause in international trade agreements. As with the relative lack of archival material for the 1990s, the lack of both written and oral sources from outside Europe means that the book, and consequently this thesis, cannot pretend to be fully comprehensive, and that further research will be needed to develop a fuller understanding of the subject in the years to come. I can only add that I have striven to be as fair as possible, and to take account of all the sources available, under these limitations.

This thesis is based on the same empirical research as my chapter in the ICFTU history, but is arranged differently and evaluates the ICFTU's actions more analytically. I have followed the case study method but have also compared the ICFTU with other organisations, including national unions, to emphasise the peculiarities of the international level. In keeping with the limitations of the materials available, most of these cases contain considerably more detail for the earlier than the later periods; indeed they were chosen with these limitations in mind. In nearly every case, I have tried to show the origins of the particular issue or event in great detail, together with the approach of the ICFTU and its affiliates and any problems or conflicts that may have arisen. In most cases, I have gone on

to summarise the consequences or further developments of each case in less detail, concentrating on the light each sheds on the nature of the ICFTU's policies and actions.

Throughout, I have deliberately based my account on the ICFTU's own documentation, in particular the minutes of meetings of its governing bodies and reports of its Congresses, as well as reports from several affiliates and the observations of individuals who were involved in key events. I have sought to present the ICFTU's own view of itself, by which I include the viewpoint of significant actors involved in its secretariat and governing bodies, as well as representatives of its affiliates or other international labour bodies. While I have taken into account the observations of some writers who could be considered to be outside critics of the ICFTU, there has not been enough literature available for me to claim to present an 'objective' picture in the traditional sense. However, as the reader will discover below, this perspective is far from uncritical. Indeed, the criticisms that have emerged of the activities of the Confederation and its regional organisations from within the ICFTU's own structures have been as severe as any from outside the organisation. The test of whether the Confederation has lived up to its own stated policies and ideals is by no means an easy one.

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 2 continues this introductory overview, examining the structure, resources and ideology of the ICFTU, as a basis for understanding the constraints under which it operates. It presents both its internal workings – its constitution, system of decision making and representation, and resources – and its relation to its external environment.

Chapter 3 begins the presentation of the results of the empirical research with an analysis of the Confederation's response to pressures from its affiliates in the 1970s for the establishment of a separate European organisation, which was closely connected to the rise of détente and the process of European integration. These events also did much to encourage a parallel search, ultimately unsuccessful, for unity with the rival christian international.

Chapter 4 examines activities outside Europe (in Africa, Asia and Latin America) and outlines the development of regional structures. It presents several examples of the Confederation's work in these regions, particularly in the protection of human and trade union rights, and reveals the tensions that have arisen between the secretariat, the national affiliates, and the regional organisations.

Chapter 5 concentrates on two specific cases which can be seen as successful initiatives: involvement in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, and efforts to promote the position of women within the ICFTU's own governing bodies and in the trade union movement more generally. Despite differences, both cases demonstrate the importance of individual affiliates, key individuals within the secretariat and the governing bodies, the ITSs and individual trade union members in developing effective campaigns.

Chapter 6 focuses on the efforts of the ICFTU to regulate the world economy, often in cooperation with the international trade secretariats (ITSs). The Confederation has worked within intergovernmental institutions, most importantly the International Labour Organisation (ILO), to promote the adoption of binding rules, and has also been involved in support for industrial actions undertaken by the ITSs and the affiliates.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis with an evaluation of the ICFTU's successes and failures, using the cases material as indicators of its capacity to act.

Chapter 2

The ICFTU as an Institution: Structure, Ideology and Resources

Introduction

In order to evaluate the ICFTU's role as a leading actor within the international industrial relations system, it is important to understand its structure, its constituencies, its resources, and its relations to outside actors, as well as its basic ideology and purpose: the constraints under which it operates and the opportunities to which it can respond. The objective here will not be to concentrate over much on details of structure and administration, but to show how the structure allows the organisation to function and to carry out its purposes. The fundamental basis for its identity, and the basis of its rules and system of representation, is its ideology, which I shall examine at the beginning. After going on to examine the Confederation's resources, structure and relations to outside actors, this chapter will conclude with an overview of the situation the Confederation faced at the beginning of the 1970s – a severe crisis affecting its structure, confusing its identity, and limiting its capacity to act.

Ideology

The ideology of an organisation like the ICFTU is important for two distinct reasons: it shapes its long-term aims and purposes and helps determine its immediate objectives; at the same time it provides a basis for internal unity and cohesion, a major prerequisite for enabling it to pursue these objectives. In the ICFTU's case, ideology provided the reason for its creation and has

remained overwhelmingly important for its identity, its structure and its actions. Clearly, the participants in the break-up of WFTU were united in their opposition to what they saw as the domination of the Soviet bloc and the attempts to impose its model of trade unionism within the federation. As is often the case, however, it was not so clear what, if anything, they were all *for*. The preliminary meetings and the founding Congress provided an opportunity for the participating unions to work out their differences and develop a common programme and set of principles. The result was a new organisation, with an identity different from either the pre-war IFTU or WFTU, an identity that has stood the test of time with remarkable consistency; but its persistence has depended on a flexibility which has also been a source of confusion and contradiction.

The Confederation is unique among the three labour internationals in affirming its ideological persuasion in its very title, launching a 'declaration of war' against its rivals (Devin 1990, 69-70; Carew 2000, 193). The central element in the ICFTU's ideology is the concept of 'free trade unionism', which has been essential to its identity but is in practice notoriously difficult to define. The founding Congress and the meetings leading up to it were marked by considerable debate over the meaning of this term, inspired by the fundamental differences between models of trade unionism in northern and southern Europe, the US, and other parts of the world (Windmuller 1967, 95). To many North American unionists, 'free' meant the absence of any party affiliation, which ran contrary to the practice in many European countries where there were close ties with social-democratic or labour parties in an atmosphere of mutual interdependence. To European trade unionists, freedom meant the ability to act autonomously and independently, which did not preclude affirming their own political beliefs or joining with political forces in promoting their objectives. For countries newly emerging from colonialism, freedom naturally referred to independence from the colonial power, and for them it was also natural for trade unions and parties to be allied within the independence movement. These

differences of perspective also appeared *within* countries: for example in the contrasting styles and ideological orientation of the AFL and CIO unions in the US, or the competing political allegiances within the TUC or DGB. The term ‘free’ in reference to trade unionism was not new – in the early twentieth century, the German social-democratic unions called themselves ‘*freie Gewerkschaften*’ – but the AFL in effect appropriated the term with a very different meaning.

In his keynote speech to the opening Congress, William Green, president of the AFL, emphasised American labour’s hatred of totalitarianism in every form, and above all else the need for the free trade unions to dedicate themselves to the battle against communism (Carew 2000, 197). Clearly, anti-communism was behind much of the debate over the nature of free trade unionism. While few if any of the unions participating in this first Congress were openly pro-communist, many did not appreciate the AFL’s attempts to push the organisation as a whole into an instrument for fighting communism. Several delegates from developing countries objected that the exclusive emphasis on anti-communism was not appropriate to their situation. Phany Ghosh, of the influential Indian affiliate INTUC, said he would not be associated with a Congress whose sole objective was the spread of anti-communism, and Arturo Jáuregui, who went on to become a notably anti-communist secretary of ORIT in the 1960s and 70s, pointed out that communism was less of a threat in Latin America than military dictatorships, a view shared by other delegates from the region (Carew 2000, 197). It was Walter Reuther, leader of the CIO, who expressed this argument most memorably: ‘We do not believe that our choice... is between Wall Street and the Kremlin... Stalin and Standard Oil. We believe that the choice lies down the broad, democratic middle road, where people may fight to have both bread and freedom’ (ibid., 198). His closing words were the basis of the slogan of the new organisation in its manifesto, *Bread, freedom, peace*, which Reuther was asked to draft. While the manifesto is not part of the Constitution, it too has contributed to the ideology of the organisation, and

Reuther's words have been cited time and again in opposition to the exclusive emphasis on anti-communism tirelessly promoted by his North American colleagues and opponents, the AFL.

In the end, a compromise was worked out on the definition of free trade unionism in the new constitution. An early proposal from the AFL, for a reference to 'freedom from domination by political parties, government, employer or church' (Carew 2000, 193) was not acceptable to the Europeans, and Congress adopted instead a TUC proposal to define the term as 'freedom from external domination' more generally. This definition was placed in the first paragraph of the section on Aims (para. a). At the same time, a reference to unions as 'free bargaining instruments ... which derive their authority from their members' was fourth in a list of the rights of individuals in the Preamble (ibid., 196). In strictly juridical terms, it is not clear to what extent the Preamble is to be considered more or less binding than the other parts of the Constitution; in practice, both the Preamble and the Aims have been used by leaders of the Confederation and the affiliates in their definition of free trade unionism (along with the Manifesto). Be that as it may, the two definitions are not the same, and the reference in the Preamble to free trade unions as 'free bargaining instruments' implies a more restricted model of trade unionism than the broader definition in the Aims. Behind the notion of 'bargaining instruments' proposed by the AFL lurked a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon model of trade unions as purely economic instruments, free from any political affiliations or beliefs beyond pragmatism, and free from the various forms of social democracy which were current in most European unions of the time (Cohen 1987, 5-6; Wedin 14-15). The attempt to impose a narrow vision of collective bargaining would later lead to serious problems in understanding the situation of affiliates in the developing countries (Interview notes: Anderson, Pursey). In the short term, the coexistence of different models and different definitions of free trade unionism created confusion, but allowed unions of very different kinds to coexist in the organisation. As

Windmuller put it: ‘constant reiteration of devotion to free and democratic trade unionism has not sufficed to confer hard meaning on a term whose unfortunate elusiveness is matched only by the flexibility with which it is applied to determine eligibility for ICFTU membership (1967, 95).

In addition to its devotion to ‘free trade unionism’, however that may be defined, the new organisation also asserted its singularity in relation to its predecessors by its strong stance on colonialism, proclaiming ‘the right of all peoples to full national freedom and self-government’ (Preamble, par. 3). Along with its solidarity with ‘... all working people deprived of their rights’ (Preamble, par. 5), the organisation’s commitment to ‘further the establishment, maintenance and development of free trade unions... in economically under-developed countries’ (Aims, point c), and its plan to establish regional organisations (see below) created a progressive, anti-colonial identity intended to be attractive to potential affiliates in the developing countries. Here, too, the American influence was strong, in keeping with the post-war power rivalries between the US and France, the UK and other colonial powers. The constitution also called for economic development (Aims, point h) and for greater economic cooperation leading to greater prosperity for all (Aims, point i).

The reference to economic cooperation implied, though it did not state, a commitment to free trade and the abolition of all forms of protectionism, an issue that was taken up by Third World affiliates in later years (see below, ch. 6). The same clause also called for economic cooperation to be ‘properly planned’ and for ‘the full participation of workers’ representatives in official bodies dealing with these questions’ (Aims, point i). This raises the question of the attitude of the new Confederation towards the existing economic system more generally. While it did not contain an explicit reference to the promotion of socialism, unlike previous labour

internationals,¹ the constitution of the ICFTU did state its commitment to ‘universal well-being based on free labour and economic democracy together with social justice and security...’ (Preamble, par. 4). Economic and industrial democracy were key objectives for the founders of the Confederation, many of whom were working with social-democratic parties in their own countries for the adoption of codetermination, joint control of investment, and other similar policies. While there has been considerable debate since 1949 on the meaning of economic democracy, and whether or not it can be realised within capitalism, it is nonetheless clear that it is a position consistent with the more progressive tradition within the northern European socialist and social-democratic parties. In its commitment to economic democracy, the new Confederation identified itself with that tradition.

Simultaneously, the ICFTU identified itself in other ways with the developing Cold War, with which many of its leading figures were closely associated (Wedin 1974, 16; Carew 1987; MacShane 1992a). Aside from the frequent references at the founding Congress to the fight against communism, the constitution specifically included a commitment to promote the ‘economic... interests of the people of countries suffering from the ravages and after-effects of the war...’ (Aims, point f), a clear reference to the Marshall Plan. This comes as no surprise, as the attempt by WFTU to encourage opposition to the Plan for European Recovery was one of the main reasons the European and north American affiliates decided to leave (Carew 1987; MacShane 1992a).² Carew argues that the ICFTU openly aligned itself with the west in the Cold War, and many leading figures within the Confederation have expressed this view since that time (interview notes Vanderveken). In my view, however, it would be a mistake to regard

¹ The IFTU’s first Congress adopted a resolution calling for ‘the socialisation of the means of production’, which according to Van Goethem (2000, 85), ‘left moderate reformers with sufficient room for interpretation’.

² It can also be argued that the Constitution endorsed NATO (Carew 2000, 197), although this is certainly not explicit. The relevant text reads: ‘to support the establishment of a world system of collective security, but pending its attainment, to further and support within the Charter of the United Nations, all measures that are necessary for assuring the defence of world democracy... against totalitarian aggression’ (Aims, point m).

the situation of 1949 with the hindsight of the subsequent history of the Cold War. At that time, inside the ICFTU Congress hall and within the affiliates, there still appeared to be a number of options; and Reuther was not alone in promoting 'the broad, middle road' of social democracy. Further, this alternative left perspective, if I may call it that, has remained an important current within the Confederation over the next 50 years of its history, figuring prominently in debates over the multinational corporations and economic democracy, human rights and other themes, as I shall demonstrate below. Most importantly, though, from its foundation the Confederation has sought to be a 'broad church', an inclusive and open international as opposed to the ideologically narrow organisation the WFTU had become. Its founding Congress adopted a pragmatic, non-dogmatic orientation in its effort to broaden the base of trade unionism to include unions from every part of the world, but it thereby left a certain ambiguity in its ideology and identity, which would create difficulties later on.

The ICFTU's structure

In Windmuller's phrase, an organisation like the ICFTU depends on a number of 'instruments of action' (Windmuller 1967, 97), one of the most important being its structure. This does not refer only to a 'well-functioning apparatus' in the sense of internal administration, but more generally to the way in which the organisation is set up: its formal constitution and informal rules of behaviour, its system of representation and decision making, and the relationship between its component parts. Many details of the structure of the Confederation were worked out in a series of meetings leading up to its foundation in December 1949. It was quite clear in the minds of leaders of the influential European and North American trade unions what they did not want – an organisation like the WFTU – but they were not of one opinion on what they did want. Some were quite happy to go back to an organisation like the pre-war IFTU, but others wanted a structure better suited to the changing world situation. This desire for change led to a

number of innovations in the plans for the new Confederation, nowhere more clearly than in the creation of regional organisations, and it also influenced the development of the formal relationship with the ITS. The lack of consensus on other points led to a certain ambiguity in some areas, for example the rules governing regional organisations, the means of enforcement of policy (sanctions against affiliates), the criteria for membership, and above all, ideology, as mentioned above.

The Constitution

The constitution set up in 1949 established a framework for representation and action as well as for identity. While it seems fairly straightforward at first glance, it was far from an easy task to draw it up, and certain provisions led to subsequent complications and modifications. As mentioned above, the constitution begins with a preamble and a section on the aims of the organisation. The desire of the ICFTU to establish a separate identity from either of its predecessors is already clear at this point, from its emphasis on free trade unionism, its opposition to all forms of dictatorship, to its support for the freedom and self-government of all peoples and aim of promoting trade unionism in the developing world (ICFTU 1959: 112-113). It is also important to note that all subsequent sections of the Constitution are dependent on the definitions of the nature and purpose of the organisation and the qualities desired of its members (for example, the definition of free trade unions), as set out at the beginning.

The first article of the Constitution deals with membership, proceeding from the preceding sections to define the criteria for membership and the procedures for affiliation. Any national centre applying need only demonstrate that it accepts the aims and Constitution (Article 1a), whilst an individual union may be admitted only after consultation with the national centre(s) of the country concerned and a 3/4 majority vote in the Executive Board (EB) (Article 1b). This

provision was crucial in the early years of the ICFTU, when many individual unions in Japan and other Asian countries applied for membership in situations where national centres were either absent or objected to international affiliation; the same could be said of applications from unions in Africa in the 1960s onwards (interview notes: Horii, Nedzynski). Equally significant are the rules governing the suspension or expulsion of an affiliate, as they provide one of the very few sanctions in the Constitution, 'compelling an adherence to policies' (Windmuller 1967, 97). These allow the EB to suspend, and Congress to expel an affiliate for action deemed 'to be in contravention of this Constitution, or against the interests of world labour' after first investigating the charges and allowing the affiliate to answer them (Article Ii). We shall examine below some cases where these procedures have been followed, but it is worth noting here that suspension has rarely been used as a sanction in the history of the organisation, while expulsion is almost unheard of. Even action against affiliates for the non-payment of fees has been rare. This article also contains a clause guaranteeing the autonomy of the affiliates, further limiting any actions that could be taken against them (Article Ic).

Congress is formally recognised as the 'supreme authority' of the organisation (Article IIa). The original constitution provided for Congresses to be convened every two years, with a smaller General Council comprising representatives from all affiliates meeting in the intervening years. The latter was abolished in 1953, as a cost-cutting measure. In 1959, when the Confederation found itself in financial difficulties, it was decided to hold Congresses every three years; and in 1975, every four years. These measures had the effect of reducing the democratic control over the organisation, as the EB could never be as representative as Congress. Representation at Congress is open to all affiliates, with a graduated scale based on membership (Article IVa (i)). At the 13th Congress in 1983, a controversial clause was added regarding the representation of women at Congress: 'Affiliated organizations shall select their delegates taking into account their membership composition. Any organization having more

than 100,000 women members should nominate at least one woman as delegate' (Article IVa (iii)). Note the use of the word 'should': no sanction was to be applied if this provision was not acted upon. As a reflection of the close interrelationship between the ICFTU and the ITSs, the latter were entitled to send between one and four delegates to Congress, according to the size of their membership (Article IVc). Any affiliated organisation may submit items for the Congress agenda, but the final agenda is decided by the EB after full consultation with affiliates; emergency items may be added while Congress is in session with the Board's agreement (Article VIa-e). The ability to submit items for the agenda has had a significant impact on the proceedings of Congress and on the course of the Confederation, providing a real opportunity for affiliates to affect the outcome.

The EB is the central decision-making body in the Confederation. It is elected directly by Congress, has 'the authority to act on behalf of the Confederation' between Congresses and is responsible for 'giving effect to the decisions and recommendations of Congress' (Article XV, a, b). At the ICFTU's foundation, the composition of the Board was very carefully determined to represent all regions of the world, in marked difference to the pre-war IFTU. The founders considered the breadth of composition so important that the precise figures were stated in the Constitution, and the many changes over the years have required amendments to the Constitution (see section on representation, below).³ However, the means of selecting representatives from individual affiliates as candidates for the Board was left somewhat vague: 'all affiliated organisations represented at the Congress shall have the right to participate in the arrangements for considering nominations for membership... from their particular area' (Article XIIIb). Further, considering its carefully determined regional composition, it is curious that officially 'the members of the EB... shall be regarded as representing the Confederation as a whole and not any particular geographical division...' (Article XIIIe). In response to the failure

³ From nineteen in 1949 (plus the general secretary *ex officio*), the Board membership increased to 29 in 1975 and 49 in 1992 (Article XIII).

of the North Americans to reach agreement on a common slate of nominees at the 1969 Congress (*Report of the 9th World Congress, 1969*; see also Wedin 1974), a new provision was added in 1972 that any vacancies left open by Congress will be automatically referred to the Board (XIIIi); this procedure has only been used since then in a few cases, for example in the Middle East. Finally, one of the most important changes over the years has been the addition of reserved seats for women, starting with one seat as an observer in 1969 and going up to five seats with full voting rights by the 1992 Congress (Article XIIIc). The progress of women's representation in the Confederation is covered in more detail below (chapter 5).

In addition to the EB, the Constitution also provides for smaller decision-making bodies, which have normally met more frequently. The names have changed over the years – Emergency Committee, Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC), Steering Committee – but none of these bodies has been required under the Constitution to be representative in regional terms, nor have their powers been set out in full in the Constitution. In general, these committees have been established by the EB, which has selected their members and determined their terms of reference. The present Steering Committee comprises the vice-presidents, along with a representative of the Women's Committee, so in this sense the Constitution does stipulate its membership. But the Constitution does not require the vice presidents to be representative on a regional basis, although in practice this is what occurs (Article XXVI, 1992). As will be seen below, in practice the FGPC and the Steering Committee have acted as the initiators of most important decisions, by making recommendations to the EB which have rarely been rejected. Thus these special committees have in fact been the most important decision-making bodies of the Confederation, but guided by a minimum of rules and regulations under the Constitution.

The key figure of authority in the ICFTU to the outside world is clearly the general secretary, who is elected by Congress (Article XXVIIa, 1992). While 'responsible to the EB' (Article

XXVII c). the general secretary disposes of a number of powers, not least that he (or in principle she) prepares the agenda for the Board. This power was used to great advantage by Oldenbroek, who would often surprise the president, then Arne Geijer, and board members with unexpected items for discussion on the day of a meeting (Carew 2000; Wedin 1974). The general secretary also has a vote on the EB (Article XXVIIb, 1992) and is responsible for notifying affiliates of decisions taken by Congress and by the EB (Article XXVIIc), enabling him to influence opinion and action to a certain degree by the phrasing of these reports. Following the somewhat messy departure of Buitter, a provision was added allowing the EB to appoint an acting general secretary to serve until the next Congress (Article XXVIIIf). The president, whose authority and influence have varied over time depending on the incumbent, is elected by the EB and, like the general secretary, has full voting rights at meetings of governing bodies (Article XXV, 1992).

A number of other important issues are covered by the Constitution, but are discussed here separately, under finances, representation, and regional organisations. A few more points need to be made, however. It was decided in 1969 that the definitive text of the Constitution should be the English version (Article XXIX), not a very surprising choice given the balance of power at that time, but different from the provisions of IFTU. There have been many difficulties in establishing equivalent texts of the Constitution in each of the four working languages (English, French, German and Spanish), most recently in the efforts to remove gender bias (see below, chapter on women). The procedure for amending the Constitution is by Congress itself (Article IIc (iv)), on the basis of recommendations from the EB or the Standing Orders Committee of Congress. As noted above, it is curious to note some of the topics specifically covered under the Constitution – such as the level of fees or the number of members of the EB by region. The ambiguity or even silence on other areas is equally interesting, for example the terms of reference of the regional organisations or the powers of the various sub-committees. It can truly

be said that a written Constitution is only part of the explanation for the workings and power relations of an organisation, however it sets constraints on the actions of all actors and so must be taken fully into account.

Representation and decision-making

The Confederation's constitution set up a system of representation that was based on regions, in an effort to ensure a broader representation than that achieved by previous internationals. However, this formal system does not extend to all bodies of the Confederation: the various sub-committees from the Emergency Committee to the Steering Committee are not officially regionally based. Furthermore, a non-regional element has been added over the past thirty years in the form of reserved seats for women. This section will look beyond the formal system at how it works in practice, and how effectively it has represented the entire membership as was originally intended.

At the beginning of the 1970s the EB consisted of three members from Africa, five from Asia, two from the Middle East, three from Latin America, one from the Caribbean, eight from Europe, six from North America (four left vacant following the disaffiliation of the AFL-CIO) and one from Australia and New Zealand, in addition to the president and general secretary. The ITSs (mainly headed by Europeans) nominated two representatives while the chair of the consultative committee on women workers' questions also attended, not yet as a voting member. Membership was expanded in the 1980s and 1990s; from 1992 there were five members from Africa, eight from Asia, two from the Middle East, five from Latin America, one from the Caribbean, fourteen from Europe (including new affiliates from eastern Europe), six from North America, two from Oceania (including one Fijian) and one from West Asia (a seat created to allow Turkey a representative), in addition to the president and general

secretary. All ITSs now sent representatives, and the Women's Committee had five members by right. The number of meetings of the Board was reduced from two to one per year.

The formal representation of affiliates from the developing countries in the ICFTU's governing bodies would at first glance give an impression of domination by the unions of Latin America, Asia and Africa. Indeed, as Table 2.1 shows, these affiliates were over-represented in relation to their total membership at least from the 1970s until the early 1990s, when their membership caught up with their formal representation. Yet the policy-making capacity of the EB was reduced when meetings were reduced to one a year. Furthermore, it could be argued that the real locus of decision-making in the ICFTU, as in many large organisations, has long been in smaller official committees and unofficial networks that have met more frequently and whose size has facilitated more efficient decision-making. As noted above, these smaller committees, from the Emergency Committee to the Finance and General Purposes Committee to the present day Steering Committee are not bound by the same rules on regional representation as the EB. From the 1970s onwards, the most important of these smaller bodies has been the FGPC, which has tended to play the key decision-making role in the Confederation, making recommendations regarding personnel and policy which have then been submitted for approval by the EB. The membership of these committees has always been drawn from the largest affiliates in the industrialised countries, in particular those that make the highest financial contributions to the work of the Confederation. In 1972, the FGPC had seven members (*Report of the Tenth World Congress, 1972, 20*), of whom only one came from outside Europe and North America; in 1982, the figure was three out of ten (*Report of the Thirteenth World Congress, 1983, 45*); in 1992, it was three out of 11 (*Report of the Fifteenth World Congress, 1992, 37*).⁴

⁴ In each case, the total numbers include the general secretary, but not the president, both *ex officio*. The general secretaries over this period, Otto Kersten and John Vanderveken, were both Europeans (as has been the case throughout the history of the ICFTU); the presidents were Bruno Storti (Italy) and P. P. Narayanan (Malaysia).

A perusal of the minutes of the EB and the FGPC and Steering Committee over the past thirty years reveals the extent to which the EB follows the recommendations of the smaller bodies. Such important issues as the choice of a new general secretary in 1972 and 1982 were discussed first, and at great length, in the FGPC, or even by small informal meetings of individual leaders of affiliates, mostly those from North America and Europe. The discussions that went on throughout the mid to late 1970s over the possible departure of the general secretary, Otto Kersten, were dominated by a few key individuals, most importantly: Len Murray, general secretary of the TUC, and Heinz Oskar Vetter, president of the DGB; a letter from Murray to Kersten was considered crucial in the latter's decision to leave (interview notes: Murray, Seideneck, Walsh). While it was only natural that the leader of the German national centre would play a major role in the departure of a German general secretary, the absence of any union leaders from the developing countries in these discussions is nonetheless striking. Nor was this occasion unique. The participants in a series of committees and sub-groups set up to discuss the reform of the ICFTU structure and finances have also tended to come from the northern European and North American affiliates, although the Japanese affiliates have played an important role, especially on financial issues, and the Indians on political and social issues.

The domination by the European and North American affiliates has been offset to a degree by the important role played by figures like C.V. Devan Nair, general secretary of the National Trades Union Congress of Singapore and a leader of the Asian Regional Organisation (ARO), who stood for general secretary in 1972, Frank Walcott of the Barbados Workers Union, who chaired the Standing Orders Committee and the Constitution and Finance Committee, P.P. Narayanan of the Malaysian TUC, who was elected as the first president from a developing country in 1975, and LeRoy Trotman, also of the Barbados Workers Union, who succeeded

him in 1992. To take but one example, Narayanan was a leading advocate of the advancement of women within the Confederation, and played a major role in social and economic policy when he chaired the Economic and Social Committee. However, in both the FGPC and the EB, most representatives from the developing countries have tended to restrict their remarks to matters directly connected to their regions. On many occasions their role has been crucial in approving or disapproving policy proposals, such as their 1972 refusal to go ahead with the appointment of Kersten so that Devan Nair's candidacy could be given serious consideration; rarely however have they been the initiators of policy proposals for the Confederation as a whole. The interest in cooperatives and in socio-economic projects throughout the 1960s and 1970s are notable exceptions, as has been the more recent role of ORIT in advocating work on the informal sector. Otherwise the dominance of the governing bodies of the organisation by a small number of affiliates from the industrialised countries remains clear from the reports of the Board and the FGPC and Steering Committee.

One area where the failure to represent the membership as a whole has been successfully challenged is the representation of women within the Confederation's own governing bodies as well as among the affiliates. As mentioned above, the chair of what was then the Advisory Committee on Women Workers' Questions (see below, Chapter 5) gained a seat on the EB in 1969, although only in an advisory capacity. The committee itself had been set up in the early 1950s but was generally sidelined among the more 'important' committees and sub-committees, with its reports left to last on the EB's regular agenda, so that they rarely received the members' full attention. The rise of the women's movement changed all that, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s the question of women's role within the unions and within the ICFTU itself became more and more central to the concerns of leaders of the organisation and its affiliates. Here, too, a few affiliates from the industrialised countries – the DGB, NVV and the Nordic unions – exercised a great influence in the promotion of women's representation, joined

by figures like Narayanan and leaders of the Israeli affiliate, Histadrut. During this period, the under-representation of other groups, such as young workers, was also considered within the ICFTU, but only women's representation was taken seriously enough to merit changes in the Constitution.

There are interesting parallels between the representation of women and that of affiliates in the developing world. The first women who sat on the EB as representatives of the Women's Committee intervened almost exclusively on 'women's issues', whether internally within the organisation and its affiliates, or in the economy or society at large. An example of how this worked in practice can be seen in the role played by Nel Tegelaar, international secretary of the NVV and later responsible for the FNV's work on women's equality issues. Tegelaar first sat on the EB as a substitute member for the NVV, and intervened on a number of issues, including the development of a separate European regional organisation and relations with communist-controlled organisations. Once she shifted to the seat reserved for the chair of the Women's Committee, in 1969, Tegelaar intervened only on 'women's' issues. At a time that there were few women on the Board, either as full members or as substitutes, it is curious that no other women made significant interventions on this subject: Fabrizia Baduel-Glorioso, international secretary of the Italian CISL and Shirley Carr, vice president and later president of the Canadian CLC were both active members of the Board; neither referred specifically to women's issues but concentrated on the developing countries, détente, South Africa and other areas. More recently, when Nancy Riche, executive vice president of the CLC and a vice-president of the ICFTU and chair of the Women's Committee, made remarks critical of trade liberalisation and engagement with the WTO, she provoked anger within the ICFTU, even though she was expressing official CLC policy (interview notes: Benedict, Pursey, Riche). It was argued that she was expected to speak for the Women's Committee and not intervene in other areas. Clearly, these examples indicate a division of labour between women representing

a national affiliate and those holding their seats as representatives of the Women's Committee. However, such a division was never stipulated in the Constitution or mentioned in the many debates over the promotion of the participation of women within the ICFTU. Whether such a division was expected by the women themselves, or by the Women's Committee, or by their affiliates, it has favoured a compartmentalisation of women and their concerns rather than their integration within the organisation. This division has become somewhat less pronounced over time, in keeping with the policy to integrate or 'mainstream' the concerns of women into all ICFTU policies and programmes (see chapter 5 below).

On the whole, however, neither the formal representation of affiliates from different countries and regions, nor the formal provision for the representation of women, has solved the problem of the domination of decision-making by a few affiliates from the industrialised countries, and by men. The question of how these two bases for representation connect and intersect has never even been addressed.

Regional organisation

The ICFTU established its regional organisations for the Americas, Asia and Africa shortly after its foundation in 1949, in a major new direction for the international labour movement. The post-war world presented new opportunities for increased union membership in the developing countries, and in the new climate of the cold war trade union organisation was seen as an essential part of the greater ideological battle. The first trade union organisations that were specifically regional in focus were set up in connection with the war effort, and paved the way for the ICFTU later. The Anglo-American Trade Union Committee, which carried out much of the work of the IFTU during the war years and led indirectly to the formation of the trade union committee of the European Recovery Programme (now TUAC), was closely linked

to US and British diplomacy (Carew 1987). In the Americas, the *Confederación Inter-Americana de Trabajadores* (CIT), later incorporated into the ICFTU, was set up largely through the efforts of the American Federation of Labour (AFL) but in close cooperation with US intelligence (Reiser 1962).

The founding Congress of the ICFTU declared its support for the self-determination of all peoples and its opposition to colonialism and made a point of including many trade unionists from developing countries and those emerging from colonialism. As noted above, not only the Preamble but also the aims set out in the Constitution specifically called for support to union organisation in the Third World. It was therefore logical to set up regional organisations to bring the new international closer to the regions where assistance was most needed. A regional organisation was also set up for Europe, the better to take part in the process of recovery and to encourage support for the Marshall Plan (Carew 1987). Organisations were set up for Asia and Africa, and the CIT changed its status to become the regional organisation for the Americas, ORIT (Reiser 1972). In setting up these regional bodies, the ICFTU intended to channel resources for education programmes, build up trade union organisation and win over new affiliates. But the role of the regional organisations within a Brussels-based world body was never entirely clear, and problems soon arose, both in relation to resources and control of the regional organisations, and their contribution to the policy formation of the ICFTU itself.

The Confederation did not establish the regional organisations to set policy for their own regions; rather, to concentrate on union organisation and to act as a 'conduit' to feed information and policy proposals from the regions to the secretariat and back to the regions (interview notes: Horii, Vanderveken, Debunne). Determined to be a truly international organisation, with a common policy for all five continents, the ICFTU was keen to avoid the formation of competing regional blocs. As noted above, it went so far as to state that members

of the EB did not represent their own regions but the Confederation as a whole. Like the founders of the earliest international labour organisations, the leaders of the ICFTU championed the unity of the world's workers against the divisions of nation and region, expressing dismay when national or regional conflicts arose. The only division that was openly expressed was that of the 'free' trade unions in battle against Communists, fascists, and other movements that did not adopt a strategy of 'free collective bargaining' by politically independent unions. Neither nationalism nor regionalism had any place in this scheme of things, making it more difficult for the organisation to face the problems posed by conflicting national and regional interests.

There were also important differences of approach among the affiliates toward the policies and programmes to be carried out at the regional level. Carew (1996) and Wedin (1970) both highlight the contrast between the AFL-CIO's emphasis on forming national centres and the TUC's more cautious approach of forming unions from the grass roots up, especially in Africa. This issue was closely related to the American unions' focus on anti-communism, in contrast to the more traditional approach of the British unions toward organising, which was informed by their experience of working with unions in the British colonies (Carew 1996). Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the ICFTU tried a number of approaches in Africa, but was much more successful in its education programmes than in union organising, which infuriated some leaders of the AFL-CIO, who from that time began to lose their early enthusiasm for multilateral action within the ICFTU (Wedin 1974). The Confederation's work in Asia and Latin America over the same period was less controversial: in Asia because unions were already well organised and able to express their own demands, and their needs were clear-cut; in Latin America because the North American unions were able to transfer their domination of CIT to the new organisation, ORIT (Carew 1996; Reiser 1962). This policy, a sort of trade union Monroe Doctrine, created major problems for the Confederation subsequently, especially after the AFL-

CIO left the Confederation in 1969 but continued membership in ORIT. The resolution of these difficulties is covered below.

From the 1960s onwards, major developments in each of the regions revealed the contradictions in the ICFTU's regional set-up, sometimes on the basis of the actions of the regional organisations themselves, sometimes through the evolution of the broader political and social situation, sometimes through the rivalries of leading affiliates in the industrialised countries. Many problems had to do with finance, including the difficulties of the regions to achieve self-sufficiency; efforts to devise a more equitable basis for affiliation fees from the developing countries; the use of the International Solidarity Fund (ISF) for regional programmes; and the rise of bilateral projects. Moreover, differences of policy between regions and the Confederation arose regarding developments in individual countries or the actions of individual affiliates, often with regard to economic policy or human and trade union rights. In all these cases, the Confederation sought at the same time to handle relations with the regions and to articulate a coherent policy and programme for the organisation as a whole. Carew (2000) has described this process as the struggle between internationalism and regionalism, beginning with the shift of the AFL-CIO towards bilateralism, which was followed by other affiliates from the North, and continuing with the rise of competition between different countries and regions for a share in increasingly global markets. I shall return to this theme below.

Financial questions relating to the regions and regional activities have caused many headaches for the ICFTU. The issue of affiliation fees – non-payment by affiliates, and proposals for a sliding scale based on income and development – has been mentioned already. Another important problem was the financing of the regional organisations, which from the 1960s into the 1980s derived substantially from the ISF, contrary to the Fund's original purpose of paying for solidarity and emergency activities only. In 1983, the FGPC estimated that 43% of the total

expenditure of the ISF went to the administration of the regional organisations, and agreed that this burden should be shifted over the long term towards an 'alternative source of funding', preferably not the General Fund (84EB/14(a))⁵. This led to a decision at the time of the Melbourne Congress to stop funding the regional organisations through the ISF, but to impose a special levy instead (interview notes: Vanderveken). The accounts submitted by the regional organisations were themselves often the basis of argument within the FGPC, which regularly refused to accept the proposed budgets as 'unrealistic' (91EB/16(a)), delayed the approval of their accounts subject to review by the auditors, or called on the regional organisations to match their expenditure to income. Both AFRO and ORIT had continuous difficulties over budgets and expenditure; APRO increased its regional fees in 1985 (88EB/15(a)) and achieved a higher level of self-sufficiency than the other two organisations.

The most controversial financial question in the regions has been funding for development aid projects. The ICFTU favoured multilateral projects organised or at least co-ordinated by the Confederation itself, under its own umbrella; this was severely challenged by the rise in bilateralism initiated by the AFL-CIO in the 1970s onwards (interview notes: Vanderveken; Carew 1996). The regional organisations were alarmed at the decline in multilateralism, which represented the most equitable form of trade union assistance, and the only one that gave them much of a say in the matter (Wedin 1974). ARO voiced concern over bilateral projects in a resolution passed by its EB in 1971, expressing the fear that the increase in such projects in the absence of any real co-ordination from the secretariat or the affiliates would lead to a 'Balkanisation' of the free trade unions (55EB/8). This concern was shared by leading affiliates in the industrialised countries (Jack Jones, TUC, in 69EB/2,18(b)).

⁵ This is the form of reference used by the ICFTU in its internal filing system, and appears on each document submitted to the Executive Board. The system has been retained at the ICFTU archives at the IISG in Amsterdam. The reference here is to the 84th meeting of the EB, agenda item 14 (a). I use this form throughout the thesis.

One of the main problems with bilateralism was the lack of co-ordination and the danger of affiliates duplicating each others' efforts. This was a major theme of the 13th Congress in 1983, which endorsed a statement on trade-union sponsored development projects that called for greater co-ordination by the secretariat, the regional organisations and the affiliates.

According to Vanderveken, the ICFTU had three functions in this respect: to act as a clearing house for information on the needs of affiliates in the developing countries and the means at the disposal of affiliates in the richer countries;⁶ to provide a platform enabling all unions to maximise cooperation; and to put its own knowledge and experience at the disposal of both donor and recipient organisations.

Behind the issue of co-ordination was the fundamental political problem of providing the right sort of assistance to increase the self-reliance of Third World affiliates and respond to the real needs of workers in the individual country or region (Nedzynski, in 86EB/14(a)). A Project Committee was established in 1987, with representatives from the major donor organisations (the Nordic and Dutch affiliates, the DGB, CLC, AFL-CIO and Japanese unions) as well as Stefan Nedzynski (PTTI), chair of the ITS general conference, representing the ITSs (91EB/16(a)). The regional secretaries were invited to attend, but developing country affiliates were not included. Problems remained in the co-ordination of projects, relations with the ITSs and the role of the secretariat in project work, despite the foundation of the Project Committee. One participant reluctantly recognised that 'the ICFTU's efforts to assure multilateralism [have] failed' (interview notes: Etty), while Vanderveken concluded that it was a 'voluntary act of affiliates to go through the ICFTU' and that the best that could be hoped for would be for the secretariat to act as an 'honest broker' (interview notes).

⁶ This had already been proposed by the NVV as early as 11.3.1975, in a letter to the Executive Board (63EB/5(d)). Throughout the 1970s and 80s, the NVV and its successor, the FNV, played an important role in pushing for better financial control and accounting of projects, and greater co-ordination of projects by the ICFTU (85EB/13(a), 96EB/12(a), interview notes: Etty).

The ICFTU's resources

Perhaps the most important factor in the success or failure of an organisation has been referred to by Windmuller as the 'access to instruments of action', meaning the structure of the organisation and the resources available to it: 'a well-functioning apparatus under authoritative leadership, adequate human and material resources, and certain devices for inducing or compelling adherence to their policies' (Windmuller 1967, 97). As we shall see below, the departure of the AFL-CIO in 1969 weakened the legitimacy and cohesion of the Confederation; these same events had a severe effect on the organisation's internal structure and resources.

To begin with the question of **financial resources**, it has always seemed curious to many observers that despite its vast membership, the structure and resources of the ICFTU are quite modest, much smaller than those of most of its affiliates in the industrialised countries. (MacShane, cited by Devin 1990, 75). However, on reflection this reflects its status as an organisation of organisations whose most important work is still carried out at the national level.⁷ In principle, the main source of income of the ICFTU has always been the regular payment of affiliation fees from all affiliated organisations; like many principles, this one has not always worked out in practice. It was recognised that affiliates in the poorer and developing countries would have more difficulty in paying the affiliation fees, a flat rate which in 1971 had just gone up by nearly double to BEF 1,900 per thousand members; the first increase since 1960 (*Report of Ninth World Congress, 1969, 558; Financial Reports, 1969-1971, 223-4*)⁸. A

⁷ Similarly, national centres in some countries, for example the UK, are sometimes smaller and work with more limited resources than their largest affiliates. The size of national centres, like that of international confederations like the ICFTU, depends on their function within the trade union movement as a whole, for example whether they have important negotiating and organising functions, or leave these to their affiliates.

⁸ Because the ICFTU was based in Brussels, contributions were paid and accounts kept in Belgian francs (BEF).

procedure was set up for the affiliates unable to pay to appeal to the EB for a reduction in the rate; with some required to pay as little as ten percent. A number of affiliates were unable to meet even this target, and a way was found to adjust their membership to a level that they were able to afford. This did them no favours, however, as it reduced their entitlement to representation accordingly, unlike the previous system. Despite this, many affiliates still found themselves in arrears, although sanctions provided for in the Constitution – for suspension of representation in governing bodies or even suspension of membership – were rarely applied. Despite a proposal from Asian members of the EB in 1972 to introduce a graduated scale of affiliation fees, so that Third World countries would not have to beg individually for exemptions, this system remained in place for want of anything better (*Report of Tenth World Congress, 1972, 547-8*). The system by which affiliates had to apply individually for a reduction in their affiliation fees was both embarrassing and inefficient, and highlighted the differences in economic resources of the different regions. For example, in 1961, ‘53 affiliates paid at the standard rate while 83 obtained reductions ranging from 20 to 95 percent’ (Windmuller 1963, 152). In 1971, the situation was somewhat better, with 50 paying at the full rate, with 65 receiving various reductions, including 18 paying only a token fee (*Financial Reports, 1969-71, 224*).

The ICFTU has calculated the payment of affiliation fees from 1960 to 1998, showing variations by region. As shown in Table 2.2, the overwhelming financial reliance on the industrialised world stands out, although there have been variations in this picture, with the steady increase in income from Asia and the sharp fluctuations in income from North America (reflecting the years the AFL-CIO was absent).

Striking though the regional distribution of affiliation fees may be, this is only part of the picture, for a large part of the ICFTU’s financial resources derives from voluntary

contributions over and above the payment of affiliation fees. While praiseworthy in principle – for example the national campaigns carried out in some Nordic countries to raise funds for solidarity and humanitarian purposes (Windmuller 1963, 154) – in practice this has intensified the dominance of a small number of affiliates in the industrialised countries. For example, in 1969 five affiliates (the Swedish LO and TCO, the Danish LO, the Norwegian LO and the DGB) made voluntary contributions to the General Fund of BEF 7,887,335, more than 20% of the total sum (BEF 38,764,702) raised through affiliation fees (*Financial Reports 1969-1971*, 222-3). Moreover, over the years the ICFTU has established a number of special funds designed for particular countries or in response to specific events, ranging from the Regional Activities Fund, set up in 1951, and the Hungary Fund, a response to the 1956 uprising, to funds for black South African unions in the 1970s onwards and to programmes in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989. The most important of these is clearly the ISF, which was set up in 1957 and has come to serve as a sort of umbrella for other more specialised funds (Carew 2000, 212, 252-4).

The ISF has provoked considerable controversy, for reasons to be explained in greater detail in the context of specific instances. Suffice it to say here that there were problems in relation to control over the Confederation's financial affairs, as well as the source of its funds and their eventual use, and the imbalance between the ISF and the General Fund. The establishment of the ISF created a dual system of financing the organisation, through funds with ostensibly different sources and purposes, but with scope for transfers from one fund to the other. At first there were separate bodies overseeing the two funds, leading to a certain amount of confusion and duplication, and at least in some quarters suspicions of possible misappropriation.⁹

Without doubt, the dual system was complex and opaque, and in 1967 the separate Finance

⁹ The most serious accusations came from George Meany in 1965, over unspent funds contributed by the AFL-CIO; though investigation revealed no actual misappropriation, Meany called for 'his' funds to be returned (Carew 2000, 296-7). In more recent years, similar dissatisfaction has been expressed

and ISF Committees were merged into a single Finance and General Purposes Committee (Carew 2000, 311) However, the actual use of funds in the ISF remained an important issue. In 1969, for the first time the ISF was 'raided' to cover a shortfall in the General Fund of nearly \$150,000 (Carew 2000, 310-311); in the years to follow, it became standard practice to use the ISF for purposes for which it was not originally intended, in particular to cover the administration of the regional organisations. This became a matter for debate in the 1970s and 1980s, when ORIT came under scrutiny for political, as well as financial reasons. Concern that the ISF was being used for the wrong purposes led eventually to a review of the purpose of the ISF in 1986, which recommended that the funds be used for strictly humanitarian and educational purposes, not for regular administration.¹⁰ The over-burdening of the ISF became a particularly sensitive issue in the monetary crises of the late 1970s and 80s, when even affiliates in the richest countries had difficulty in meeting their minimum financial obligations.¹¹

The balance between funds raised by affiliation fees and voluntary contributions to the ISF received more attention over the same period as more affiliates experienced financial problems of their own. As early as 1960, George Woodcock, recently elected general secretary of the TUC, estimated that three-quarters of the Confederation's income came from voluntary contributions, and called instead for affiliation fees to be increased (Carew 2000, 284-6). But such measures were never popular, and reliance on voluntary contributions from a small number of affiliates continued. By 1971, the accumulated funds in the ISF amounted to nearly BEF 90 million (of which 38 million was raised in that year), as compared to just under BEF 60 million income for that year from affiliation fees (*Financial Reports 1969-1971*, 222-5).

by other affiliates, for example the Dutch FNV, over funds not used for their original purpose (interview notes: Etty).

¹⁰ *Report of the 15th World Congress*, 1992, 275-80; interview notes, Vanderveken.

¹¹ For example, exchange rate fluctuations meant that in 1977 the British TUC's contribution of £ 452,000 represented 23 % of its total income, in affiliation fees to the ICFTU (TUC, *Report to the General Council*, 1977, 602-3, see also pp. 159-60 on ICFTU finances). Other affiliates, such as those in Italy and Israel, were similarly affected (69EB/ 2,18(a)).

This problem was greatly aggravated by the loss of US contributions after the AFL-CIO's withdrawal from the Confederation.

Another cause for concern has been the source of these voluntary contributions from a small number of affiliates, from northern Europe and North America, and in more recent years, Japan. With the expansion of government-funded development projects from the mid 1960s onwards, these affiliates obtained access to state funding for trade union development work. This created a serious problem for the ICFTU, which had decided at its foundation not to accept money from non-trade union sources when such funding was offered by US government agencies (Carew 2000, 210, 317-9). The way around this obstacle was for the Confederation to accept funds from the affiliates only, but without concerning itself overmuch over their origin. This 'blind eye' could not prevent problems from arising, as became evident in the case of Latin America where the US government funded union work in the 1970s, forcing the Confederation to re-think its policy (see chapter 4). The matter was taken up by a sub-committee of the FGPC convened in the early 1980s to consider the ICFTU's entire financial situation. Meetings were organised with both donor and recipient affiliates, ITSs and regional organisations in the different regions in order to discuss the issue, but by then it was practically as well as politically impossible to prohibit outside funding, and the ISF continued to operate as a separate entity.¹²

Lack of funds has operated as a major constraint on the organisation and has had a severe impact on its **human resources**: its staff, its top leadership, as well as its members. A number of writers have pointed out the difficulty for international trade union organisations to obtain suitable staff, especially at the professional level. Lorwin (1929, 474) attributes this to the essential insecurity of a career at the international as compared to the national level, and the

¹² 85EB/ 13(a), 1984; 89EB/15, 1986.

fewer opportunities for advancement. Certainly this is true to a degree, although it was probably less so by the end of the 20th century, by which time many national centres were in difficulties (interview notes: Lewis). However, this has as much to do with the real or perceived inadequacies of the international organisations in question as with the qualifications of the individual. When looked at from a longer historical perspective, it would perhaps be more accurate to describe the problem as one of increased specialisation, so that very few individuals are now qualified for such positions – or even aware of their existence.

In the earliest days of the movement, national leaders generally also occupied themselves with international questions; as the movement became larger and more institutionalised, the practice arose for national centres to engage dedicated personnel to handle international affairs (Windmuller 1963, 150-1). Similarly, early international organisations were quite small, with both the first ITSs and the International Trade Union Secretariat (ITUS) described as ‘letterboxes’ (Reinalda 1997, 12, quoting Max Zwalf). A number operated at least initially out of the headquarters or with the assistance of the staff of major national centres; for example the ITUS in the first decade of the 20th century shared the offices of its German affiliate, while Legien was secretary of both organisations (Reinalda 1997, 12; Van Goethem 2000). This led to the obvious risk of the domination by particular countries or organisations, and the problem has never been entirely resolved (Lorwin 1929, 412-4).

As international trade unionism increased its scope, the IFTU and ITSs, and later the ICFTU, competed for the same sort of personnel as the international departments of national centres, and in some countries also the diplomatic service; as a result the same people would circulate between organisations, creating a small cadre of international trade union specialists (interview notes: Etty; Tapiola). This too carried a risk, that such specialists would communicate and identify with each other more than with trade unionists at the national or industrial level, a

problem exacerbated by the limited language skills and lower level of formal education of most trade unionists. One observer/participant has described this as the rise of '*vergader* professionals' (professional attenders of meetings) (Etty and Tudyka 1974, Logue 1980, 26-9), and it is more pervasive than the danger, often referred to by critics of the international organisations, that such officials may adopt a lavish life-style leading to identification with the employers (Thompson and Larsen 1978, Logue 1980, 13).

Though problems do arise when international trade union officials identify too much with each other, it would be even more problematic if they were to identify primarily with trade unionists in their own country of origin. As has been seen, nationality can be a divisive issue within the international movement. Even if the ICFTU does not share offices with an influential national affiliate,¹³ its secretariat is nonetheless dominated by particular nationalities. Some are from countries that make the largest financial contributions to the Confederation: the Netherlands, Germany and the Nordic countries; but in addition there are many Belgians employed in the international movement, even though Belgium is not a major financial contributor; the same could be said to a lesser degree of the British. Naturally, staff members do not represent their own national centres within the international organisation, but through a common language and previous contacts, they often maintain close links with the unions of their own countries (Windmuller 1963, 150-1, presumably referring to Irving Brown's period at the secretariat).

The lack of qualified personnel from countries outside Europe has become a serious concern in recent years, and even in the late 1990s the number of staff from outside Europe at the Brussels secretariat was still small.¹⁴ A similar point could be made about the relative lack of women

¹³ Though since 1993 it has shared the same headquarters as the ETUC.

¹⁴ An interesting phenomenon over the last ten or so years has been the growing proportion of British staff at the ICFTU and the ITSs, including a number of general secretaries. Today the ICFTU and several of the largest ITSs (including PSI, UNI, ITGLWF, ICEM, and IUF) are headed by Britons or Americans. This may indicate that the international labour movement has now become more attractive than trade unions in the English-speaking world; and perhaps that English is increasingly the *lingua franca* of international trade unionism..

professionals, for whom the move to another country can often pose more problems than for men with similar qualifications (interview notes: Ramos; Stewart).

For the reasons indicated, friction can arise if an organisation such as the ICFTU draws its senior officials from well-known leaders of major affiliates. Hence after the first years of Oldenbroek and Becu, both already highly regarded as general secretaries of the ITF, the Confederation chose its general secretaries from the ranks of highly qualified, highly competent international specialists, no longer from the top leadership positions of the world labour movement: a pattern that was to change only with the accession of Bill Jordan in 1995. While it would be wrong to place too much weight on the identity of individual general secretaries and their deputies, some have proved far more successful than others in providing leadership in the difficult circumstances the ICFTU has lived through over the past thirty years, and their ideas and actions (or inactions) have had profound effects on the turn of events. This issue will be discussed further in the context of specific events, but in general it can be said that over this period, there has been only one really successful general secretary, the exception proving the rule of the almost insurmountable constraints on the role.

The human resources of a union organisation like the ICFTU are not restricted to its personnel, but encompass its membership, from whom come the participants in its decision-making bodies and actions. The sheer number of members is important in backing up the leadership's claim to representativity, much as it would be at a national level; so too is the geographical distribution of members. The effectiveness of individual affiliates in determining and carrying out international policies and actions is also a key resource. The decline in membership and influence of some national centres, and the rise of others, has had a significant effect on the Confederation's orientation and prospects. The leadership of the individual affiliates, and the sense of priorities of their presidents and general secretaries with regard to international issues,

is another important factor, as can be seen in the long history of obstructive tactics leading to the withdrawal from affiliation of the AFL-CIO. The role of the largest US affiliate, with its massive membership and resources, but its disinclination to act in common with other affiliates in accordance with ICFTU principles, has been a perpetual dilemma: either they are affiliated, providing resources and numerical weight, but blocking action in certain areas, or they are outside, thus depriving the Confederation of representative legitimacy and financial resources. but allowing other affiliates to advance their own priorities. It is a problem almost impossible to resolve, and has since been joined by similar dilemmas regarding the massive Russian and Chinese unions: if they are affiliated, they will dominate and change the nature of the organisation; if they are not, the organisation cannot make the same claim to world-wide representativity.

The ICFTU as an actor in the international system

This penultimate section locates the ICFTU within its environment, the international network of trade union organisations and the global industrial relations and international relations systems. While it is true that organisations, like individuals, must make their own history within circumstances that were not of their choosing, the Confederation has been able to make a significant impact on its circumstances, at least as far as its place within the international trade union movement is concerned. One of the most important areas in which the ICFTU has shaped its environment is its relations with the international trade secretariats (ITSs). The relation between the two types of organisation – by industry and by national centre – has never been straightforward, and has varied at different periods of their history.

It has often been observed that the international organisation of industrial unions predated that of national centres, just as individual unions did that of national centres (Koch-Baumgarten

1997; MacShane 1990; Reinalda 1997). In the 1920s, Edo Fimmen, who at various times was general secretary of both the IFTU and the ITF, suggested that the ITSs should themselves set up an international umbrella organisation, and indeed a number of attempts have been made since then to co-ordinate the work of the ITSs through a joint office, a general conference, a periodical or other means. But the relation between the ITSs and IFTU remained much more distant in practice, and there was never any serious risk of the ITSs supplanting the internationals based on national centres. In the immediate post-war period WFTU attempted to incorporate the ITSs as industrial departments within its own highly centralised organisation. As MacShane and others have argued, this botched attempt was one of the major reasons for the split within WFTU and the creation of the ICFTU (interview notes: Lewis; Carew 2000, 170-1; MacShane 1992a). Leaders of the ITF, the IMF and other ITSs, who were among the key participants in the meetings leading up to the creation of the ICFTU, argued strongly for their autonomy to be respected and guaranteed. The second Congress, held in Milan in July 1951, formalised the relationship as follows:

- (i) the ICFTU recognises the autonomy of the ITSs; the ITSs and the ICFTU will co-operate in all questions of common interest. The ICFTU recognises the ITS Co-ordinating Committee as giving collective representation, but this recognition does not prevent the ICFTU from having individual relations with the ITS, whether they belong to the Co-ordinating Committee or not;
- (ii) the ICFTU and the ITS recognise that they are in fact part of the same international trade union movement. This implies the adoption by the ITSs of the general policy of the ICFTU (Circular no. 5, 12.2.1953).

This statement, brief and to the point, left considerable scope for interpretation. While the coexistence of two types of relationship between the ICFTU and the ITSs – collective and

individual – has led to a certain amount of confusion, on the whole the debate over the Milan Agreement has focused on the second clause: the assertion that the ICFTU and ITSs form ‘part of the same international trade union movement’ and the call on the ITSs to adopt ‘the general policy of the ICFTU’. This clause has often been interpreted as formalising a ‘division of labour’ between the two types of organisation, with the ICFTU setting the general policies and acting in the political sphere, and the ITSs concentrating on more practical matters in the industrial sphere; but in practice the ITSs have never refrained from making general policies of their own, and have never been comfortable with an image of themselves as the ‘junior partners’ to a much younger organisation (see chapter 6). Nor has it been to the ICFTU’s advantage to be seen as dictating policy to the ITSs, for the Confederation has benefited considerably from the formal separation between the two bodies. Since the early years, the ITSs have played a major role in organising and assisting unions in countries or industries where the ICFTU for whatever reason was less welcome, whether in Japan, where the national centres eschewed international affiliation (interview notes: Horii; Nedzynski), or in many post-independence African countries, where governments did not allow national centres to seek it (interview notes: Kailembo). The possibility of pursuing a co-ordinated strategy of both types of organisation has considerably enriched the capacity for action of the ICFTU, while the resources available through the ISF have enriched the ITSs in the more traditional sense of the term.

Not all ITSs formally endorsed the Milan Agreement – neither the chemical nor the food workers’ internationals (ICF and IUF) did so – but in practice, despite subsequent differences of opinion, both the latter adhered to the same principles and pursued the same objectives as the Confederation (see chapter 6). A more serious difficulty arose in the early 1960s when the International Graphical Federation (IGF) accepted into membership the French *Fédération du Livre*, which was affiliated to the CGT. The Confederation decided to cut off relations with the

IGF, a policy changed only after the end of the Cold War. The official stance of the ICFTU did not, however, prevent other ITSs from maintaining relations with the IGF, or indeed individual national centres affiliated to the ICFTU. A rather different problem arose with the creation of an ITS of petroleum workers (IFPCW), which the ICF charged was poaching its members and was connected to employers and the US government. The ICFTU's willingness to maintain relations with the IFPCW, until the charges against it were substantiated, provoked the hostility of the ICF and its general secretary, Charles Levinson, who kept his distance from the Confederation for many years afterwards. (interview notes: Thorpe, Vanderveken).

The Milan Agreement was revised in December 1990, adding a third clause formalising the representation of the ITSs within ICFTU governing bodies (98EB/13, appendix). They were invited to send up to two representatives to meetings of the Sub Committee, and up to four representatives to the EB, all with consultative status (iii(a)). A scale was also fixed for ITS representation in ICFTU Congresses (iii(b)), and it was agreed that they would invite the ICFTU to their annual General Conference, and to Congresses of individual secretariats (iii(c)). Finally, a Joint Council would be created, to meet at the request of either party (iv). Relations between the Confederation and the ITSs have grown closer in some ways, as more and more companies operate in several different industrial sectors and greater co-ordination is required in international campaigns; at the same time, the ITSs have also grown larger and become more prosperous, in part through a series of recent mergers, enabling them to become more self-reliant and act more independently in relation to the ICFTU. The flexibility of the relationship has allowed for adaptation in the face of changing circumstances, although its very suppleness has also meant a lack of precision in the demarcation of jurisdictions, causing friction over the years.

The ICFTU also maintains links with other trade union bodies of a more specialised nature. The most important is the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD, known as TUAC. Like the Confederation itself, TUAC was formed in the immediate post-war period in the context of the emerging polarisation within the international trade union movement. Its original purpose was the promotion of the European Recovery Programme, the issue which was to play such an important part in the split within WFTU which led to the creation of the ICFTU (Carew 1987). Despite their shared ideology and practical goals, and the presence of many leaders of the Confederation on the committee, the two bodies did not establish a formal relationship. The main reason was the presence, alongside unions belonging to the new international, of others affiliated to the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU), or with no international affiliation. As in the relationship with the ITSs, the Confederation found it more advantageous not to have too close a link, so that TUAC could gain a broader membership and establish a more productive link with the European Recovery Programme, subsequently the Organisation for Economic Cooperation in Europe and later still the OECD (Gaskell 1998; interview notes: Ford, Tapiola).

The advantages of close but informal links are particularly apparent in the relationship with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which is covered in the next chapter. The Confederation also maintains relations with other specialised and regional internationals, but none so close as those with TUAC and the ETUC. Its relations with the Organisation for African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) have been generally friendly, especially during the long period when few African trade unions were willing or able to join the ICFTU's own regional organisation AFRO (see chapter 4). OATUU has also received support for individual projects from the ISF, and has often worked together with the Confederation within the Workers' Group of the ILO. There have been no similar independent bodies for Asia or Latin America, and the

ICFTU's relations with the pan-Arab trade union bodies have been much more reserved (Windmuller 1987, 84-86).

Finally, we must look at the ICFTU's relations with its fellow trade union internationals, the World Confederation of Labour (WCL, the former IFCTU, deconfessionalised since 1968), and WFTU. Both are covered in the next chapter, in the context of European regionalism and détente, but no picture of the ICFTU's place within its environment would be complete without some notion of this relationship. The three-way split within the international labour movement has maintained its present form since 1949, although its origins go back to the origins of the labour movement (Windmuller and Pursey 1998). In the beginning, the ICFTU was not the dominant organisation it has since become: in 1949 the WFTU had a clear majority of membership on the basis of the strength of the trade unions in Soviet-dominated Central and Eastern Europe, and at that time, China. (Carew 2000; Windmuller 1987, 82-83) While there were serious efforts to bring the Christian unions into the ICFTU fold, largely through the encouragement of the AFL, the large majority preferred to remain with the IFCTU, which then as now was a small 'third force'. By the late 1990s, the ICFTU clearly dominated the trade union scene: in 1999, it had 215 affiliated unions in 145 countries, with a total of 125 million members. In 1986, WFTU had between 200 and 250 million members, more than half of these from the Soviet central federation, which has since disintegrated. Following the recent departure of the French CGT, there are few influential unions left. The WCL claimed in 1993 a membership of 19 million, with the largest affiliates in Poland and Belgium (Pasture 1994, 121).

Formally, there has never been any relationship between the ICFTU and WFTU. By refusing to meet or even communicate with its ideological rival, except within the confines of the UN system, the Confederation has sought to deny any legitimacy to an organisation it believes is

not a genuine trade union body (Windmuller 1967, 93-4; interview notes: Vanderveken, Baker). As we shall see, the Confederation has not been able to prevent its individual affiliates from establishing contacts with those of WFTU, but it has held fast to its refusal to deal with WFTU as such, even withdrawing from participation in meetings to which WFTU has been invited. No such policy has ever been applied to the IFCTU/WCL, which is officially considered to be part of the same 'free trade union family', but relations with the latter have at times been far from cordial. The WCL has been less absolute in its relations with WFTU, to the extent that it has on occasion been accused of working together with WFTU against the ICFTU (for example in Latin America, see chapter 4). Every time the WCL has appeared to grow closer to WFTU, its relations with the ICFTU have become strained, and it has backed down. The ICFTU's friendly but flexible relations with the ITSs, and specialised and regional bodies such as TUAC, OATUU, and the ETUC is in marked contrast to its relations to the two internationals. From the start, the ICFTU acted as a hegemonic force within the world labour movement, even before it could claim to be the organisation representing the most members.

The dominant, even domineering stance of the ICFTU in relation to its rival internationals can be explained in part by the fierce competition for membership and support within public opinion during the Cold War; it can also be seen as part of the ICFTU's quest for recognition and legitimacy from outside the trade union movement. Leaving aside for the moment its desire to be seen as the voice of world labour by governments and opinion-makers, the Confederation's primary concern has always been its relationship with the UN institutions, especially the International Labour Organisation (ILO). To a great extent, the ICFTU inherited the leadership of the ILO Workers' Group that had been established by IFTU. Indeed, IFTU and the International Trade Secretariats were deeply involved in the creation of the ILO in 1919 (Van Goethem 2000, 80-82) and were ready-made interlocutors for the new tripartite

organisation. In this sense, IFTU and the ITSs on the one side, and the ILO on the other, conferred legitimacy and recognition on each other.

The situation after the Second World War was somewhat different: it was the unitary WFTU that first became the voice of world labour within the newly created United Nations Organisation, which incorporated the ILO as one of its specialised institutions. WFTU devoted much attention to the UN, and sought full membership of the General Assembly and voting rights in the Economic and Social Council (Carew 2000, 171). While unsuccessful, the Federation did manage to establish consultation rights with the latter body.¹⁵ After the split of 1949, the communist-dominated WFTU continued to focus on the UN, while paying less attention to the ILO. For its part, within weeks of its foundation the ICFTU obtained consultation rights at the ILO, and by 1950 had assumed the secretarial functions of the Workers' Group of the Governing Body (Carew 2000, 231). During these first post-war years, it competed with WFTU at the UN, where both now enjoyed consultation rights at ECOSOC, alongside the IFCTU/WCL and later OATUU (67EB/5(a)), but had a free hand within the ILO (Vanderveken, personal communication). When the Soviet Union became active within the ILO in the mid 1950s, the ICFTU was faced with open competition from WFTU, and from that time onward the two internationals presented separate lists for elections to the Workers' Group. At times the ICFTU presented a common list with the IFCTU/WCL, as well as with OATUU. Through its official role as secretary to the Workers' Group, the Confederation was able to set the trade union agenda at the ILO in the decades that followed. It was instrumental in the adoption of the International Labour Conventions on freedom of association, collective bargaining, and forced labour, then used these in order to submit complaints for non-compliance against the governments of Eastern Bloc and other dictatorship countries (such as

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that so few intergovernmental institutions have adopted a tripartite system like that of the ILO. The European Recovery Programme did set up a form of tripartite consultation, which was taken on by the OECD (interview notes: Ford), as did the European Coal and Steel Community, but

Venezuela: see Carew 2000, 232; Vanderveken, personal communication). The ILO remained a major focus for the ICFTU's work, for the representation and legitimacy it conferred, the battleground it provided for its competition against WFTU, and most of all the possibility it created for the adoption of internationally binding labour standards.

It is primarily through the ILO that the ICFTU can be seen as an actor in an emerging international industrial relations system. Its point of view is succinctly put by John Vanderveken, who headed the ICFTU Geneva office before becoming deputy general secretary and general secretary of the Confederation: 'the ICFTU always considered the ILO standards as the instrumentality through which certain basic rights could be removed from international economic competition and as the best guarantee for a humane functioning of an open trading system...' (personal communication). I shall look in more detail at this aspect of the ICFTU's work on the world economy in chapter 6, but stress here the importance of this function, both in the ICFTU's view and in its contribution to the practical results of international standard-setting. The ILO conventions are the closest equivalent to labour legislation that exists at global level, and the Confederation has invested a great deal of effort in securing their adoption. As to the other main aspects of industrial relations systems, the Confederation has not been involved in anything resembling international collective bargaining (unlike some ITSs), but it has carried out considerable lobbying of governments and public opinion over particular industrial issues, and has taken part in a number of campaigns around specific multinational companies (MNCs). This approach was particularly evident in the Confederation's long-running campaigns against apartheid in South Africa (and around other dictatorship countries); it joined with affiliates in seeking to discourage workers from emigrating to South Africa, and intervened with the head offices of MNCs operating in that country in support of collective bargaining objectives. In more recent years, it has also backed campaigns around individual

proposals for a tripartite system were not successful within the UN or the European Community. See Gobin 1996.

industries, such as the North American grape boycott, or companies, such as Pittston or Rio Tinto. These actions are similar to those undertaken by individual unions or national centres, but co-ordinated at the international level. The ICFTU has also established a strong presence at the OECD, through its close association with TUAC, and at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Finally, the Confederation has a place within what could be termed international civil society, the network of organisations and individuals that forms global public opinion. Much of its impact in this area has been through the ILO and UN system as a whole, as well as through individual campaigns. However, the prominence of the ICFTU and the trade union movement more generally in the post-war period has declined dramatically, both within the industrialised countries and at the international level. This decline was clear enough in the late 1970s and 1980s, when conservative and neo-liberal opinions began to hold sway. It is more curious that the decline does not appear to have been reversed by the revival of progressive opinion in the 1990s and the first years of the new century. While it is too soon to judge, it does seem that much protest and even workers' mobilisation now bypass the ICFTU and its affiliates, being led instead by a few non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many of them concentrated around a single issue. The ICFTU's relations with NGOs have always been fairly intermittent, with the notable exception of Amnesty International, with which it has always enjoyed close cooperation (interview notes: Vanderveken, Pursey). The Confederation, along with many of its affiliates in the industrialised countries where trade unions were traditionally strong, was at first sceptical of organisations that were seen as less permanent and less representative (interview notes: Pursey). Insisting on its role as the most representative world trade union body, the ICFTU has accepted organisations with a different but complementary function, like Amnesty, but has been extremely wary of others, including church-related charities providing assistance to workers in the Third World, or bodies like the Transnationals Information

Exchange (TIE) which could be considered to be in competition. This situation is now changing, as the Confederation's place in world public opinion is changing, and it is beginning to develop a different relationship to NGOs as a more equal exchange (see chapter 6).

Conclusion: The ICFTU in Crisis

This final section acts both as a conclusion to the analysis above, and an introduction to the case studies that follow. The preceding sections give some indication of how difficult a situation the ICFTU faced even at the best of times – it had to deal with competing interests and priorities among its affiliates; scarce resources; a complex structure with few powers of independent action – and the 1970s were not the best of times. The chapters which follow take as a starting point the most serious internal crisis in the ICFTU's history, which had a profound impact on its ability to function over at least the next ten years. (for more detail, see Carew 2000 and Gumbrell-McCormick 2000). This period throws into sharp relief the issues at stake for the organisation and the means at its disposal, and the severe limitations it imposed must be taken into account in any evaluation of the Confederation's subsequent actions.

As referred to above, a major crisis arose over the disaffiliation of the AFL-CIO in 1969. The departure of one of the largest affiliates in the Confederation after years of discord over détente and other matters removed over 12 million members out of a total of 63 million (*Report on Activities, 1972*, 13), severely aggravating the predicament of an organisation already facing financial difficulties (Carew 2000, 310). The general secretary Harm Buiter, widely considered responsible for the AFL-CIO's departure as a result of his mishandling of an application for separate affiliation from the United Auto Workers (UAW), proposed that the Confederation cut back its world-wide programmes and act primarily as a 'servicing' body for the affiliates at the

ILO and other international institutions. While this proposal was fought off by the assistant general secretaries, Heribert Maier and his successor John Vanderveken (interview notes: Vanderveken; 60EB/2,6; Carew 2000, 312), drastic economies were made nonetheless. Financial stringency had a severe effect on the human resources at the disposal of the ICFTU: staff at the Brussels secretariat was reduced from 81 at the beginning of 1969 to 71 by the end of 1971 (*Report on Activities*, 1972, 21). The crisis of resources increased the dependence on the contributions of the major European affiliates, while the loss of the large US membership diminished the Confederation's claim to represent world labour and reinforced the weight of the Europeans within the governing bodies. This was particularly significant given the domineering role of the United States government in world politics, and of US-based multinationals in the world economy. At the same time, the European affiliates were increasingly pursuing their own agenda, which included for some the creation of a separate organisation to handle relations with the European Community. This presented a challenge not only to the Confederation's resources and representation but also to its very identity as the voice of world labour.

The internal crisis provoked by the departure of the AFL-CIO, and the infighting among the major affiliates and between them and the secretariat, also had an impact on the leadership of the Confederation. After the early retirement of Buiter, ostensibly on medical grounds, there were two major candidates for the post of general secretary: Otto Kersten, head of the international department of the DGB, and C.V. Devan Nair, president of ARO. This unprecedented open contest corresponded to a growing distance between the ICFTU's European affiliates and those outside Europe, itself aggravated by the departure of the Americans. Kersten was the ultimate choice of the EB, but was regarded as far from ideal by many members, and by outside observers (interview notes: Ford, Nedzynski). We shall see below how he responded to some challenges, in particular the issues of détente and European integration, and how he handled a number of cases of violations of human and trade union

rights. The internal crisis of the ICFTU and the external challenges facing it, however, put a severe strain on Kersten's mental and physical health, and the governing bodies of the Confederation were faced with a new crisis of leadership, resolved only when Kersten agreed to resign on grounds of ill-health in 1982; he died before his resignation was made public.¹⁶

His successor was the assistant general secretary, John Vanderveken, who had assumed many of the duties of the general secretary from the mid 1970s onwards. Under Vanderveken, and his deputy, Enzo Friso, the Confederation found a new dynamism that coincided with the re-entry of the AFL-CIO. During the intervening years, however, Kersten, Vanderveken, and other leaders of the Confederation were forced – and enabled – to find a new role, a new cohesion, and new resources in order to maintain unity and develop the organisation's capacity to act.

¹⁶ Both Buitter and his predecessor, Omer Becu, succumbed to pressure much as Kersten did, and left before their terms had expired (Carew 2000, 302-4).

**Table 2.1 ICFTU Executive Board Seats and Affiliated Membership (000)
by Region**

Region	1972		1983		1992	
	Seats (%)	Mbp (%)	Seats (%)	Mbp (%)	Seats (%)	Mbp (%)
Africa	3 (12)	868 (2)	4 (11)	546 (1)	5 (11)	1997 (2)
Asia	5 (20)	4295 (11)	6 (17)	11047 (14)	8 (18)	19628 (20)
West Asia			1 (3)	1800 (2)	1 (2)	800 (1)
Middle East	2 (8)	844 (2)	2 (6)	865 (1)	2 (4)	882 (1)
Latin America	3 (12)	1552 (4)	4 (11)	12608 (16)	5 (11)	10812 (11)
Caribbean	1 (4)	122 (-)	1 (3)	311 (-)	1 (2)	149 (-)
<i>Third World</i>	<i>14 (56)</i>	<i>7681 (20)</i>	<i>18 (51)</i>	<i>27177 (34)</i>	<i>22 (50)</i>	<i>34268 (35)</i>
GB	2 (8)	10002 (26)	2 (6)	11006 (14)		
Europe	6 (24)	17803 (46)	8 (23)	24896 (31)	14 (32)	46872 (48)
North America*	[2] (8)	1300 (3)	6 (17)	14902 (19)	6 (14)	14990 (15)
Australia/NZ	1 (4)	1625 (4)				
Oceania			1 (3)	2448 (3)	2 (4)	2063 (2)
<i>Industrialised</i>	<i>11 (44)</i>	<i>30730 (80)</i>	<i>17 (49)</i>	<i>53252 (66)</i>	<i>22 (50)</i>	<i>63925 (65)</i>
Total**	25	38411	35	80429	44	98193

* 1972: 4 additional seats held open following AFL-CIO withdrawal

** Not including: President, General Secretary, ITS and women's representatives

Source: ICFTU Congress Reports

Table 2.2 ICFTU Affiliation Fees by Region (%)

Region	1960	1975	1998
Africa	1.4	1.6	1.4
Asia and Pacific (incl. Middle East)	4.3	11.8	15.6
Europe	57.1	81.3	58.6
Latin America and Caribbean	0.4	1.0	0.3
North America	36.8	4.3	24.0

Source: Van der Linden 2000, p. 536 (corrected).

Chapter 3

The Contested Identity of the ICFTU:

Between Ideology and Unity in Europe and the World

This chapter explores in greater detail the ideology and identity of the ICFTU: the tension between the desires to seek broader unity and to preserve identity, as manifested within the transformation of regional organisation at the European level, and in relations with the rival WCL at the world level. The two issues are inextricably intertwined, because the drive for unity at the European level led, for both organisational and ideological reasons, to a similar push for unity at the world level. While world unity remained elusive, one could argue that the search for unity at the European level was almost too successful, as the separate organisation it entailed endangered the internal cohesion and world identity of the Confederation. These two issues highlight the relation between ideology and capacity to act, as the secretariat and the governing bodies of the ICFTU sought to maintain internal cohesion and influence the course of events, and were sometimes obliged to lay aside ideological coherence in order to preserve organisational unity.

Le défi européen

As mentioned above, the ICFTU's European affiliates have always been prominent within the Confederation, providing a large proportion of its resources, both human and financial, and exerting leadership within its governing bodies. After the departure of the AFL-CIO they represented almost 60% of total membership, and a significantly higher proportion of the

Confederation's finances, including the vast bulk of contributions to the International Solidarity Fund (ISF). The withdrawal of the AFL-CIO distressed many leaders of the Confederation, but gave others the opportunity to pursue their own policy directions with less hindrance: this was particularly true of détente, but may also have played a role in the development of a separate European organisation. It was important to the Confederation to listen to the demands of the unions of one of its most influential regions (insofar as these demands were compatible); but it was equally important to maintain world unity and some semblance of ideological cohesion, and to avoid offending affiliates in other parts of the world.

The origins of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the conflicts it provoked within the ICFTU leadership shed much light on the tensions between different levels of international trade unionism and the necessary conditions for effective common action at all levels. By the 1970s, trade unions in western Europe were well on the way to developing a coherent response to economic and political integration. Yet they had to shape their regional political strategies and organisations in the context of rivalries between ideologies, states, and sub-regions, largely beyond their own control, especially the deep divisions between the ICFTU, the IFCTU/WCL and WFTU. Leaders of ICFTU affiliates in Austria and West Germany had already in the 1960s begun the process known as *Ostkontakten* – contacts with their counterparts in eastern Europe – in parallel with the détente policies of their respective social-democratic parties (interview notes: Göhring; Seideneck). At the same time, other member unions (as in the Netherlands) were pursuing closer links with WCL affiliates in their own countries or seeking greater unity of action with the WCL at the regional and world level. Some affiliates, notably the British TUC and the Belgian ABVV-FGTB, supported closer relations with both WFTU affiliates in western Europe and the WCL unions (interview notes: Debunne; Murray; Walsh). The end result of this process was the creation of a European trade union organisation, the ETUC, with a cohesiveness not matched by any other regional trade

union body. Its relations with the ICFTU have involved a singular mixture of respect for the autonomy of each while remaining part of the same trade union family.

Détente

The challenge of Europe was twofold: the pressure for détente, and the need to find an organisational structure to respond to the growth of the EEC. The push for détente arose in the 1960s and 1970s for a number of reasons: economic interests, particularly within Germany and Austria, in greater trade between East and West (Wedin 1974, 69); diplomatic interests, responding to a stalemate in the cold war; and the political interests of parties responding to a shift in public opinion against cold war divisions.¹

Within the trade union movement, the issue of détente was complicated by political conflicts between left and right, in many cases dating back to pre-war origins. These same divisions surfaced within the ICFTU, and coloured the debate over Europe as a whole. It is difficult to define this division in simple or neutral terms. John Vanderveken, who became ICFTU general secretary in 1982, refers to a division between those affiliates who believed that it was never possible to work together with communists, whether in the same or separate unions, and those who believed that productive relations were possible under certain circumstances.² Others

¹ H. O. Vetter, president of the DGB, made a number of press interventions on this subject: for example, 'Labor's East Policy', *International Herald Tribune*, 30 January 1970; 'Wir sind nicht der verlängerte Arm Bonns', *Die Welt*, 25 March 1970.

² According to Vanderveken, this division was closely linked to the national and even personal circumstances of the individuals concerned. For example, those who had fought against communist domination in France and Italy in the immediate post-war period generally remained strongly anti-communist; while those in the UK or Belgium, which were never threatened by a serious communist

involved in this debate, such as the then chair of the TUC International Committee, Jack Jones, refer to a division between those against and those in favour of the unity of the labour movement. Both sides in the debate agreed on the ICFTU's definition of free trade unions as those accepting ideological pluralism, independent of churches, parties, employers, and governments; both opposed the east European model of trade unions as conduits for party policy. But they differed on their views of the presence of communists within their own organisations, and on relations with the official Eastern unions. No doubt their perceptions depended to a considerable extent on their own experiences: Jones had worked constructively alongside communists in the TGWU, an experience very different from that of many colleagues on the EB (interview notes: Jones; Jones 1986).

ICFTU Policy on Contacts with Communist-Controlled Organisations

The core of ICFTU policy on relations with trade unions in eastern Europe was set in a series of special meetings of the EB and the FGPC in the early 1970s, and a special committee on contacts with communist-controlled trade union organisations was set up by the 58th EB in 1972. The basic principle was that bilateral relations between national centres were acceptable – courtesy visits, exchanges of delegations – but that multilateral relations were not, except in the framework of the ILO. This meant that the frequent overtures in this period from WFTU or its affiliates, to discuss European security, disarmament, or other issues, had to be rebuffed. Furthermore, the ICFTU should be informed about bilateral contacts, and consulted whenever any doubts arose.

challenge, believed it was possible to work together with the communists. Similarly the Austrian confederation ÖGB, which strongly supported *Ostkontakten*, faced only a weak communist presence within its ranks (interview notes: Göhring; Vanderveken).

The policy on contacts with communist trade union organisations appears fairly straightforward in theory, but it was far from easy to apply at the time, and tensions soon arose between affiliates with different policies, and between affiliates and the secretariat. Some affiliates, most notably the French *Force Ouvrière* (FO), had no bilateral contacts, and voiced their suspicions of those who had. Others, like the Nordic unions and the TUC, had extensive bilateral contacts, and were jealous of their right to pursue them. In practice, only some affiliates actually consulted the ICFTU on contacts, as for example in the series of international trade union gatherings organised by the 'Dubrovnik Group' in the 1970s. The German and Austrian affiliates consulted the ICFTU, and did not participate; the British TUC and several others did not consult, and did participate (interview notes: Walsh). On the issue of relations with communist unions within western Europe, the Italian affiliates, especially CISL (*Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Lavoratori*), vigorously defended their right to pursue trade union unity within Italy through their common front with the CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*). The definition of which international trade union gatherings were acceptable, and which were not, was even more fraught with difficulties. The ICFTU was often faced with the dilemma whether or not to participate in an international trade union meeting, however worthwhile, if WFTU or one of its affiliates was involved. On one occasion, the ICFTU representatives at a rally in Québec to support striking public sector workers told the organisers they would not address the meeting if the WFTU delegate were allowed to do so. This problem was even more acute when a meeting was organised under the auspices of the UN, as were many meetings on apartheid in South Africa. The secretariat's efforts to steer a middle course often seemed to invite criticism from all sides. Some affiliates argued that the ICFTU was losing support in the Third World by staying away from potentially important initiatives on the transnational corporations, South Africa, and other key issues of the day if there was a WFTU presence. On the other hand, the failure to prevent contacts between its affiliates and communist-controlled unions aroused great concern from the FO and some other

European affiliates, the remaining North American affiliates, and some affiliates from the developing countries.

The Beginnings of Change: *Ostkontakten*

In the Europe of the 1970s, ICFTU policy was put under strain by recurring invitations from east European unions to multilateral meetings; pressures within individual national affiliates to adopt a new, more open policy; and developments in the international situation itself. In July 1973 the secretariat reported that a meeting had taken place in Vienna between representatives of the TUC, DGB, and the Swedish LO, and the Soviet, Hungarian and East German trade unions. This aroused some consternation within the ICFTU Executive Board, and the representative of the Dutch NVV (*Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigingen*), Nel Tegelaar, requested that the matter be taken up at their next meeting, in order to determine whether the Vienna meeting was consistent with ICFTU policy. In the ensuing debate the German and British participants strongly defended their initiative, which they said was for the purpose of arranging a European conference of the ILO, but the political considerations were if anything more significant than the procedural ones. Vetter spoke of the significance of the opportunity to discuss matters of common interest with eastern European representatives. Len Murray, general secretary of the TUC, recalled that the meeting had been exploratory and informal, and warned the ICFTU to 'keep a low profile' on the issue; Georges Debunne, president of the Belgian ABVV/FGTB (*Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond/Fédération Générale des Travailleurs de Belgique*) called on the ICFTU to be 'logical' in the application of its policy. But many members regarded the meeting with suspicion, particularly those from North America and the developing countries. As Devan Nair argued, the Europeans might have enough 'homogeneity and cohesiveness' to resist the influence of communists within their region, but Asian affiliates would find it more difficult to withstand such pressures (60EB/10(d1), 61EB/2,10(d1)).

In the view of many of the critics, from the ITSs as well as the developing country affiliates, 'regionalism' had raised its head: the Europeans were taking a new path, diverging from that of the ICFTU, and placing affiliates in other regions in danger. The response of the general secretary was to reiterate the policy on contacts with communist-controlled trade union organisations, and to call for a further meeting to 'synthesise policy'; but in fact the issue remained unresolved and the divisions became even more marked. At the same time that this question was being fought out within the ICFTU, the other debate on Europe, concerning the formation of a separate regional trade union organisation, was developing along closely parallel lines, involving many of the same actors and giving rise to the same concerns (Debunne 1987, 36-8).

The Debate over Europe: Towards a Separate Organisation

The long path towards the formation of the ETUC was tortuous, and a source of major tensions within the ICFTU as a world body. Even more clearly than with the issue of détente, the desire of most of the European affiliates to form a separate organisation was seen as an affront to trade union internationalism and a threat to the continuity of the ICFTU as a world body. As with détente, this was seen as both a procedural and a political problem: the nature of the links between the new body and the ICFTU was the main focus of debate, but the problem of regionalism and the best way to integrate regions within a world organisation and form a united policy for that organisation were addressed directly and frankly. On the whole, the same divisions appeared as over the European unions' moves on détente, although this was complicated by rivalries among the Europeans over the geographical scope and leadership of the new body.

At the ICFTU Congress in July 1972, the issue was a major challenge for the new general secretary. Renate Peltzer, his personal assistant at the time, recalls the difficulties in drafting his opening speech: it was impossible to find a policy that would please everybody (interview notes: Peltzer). In the event, the paragraph on Europe in the general policy statement provoked intense debate and it was clear that consensus could not be achieved. Summarising the discussion, Kersten insisted that despite sharp differences over the status and composition of any new European organisation, all agreed that there should be some link with the ICFTU and that conflicts over policy must be avoided. To achieve a resolution of the issue, he proposed that it be referred to the new EB, and this was agreed (*Report of the Tenth World Congress, 1972*).

At the EB meeting in November 1972, the question again provoked lengthy debate. Vetter gave a detailed exposition of the history and prospects of European trade union organisation. He traced the progress of the ideal of a united Europe following the devastation of the Second World War, through the development of the European Coal and Steel Community to the emergence of the EEC and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA). The ICFTU's own European Regional Organisation (ERO), created in November 1950, had been wound up at the end of 1969; it had 'quietly passed away'. The European unions had set up a liaison office for relations with the EEC institutions, which later became the ECFTU, and in the non-EEC countries had established the EFTA-TUC. In the late 1960s, leaders of sixteen ICFTU affiliates had begun to discuss their common problems, during the course of which 'the will became pronounced to expand the ECFTU beyond [its present] limits' and to set up a body that would include both the original six EEC countries and the EFTA countries still outside. Following the present discussion a further European meeting would be held in Luxembourg in December to iron out the remaining difficulties before the formal launch (59EB/2).

Responding to Vetter's statement, P. P. Narayanan, leader of the Malaysian TUC and later president of the ICFTU, went to the heart of the concerns of many non-European (and also some European) EB members: he himself favoured a certain 'flexibility' in relations between the ICFTU and its regional organisations, but saw no reason why the Europeans could not remain in a regional body of the ICFTU. Once they split off, other regions would follow, and this would lead to the disintegration of the world body: 'the outer shell would be there but the soul would be missing'. Devan Nair and Stefan Nedzynski, general secretary of PTTI, both referred to the danger that a separate trade union body might be founded in Asia, and similar fears were expressed with regard to Latin America. Nedzynski added that all the ITSs had misgivings about the effects of the separate European organisation on their own work within Europe.³ Frank Walcott of Barbados speculated on the reasons for the present trend toward 'Europeanisation': the real origin of the current developments was the departure of the USA from the ICFTU, thus weakening it as a representative world body. The Europeans, perceiving that they could no longer be strong through the ICFTU, now wanted to form their own bloc and seek strength through their own identity.

This was the key question: could the Europeans still get what they wanted by staying in the ICFTU, and what *did* they want? Vetter insisted that the European trade unions wanted unity, but for this great flexibility was required in relations with the ICFTU. Because of the special circumstances of Europe, it could not be compared to other regions: the Europeans 'were being pushed, by a popular will and by compelling necessities, into setting up this large confederation'. The ideal of a united Europe inspired both the trade unions and the general population, and this was closely linked to the economic and political integration of western

³ This fear was to some extent well-founded: the subsequent development of the European Industrial Committees (later Federations) raised difficulties in defining their relationship with the corresponding ITS. See Keller and Henneberger (1995: 128-55) and Gumbrell-McCormick (1996: 80-101).

Europe and to the search for improved relations with the East. Hence Debunne insisted that the new European body should be 'as wide as possible from the outset'; how many countries it should encompass should be left to the Europeans. The task facing the free trade unions was especially complex, because of the heterogeneity of Europe, geographically and politically, and the presence of trade union groupings outside the ICFTU. This desire for the widest possible unity was soon to lead the ETUC to admit organisations outside the ICFTU, but none of the speakers went so far as to propose this at the time.⁴ Indeed, one of the few speakers who referred openly to the possibility that organisations that were not ICFTU affiliates might enter the new European body was André Bergeron of the FO; he was strongly opposed to the idea (interview notes).

As to Vetter's 'compelling necessities', the most important was clearly the growing political and economic importance of the EEC, the extension of its membership⁵ and the development of its institutions. In the words of Bruno Storti, secretary-general of CISL and a former president of the ICFTU, 'Europe now had a government with executive power. Employers, well organised, were trying to lead the Community towards a... conservative, neo-capitalist entity.' Europe was a reality to which trade union structure had to adapt.

⁴ Debunne considered it 'premature' to address this issue before the new organisation was established; but both he and Jones, key players in these events, state today that the impetus was for the new body to include affiliates of both WFTU and the WCL (interview notes: Debunne; Jones; Debunne 1987, 38, 42-3).

⁵ The debate coincided with the conclusion of negotiations for the accession to the EEC of Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the UK; all joined in 1973 except for Norway, which rejected membership in a referendum.

Throughout this heated debate, Kersten and the president, Donald MacDonald of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), sought to balance the opposing forces and emphasise areas on which there was a consensus. No one wanted the disintegration of the ICFTU, no one was questioning the good intentions of the Europeans or their desire to cooperate within the ICFTU. The issue was largely procedural: what was to be the formal relationship between the ICFTU and the new European body? At this time, the leadership still believed it possible to maintain an 'organic link'. The EB agreed that the general secretary should go to the forthcoming meeting of European affiliates to argue for a constitutional link and a division of responsibilities between the two organisations. But as Walcott shrewdly observed, a decision had already been made by the Europeans, and no one could force them to change their minds.

The Founding of the ETUC

The European conference was held in Luxembourg at the end of 1972, chaired by Matthias Hinterscheid, general secretary of the CGT Luxembourg (otherwise known as OGB-L, *Onafhängege Gewerkschafts-Bond Lëtzebuerg*). The delegates agreed on the decision-making procedures and structure of the new organisation, and on its geographical scope: it would include countries of both the EEC and EFTA, involving seventeen ICFTU affiliates in fourteen countries. But the questions that were most important for the ICFTU delegation and the general secretary were not yet resolved: the name of the new organisation and its relationship to the ICFTU (Debunne 1987, 44-5).

These and all other unresolved issues had to be fought out at a meeting in February 1973, followed immediately by the founding Congress. Debunne, who chaired the first meeting, recalls the last-minute divisions that appeared over the apparent deal that had been struck between the TUC and the DGB for the leadership of the new organisation. When Vetter

announced the DGB's nomination of Vic Feather of the TUC as the new body's first president. Hinterscheid expressed the view of many delegates from the smaller countries: 'we cannot accept a *fait accompli* imposed by the two heavyweights'; but he resigned himself to the inevitable. The candidature of Thomas Nielsen, from Denmark, proposed by the ÖGB as a counterweight to the DGB proposal, was not successful (Debunne 1987, 46).

Vetter's role was of great significance for the creation of the ETUC and for the ICFTU. At an earlier European meeting in October 1972 he had called for delay, in order to seek the advice of the ICFTU. At this time, he also argued strongly that only ICFTU affiliates be accepted by the new body, and that membership be restricted to EEC countries, largely because of reservations about the inclusion of the TUC, which at that time maintained a strong anti-EEC policy. Apparently he was persuaded to change his position by Arne Geijer, president of the Swedish LO, who insisted that 'it would be a historical mistake to split the western European trade union movement'.⁶ The shift in the DGB's stance and its collaboration with the TUC at the opening Congress of the ETUC meant that the ICFTU's strongest ally within the new body was no longer acting as an advocate for its position but seeking to build alliances of its own within Europe.

The other key issue was the title of the new body: would this include the word 'free', thus symbolising its affinity with the ICFTU? In the long debate over this question, the DGB abandoned its former view and now supported the shorter title which was adopted. The British

⁶ André Thiria, formerly acting secretary of EFTA-TUC, reported by Bo Jonsson (personal communication). In any event, restricting membership to EEC member states would not have excluded the TUC following the UK accession. Also important was the insistence by the Danish LO that they would not join the new body after Denmark joined the EEC if other Nordic unions were kept out.

and Belgians were the strongest advocates of broad membership and an ideologically neutral title; unions like the FO which still argued for the official ICFTU position were marginalised. Jones recalls his own contribution to this debate: he pointed out that the East German unions had the word 'free' in their title. There was therefore no certainty that such a name would protect the new organisation from unsuitable influences! (interview notes: Debunne, Jones).

In the end, all Vetter's proposals went through: the main office-holders (Feather as president, Theo Rasschaert – former secretary of the ECFTU – as general secretary), and most importantly for the ICFTU, the name of the new organisation. It was also agreed that the ICFTU general secretary would be invited to attend meetings of the ETUC executive. At this time, only ICFTU affiliates were accepted as members. At the next meeting of the ICFTU EB, in July 1973, there was no repetition of the previous lengthy debates on Europe. It was simply noted that the ICFTU and ETUC would each invite the other's general secretary to executive meetings, and that there would be a division of labour between the two: the ICFTU would remain responsible for work on the European dictatorship countries (Spain, Greece and Portugal) while the ETUC would take responsibility for the democratic countries (59EB; 60EB/2, 13(d); Barnouin 1986; Dølvik 1997; Gobin 1996).

The Admission of Unions from Outside the ICFTU

This was not the end of the challenge for the ICFTU, however. During the first year of the ETUC's existence, applications for membership were received, first from christian trade unions, subsequently from the Italian CGIL. The admission of the former in the spring of 1974 (discussed in more detail below) was generally acceptable to the ICFTU; but the case of the latter was very different. CGIL was the most significant western affiliate of WFTU and was

closely linked to the Italian Communist Party (PCI), whose members formed a majority of its leadership.

The request from the ETUC general secretary for consultation on this application provoked a highly charged debate at the May 1974 EB meeting, reminiscent of the earlier controversies over détente and the creation of the ETUC. As noted above, some trade union leaders had always aimed eventually at uniting the entire European trade union movement within a single organisation, but others were as strongly opposed. On this occasion, delegates from outside Europe, joined by FO and the representatives of the ITSs, again warned of the danger of a precedent that would harm the interests of the ICFTU world-wide. Once the ETUC admitted one communist union, as Tom Bavin of the agricultural workers' international IFPAAW put it, this would provide 'just that little degree of respectability which the communist movement needed in the developing world'. Against these arguments, Storti defended the democratic *bona fides* of CGIL, which had just ceased full membership of WFTU and since 1971 had been part of a unitary federation with CISL and the smaller ICFTU affiliate UIL (*Unione Italiana del Lavoro*).⁷ The other European speakers, except for the FO representatives, backed Storti, stating that whatever their misgivings about CGIL they were prepared to accept the judgment of the Italians. The Austrian leader Alfred Ströer, who had been a prisoner of both communists and fascists, spoke effectively of the dangers of a return of fascism in Italy: the unity of the Italian trade union movement was therefore vital. Debunne wondered whether the ETUC had not committed a 'tactical error' in seeking the advice of the ICFTU at all. The ETUC was an 'independent, autonomous body' and should be left to make its own decisions; it was

⁷ As part of the accommodation between the three Italian confederations, they established the principle of incompatibility between executive office in a union and in a political party, thus loosening the links between CGIL and the PCI.

‘inconceivable’ that the Europeans would ever take a course opposed to that of the ICFTU (61EB; 62EB/2: 26-7).⁸

Following Debonne’s lead, the president summed up the debate in effect by deciding not to decide: MacDonald stated that it would be a ‘tragedy’ if the issue came to a vote, which would result in ‘division and disunity’ within the world body and would interfere with the autonomy of the ETUC. Yet, he went on, it was important that there had been an exchange of views in which the ICFTU could make its views known to its sister organisation. Despite continuing opposition from some members, in July 1974 the ETUC admitted CGIL, which continued to maintain its independent course within Europe and at world level. Much later, in 1991, CGIL became a member of the ICFTU as well. The ICFTU had experienced years of often bitter debate over the issue of Europe, but was not torn apart by it. The Europeans were allowed to pursue their own *Ostpolitik*, and to form a separate and autonomous organisation, but the ICFTU leadership was able to contain both détente and the ETUC within its broader global strategy, by allowing for flexibility in the application of its policies, and by maintaining close links while respecting the autonomy of its sister organisation. However, the handling of this issue also shows how weak were the sanctions at the disposal of the ICFTU’s governing bodies and secretariat: it could only reiterate policy, not impose it.

Trade Unionism after the Dictatorships

When Kersten took office in 1972, three countries of southern Europe were ruled by dictators. Spain and Portugal had been under fascist domination since before the war; in Greece a brief

⁸ According to Ströer, there were a number of meetings at this time between CGIL and the ÖGB, and the CGIL leader Lama was influenced by the ÖGB’s arguments that they should leave the WFTU before applying for membership in the ETUC.

period of democracy was ended by a military coup in 1967. In all three countries, free trade unionism was suppressed. The ICFTU, often in cooperation with the WCL, closely monitored the situation in each country; publicised human rights violations and submitted frequent protests, particularly to the ILO; at times sent observers to trials of unions activists; and provided humanitarian relief.

Within a few years the situation was transformed. In Portugal, fascist rule was overthrown in April 1974 by a popular revolt backed by key elements in the armed forces. In Greece the military dictatorship collapsed a few months later. In Spain, the death of Franco in November 1975 was followed by partial liberalisation, then renewed repression; here too, revolt escalated and in 1977 the authoritarian regime disintegrated. This provided an opportunity for the Confederation to assist the growth of the free trade union movement and a challenge in terms of policy and resources. The trade union situation in each country was very different, and this was reflected in different approaches by the Confederation.

In Greece the main confederation, the GSEE, had been an ICFTU affiliate before the coup; but in 1969 the regime imposed its own nominees as leaders of the union, which was immediately disaffiliated. Free trade unionists formed an underground opposition, the DEKE, which was supported by the ICFTU. With the fall of the junta its nominees were removed from the GSEE leadership and largely replaced by DEKE activists, and the union was re-admitted to the ICFTU in November 1974.

In Spain the situation was more complicated. The socialist-led *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT), which had existed before the victory of Franco in the civil war, maintained a leadership in exile and was a member of the ICFTU (as was the Basque union ELA/STV). In 1964 the UGT re-activated its organisation within the country; in April 1976,

following the death of Franco, it challenged the Spanish authorities by holding its Congress there, with Kersten and many other European trade union leaders in attendance. But on the ground the UGT had to compete with the workers' commissions which had grown up clandestinely, largely under communist leadership, during the Franco years, and had begun to colonise the official 'vertical' union structure established by the regime. In 1976 these were consolidated into a national trade union, the *Comisiones Obreras* (CC.OO.). For a brief period the UGT cooperated with its larger rival in a coordinating committee, but abandoned this in March 1977 because the CC.OO. 'refused to discontinue the integration of their militants into the government-controlled vertical trade unions', whereas the UGT demanded their 'total dismantling'. In continuing and amplifying its assistance to the UGT, the ICFTU enabled it to mount an effective challenge to its more strongly entrenched and communist-led counterpart (*Report on Activities 1975-1978*: 192).

The situation in Portugal was different again. As in Spain, opposition activists led by the communists had infiltrated the official unions of the fascist regime, in this case gaining control of a number of sectoral 'unions', which came together in a coordinating body called *Intersindical*. This was quickly banned, but emerged from the underground after the 1974 revolution. The ICFTU sent two fact-finding missions immediately after the revolution to explore whether it would be possible to work with the new national centre; but soon concluded that *Intersindical* was 'dominated by elements belonging to the Communist Party' and thus that 'it was impossible to engage in a true dialogue'. From an early stage, the Confederation sought to encourage a greater role for non-communists in the labour movement, initially through its links with the leader of the Portuguese Socialist Party, Mario Soares, while still in exile. He provided the ICFTU with lists of contacts within Portugal, which were used to set up training and education programmes sponsored by the Confederation with the assistance of the DGB, TUC and other affiliates. It was this nucleus of largely socialist trade unionists who played a

key role in forming a new organisation, the *União Geral de Trabalhadores de Portugal* (UGTP), which held its founding Congress in January 1979. Celebrating this event, it was reported that ‘the ICFTU has been making every effort to help the Portuguese workers to build up authentic and democratic trade unions’. But the direct involvement of the Confederation in the creation of the UGTP was controversial at the time, and remains so today; some EB members, in particular Jones, criticised what they saw as an effort to split the labour movement, and there were scarcely veiled complaints by some affiliates that hostility to *Intersindical* was influenced by cold war reflexes (interview notes: Friso, Jones, Vanderveken; *Report on Activities 1972-1974*, 139; *Report on Activities 1975-1978*, 188-9).⁹

The Global Search for Unity

Another key priority for Kersten at the beginning of his term of office was unity with the WCL. Though the issue was global in character, here too there was a strong European dimension. Both ‘free’ trade union internationalism and its smaller christian rival were originally European initiatives. The existence of rival trade union organisations committed to conflicting ideologies dated back to the turn of the century, when many of the early European unions were socialist and often anti-clerical in inspiration and were strongly opposed by the catholic church. By the time the ICFTU was founded the ideological fault-lines had become blurred, and a shared anti-

⁹ See also D. Wagner, ‘Bericht über meine Reise nach Portugal vom 24.6 bis 8.7.1974’, file 32/15, Irving Brown papers; ICFTU circular no. 44 (1974); J. Barreto 1992, 462-5. At the 1975 Congress the Belgian ABVV/FGTB and others affiliates refused to vote for the resolution on Portugal which ‘condemn[ed] all those political forces which are motivated by dictatorial ideologies and seek to control the trade unions for their own purposes’; in the view of the Belgian speaker, this was ‘too unilateral and too limited’ (*Report of the Eleventh World Congress*, 622). Much later the CC.OO., and later still *Intersindical* (now known as CGTP), were admitted to the ETUC.

communism meant that in some countries the old divisions could be overcome. But in others, old enmities died hard.

By the 1970s, forces within both internationals were advocating unity. As has been seen, several important European affiliates of the ICFTU held this view; at the same time, some of their WCL counterparts were feeling increasingly isolated within their much smaller world body and its even smaller trade secretariats and sought a way out of their 'catholic ghetto' (Pasture 1994, 101; Georgi 1995). For European trade unionists, the consolidation of the EEC gave a new urgency to the task of overcoming inherited divisions; and there was a 'logic' (a favourite word of Debunne) in seeking unity at the European and world levels as part of the same process. This search for unity at the European or world level sometimes went hand-in-hand with sharp confrontation at the national level: most notably in Belgium, where relations between Debunne and Jef Houthuys, head of the rival christian union, were far from cordial (interview notes: Debunne, Vanderveken).

For most ICFTU leaders the WCL was a minor rival and at times an irritant, but not an enemy like WFTU; they generally included its affiliates within the imprecise category of 'free trade unionism' (Morris to Maier, 10.9.71; Kersten to Rasschaert, 6.3.74; cited in Debunne 1987, 52). By the ICFTU's own 1973 estimate, the WCL had 4.2 million paying members throughout the world, including a mere 106,000 in Latin America, with a budget of \$400,000 from affiliation fees together with resources of up to \$2 million from Dutch, German, Swiss and other church funds (61EB/2,9).¹⁰ In some regions, as in Asia and Africa, the WCL had a limited presence but posed a danger of splitting unions friendly to the ICFTU. In Latin

¹⁰ I have not been able to check these figures with WCL sources, but they are broadly consistent with those in Pasture 1994, 121. Assuming that the figures are accurate, nearly half of the world membership was in Belgium, France and the Netherlands alone.

America, however, it was perceived as a serious threat by many ICFTU affiliates and by ORIT, whose leaders lambasted the WCL regional organisation CLAT as 'working with anti-democratic forces in the region' and playing into the hands of WFTU (Mathur and Urtusástegui, in 61EB/2,9). Within the ILO, the two confederations had competed for votes during elections to the Workers' Group, leading to 'completely adverse results in the 1966 and 1969 elections' (Brück, WCL general secretary, to Kersten, 24.2.72).

Yet both internal and external forces were bringing the two confederations closer together. The ICFTU and WCL normally cooperated at secretariat level (both were based in Brussels), within TUAC, and within the ILO and other UN bodies. They often worked together on human and trade union rights issues, especially on the dictatorships in Spain and Portugal – often issuing joint press releases and joint complaints to the ILO, and sometimes organising joint meetings with opposition groups within the two countries.¹¹ The Basque ELA-STV had a dual affiliation to the two confederations, a unique exception to ICFTU rules that further fostered cooperation with the WCL.¹² The two confederations took part in a joint protest in April 1973 against the jailing of Québec public sector unionists including the then WCL president, M. Pépin. The two world bodies also worked together on the world economy and the problems raised by the transnational corporations (60EB/6; 60EB/10(c)(v); ICFTU/WCL/1, in 59EB/11).

¹¹ For example, a joint complaint over the dismissal of Nicolas Redondo, UGT activist and later general secretary.

¹² ELA/STV may be the only national centre to have enjoyed a triple affiliation: to the IFCTU in 1933, WFTU in 1945, and the ICFTU in 1949 (Pasture 1994, 124). The catholic fraction of the ÖGB was also affiliated to the WCL (L. Reichhold, *Geschichte der christlichen Gewerkschaften Österreichs*, Vienna, 1987; interview notes, Göhring). The only other dual affiliation to the WCL and ICFTU was that of Solidarnosc in 1986.

Deconfessionalisation of the WCL

Organisational unification first became a serious possibility with the transformation of the IFCTU in 1968, when it dropped its exclusively christian identification and adopted the more embracing title WCL. This occurred in part at the instigation of its main French affiliate, the *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (CFDT), which had itself 'deconfessionalised' in 1964 and was briefly radicalised by the 'utopian' ideas of May 1968. In alliance with affiliates in the developing countries and in Canada, the CFDT (supported only by the Dutch catholic NKV in Europe) helped transform the IFCTU with its staid image as a largely European christian international into an organisation with a radical social programme and a 'third worldist' view of the international economy (Etty 1978b, 196; Georgi 1995; Groux and Mouriaux 1989, 99-101, 271-2; Pasture 1994, 85, 107, 114-7).

These developments had contradictory implications for the ICFTU. The WCL seemed to the ICFTU to be pursuing alliances that might involve closer contact with WFTU: it had participated in a meeting organised by the Yugoslav trade unions in Dubrovnik, in February 1972, together with representatives of WFTU, the All African Trade Union Federation (AATUF), the Japanese *Sohyo*, and other national and international union organisations associated with the 'non-aligned' movement. The meeting discussed the forthcoming elections to the Workers' Group at the ILO, and how to reduce the ICFTU's 'monopoly' of seats. Despite the assurance by the WCL general secretary that he 'did not wish to form a bloc antagonistic to the ICFTU' (Brück to Kersten, 24.2.72), this naturally provoked the ICFTU leaders, many of whom regarded the WCL's new radicalism as a form of posturing. Reflecting later, Vanderveken went so far as to say that the WCL's 'gauchiste' pose 'pissed me off' (interview notes: Vanderveken).

In the uncertain context of détente and the rise of the non-aligned movement, the ICFTU perceived a danger of losing its pre-eminence in the free trade union movement and saw advantage in pursuing unity within the non-communist camp. Despite annoyance at the WCL's claim to act as a 'bridge between the ICFTU and WFTU' (of which the ICFTU, again according to Vanderveken, had no need) the internal transformation of the formerly christian confederation and its stated desire to pursue unity also provided an opportunity for rapprochement, and the ICFTU was quick to respond when the WCL proposed a meeting. This took place in Brussels in October 1972. While there had often been informal discussions between general secretaries and staff, this was the first formal meeting with large delegations from the governing bodies of both sides, including representatives of affiliates in the developing countries. The results were inconclusive, but the two parties agreed to hold regular meetings, at least twice a year, in order to pursue closer cooperation and possible unity.

Pressure was growing within the WCL for unity with the ICFTU. At its Evian Congress in September 1973, the CFDT leader Edmond Maire criticised the slow progress of unity between the two confederations, warned of a splintering of the international trade union movement through competition at national level, and concluded that 'the renewed life of the international trade union movement does not depend on the WCL alone. But the WCL must state that it is prepared to disband as an organisation for the benefit of a development toward unity' (Maire, quoted in 60EB/8). Most WCL affiliates did not back Maire's position, fearing the loss of their own identity in any possible merger with the larger organisation. The ICFTU, which was represented at Evian by Vanderveken, was also cautious in its response to this call for unity from one of the most influential leaders of a WCL affiliate. EB members expressed concern over CLAT's 'spoiling tactics' in Latin America and over attempts by the WCL to 'strengthen

its position' in Asia, and Kersten warned that the ICFTU 'should not go too far' but cooperate on selected issues (Pasture 1994, 93-5; 61EB/2,9).

Unity at the European and the World Levels

The initiative now shifted to Europe, with the founding of the ETUC in February 1973. As seen above, the European ICFTU affiliates had decided to pursue their goals of unity within Europe 'one step at a time', first resolving the issue of 'geographical' broadening of their structures by forming a single European organisation for affiliates in the European Community and EFTA before exploring 'ideological' broadening by admitting members from outside the ICFTU (interview notes: Debunne). When the majority of the WCL's European affiliates applied to join the ETUC, its general secretary, Rasschaert, requested the advice of the ICFTU on how to respond. An earlier application by the WCL unions to enter the ETUC as a single bloc had already been rejected, partly because some of its affiliates (such as the tiny catholic union in Germany) were unacceptable to the ICFTU members in their countries. However most ETUC affiliates supported the inclusion of the main WCL unions, in order to build an effective organisation within the EEC, but insisted that the applicant unions must work for unity not only within Europe but also at the national and world level (61EB/21(d)(i); Debunne 1987, 39).

International unity now seemed a genuine possibility; when the two confederations met in Geneva in March 1974, in Vanderveken's words 'we thought we had it clinched'. Whether the breakthrough came because of pressure from the European affiliates of both confederations or for other reasons, the leaders of the two world bodies agreed to set up a joint working committee to 'study means of developing further cooperation [and to] seek ways and means for unification' (61EB/20). The historic move towards 'organic unity', decided on a Saturday, was scuppered by a press release on the Monday, claiming that the two confederations had already

decided on a merger. This led to consternation on all sides and a cooling of relations between the two internationals.¹³

Two days later the ICFTU sub-committee met to discuss the ETUC's request, and both Debunne – previously always a strong advocate of unity – and the FO representative Camille Mourguès expressed their irritation at the press leak, and complained of the divisive tactics of WCL unions within their own countries. Nevertheless, the majority led by the DGB and the Dutch NVV agreed to the proposals, and the ICFTU formally endorsed the membership of the WCL unions in the ETUC, on the condition that the national centres involved, 'by becoming members of the ETUC, undertake to work for unity of the free and democratic trade union movement at all levels'. They agreed to the establishment of a similar structural relationship between the WCL and ETUC as that which already existed with the ICFTU – the invitation of general secretaries to meetings of each other's executives, and full exchange of information (61EB/3; Barnouin, 1986, 23; Debunne 1987, 51-3).

¹³ Vanderveken recalls that the press release appeared in the Belgian Catholic *La Cité*, 22.2.99; Pasture reports that it was a release from *Agence France Presse* (Pasture 1994, 110, see also 61EB/20). Vanderveken now wonders whether the story may have been a manoeuvre by CLAT to quash the moves toward unification as put forward by the Europeans, but this is curious, as the CLAT leader, Emilio Maspero, had been a strong advocate of unification at the time of the Evian Congress (Pasture 1994, 93). Barnouin (1986, 23) suggests that 'this agreement – which later appeared to be little more than a tactical move on behalf of the WCL – paved the way for the approval of the applications of the Christian confederations by the ETUC Executive Board'; this view is shared by Pasture 1994, 105. I would hesitate to agree that the entire process of reaching an agreement at world level was a 'manoeuvre' on the part of the WCL. The CFDT and NKV, among others, seem to have been genuinely committed to the search for world unity.

The breakthrough on Europe paved the way for 'intensified' cooperation between the two world bodies, which displayed 'excellent relations' at the second European regional conference of the ILO in 1975. Cooperation continued on human and trade union rights, including protests at violations in Chile and South Africa, and in 1975 the two confederations formed their first common list for elections to the Workers' Group of the ILO. Within the EB, more members were calling for closer links with the WCL, including Ströer and Jim Knox, of New Zealand, who argued that there was 'no danger in forging links with the WCL, but [rather a] necessity', though others such as Jon Löfblad of the construction workers' ITS (IFBWW) still expressed reservations over the WCL's role in Latin America. That region proved the most divisive issue during the regular meetings of the two confederations, as Kersten reported following a meeting with the WCL executive in June 1975 (interview notes: Ströer; Vanderveken; *Report on Activities 1972-1974*, 26-7; 62EB/2,20, 64EB/2,6,12).

Obstacles to Unity

Hopes for unification were not fulfilled. In October 1976 the WCL confederal board adopted a cautious statement which set the tone for its Congress in De Haan a year later. The delegates called for 'collaboration, coordination and common action' with the ICFTU, but rejected a merger on the grounds of differences of strategy and policy, adding that they did not want to restrict 'the expansion of world trade unionism' to the ICFTU. Following a meeting with the new WCL general secretary Jan Kulakowski (previously deputy general secretary of the ETUC) in March 1978, the ICFTU representatives reluctantly concluded that the WCL decisions 'clearly run counter to the ICFTU's intention to pursue... unification' (70EB/16, 71EB/15).

This setback did however bring some benefits for the ICFTU. Maire of the CFDT, who had launched the drive for unity at Evian, had attempted to take the process further at De Haan – calling for the WCL to close its feeble industrial federations so that their members could join the ITSs, in the interests of united struggle against the multinationals. Following his defeat at the Congress, he recommended that the CFDT leave the WCL, and this was agreed at its 1979 conference. Significantly, a motion that the CFDT would ‘never affiliate to the ICFTU’ was defeated (interview notes: Briesch, Vanderveken).¹⁴

The Dutch catholic union NKV, for its part, demanded that the WCL resume unity talks with the ICFTU, stating that it would leave that body by the end of 1978 if no significant progress had been made. This ultimatum was linked to unification efforts within the Dutch trade union movement. The three main confederations had begun talks on a possible merger in the early 1970s. The smallest, the protestant CNV, was least enthusiastic – it opposed the deconfessionalisation of the IFCTU and was ambivalent towards the entry of WCL unions into the ETUC – and eventually dropped out. The NKV continued discussion with the largest union, the socialist-oriented NVV, and in 1976 the two unions formed a federation, the FNV, as a prelude to complete merger (a process completed in 1981). Their original intention was to affiliate to both internationals, and talks were held with representatives of each in the course of 1978.

The Kok Process

Having already decided on their own merger, the NKV and NVV wrote an identical joint letter to both internationals on 29 September 1978, signed by Wim Kok, president of the new

¹⁴ In the 1980s some WCL industrial federations, notably the food workers, did merge with their ICFTU counterparts.

federation and former president of the NVV, and H. van Eekert, formerly of the NKV and general secretary of the new FNV. The two leaders called on the ICFTU and WCL to resume discussions on the basis of a suggested text, which stated: 'the two organisations express the political will to work within a single, new organisation as soon as possible. By this firm commitment and this explicit expression of political will, the ICFTU and WCL envisage taking concrete steps to renew the world trade union movement' (71EB/15, Appendix).

In his reply of 14 December 1978, Kersten welcomed the initiative, adding that 'as far as the ICFTU is concerned, this political will does exist'. The WCL general secretary, Kulakowski, writing on 4 December, stated only that 'the WCL is prepared to enter into any kind of broad discussion, without any prior condition, between the ICFTU and WCL'. For the impatient FNV leaders, this was not good enough. The new Dutch union, having worked out an agreement for continued development aid to WCL affiliates in the third world (as part of a three-way split between the WCL, ICFTU and bilateral projects), opted in the end for affiliation to the ICFTU only (interview notes: Ety; 72EB/16, Appendix I and III).

This marked a political victory for the ICFTU, but a failure of the attempt by Kok and his colleagues to use their own merger as a lever for unification of the two internationals. This did not mean the end of the process, however. The general secretaries continued to hold regular meetings in the course of 1979, drafting a joint memorandum in favour of further talks at executive level 'to jointly arrive at a clear definition enabling real cooperation between the two organisations to be attained'. The ICFTU EB called for a 'prior expression of political will', while the WCL's confederal committee called for talks 'without preconditions', reiterating the positions in their respective answers to the Kok/van Eekert letter (interview notes: Vanderveken; 72EB/16; 73EB/13, Appendix IV).

At a meeting in September 1979, the general secretaries admitted that there were still many obstacles to unification, in particular in their work in the regions. Looking back, many of the participants agree that the major stumbling block to unity was the situation in Latin America (interview notes: Anderson; ETTY; Friso; Vanderveken). Emilio Maspero, the charismatic leader of CLAT, had a considerable following in the region, in part as a result of the failure of ICFTU's ORIT to take a strong independent line in the defence of human and trade union rights. This following was not necessarily expressed in union membership figures (Vanderveken and Friso regarded CLAT as more of a movement of opinion than a membership organisation), but it gave CLAT a prestige not only within the region but in North America and in northern Europe that caused concern to ICFTU affiliates (Thomson and Larson 1978). During this period, CLAT sought not only the affiliation of non-aligned national centres, but also to win over existing ICFTU federations (73EB/13; Groux and Mouriaux, 1989; Pasture 1994). There were other obstacles as well, as seen above: the WCL's pursuit of independent links with the non-aligned movement and its readiness to cooperate with organisations outside the ICFTU conception of 'free' trade union movements continued to worry ICFTU leaders. At the industrial level, as previously noted, the WCL insistence on retaining its own industrial federations in rivalry with the ITSS was another stumbling block.

In the early 1980s, the two internationals found a new area of productive cooperation in the foundation of the independent Solidarnosc union in Poland, which was later accepted as an affiliate by both internationals. But in other respects they were drawing further apart. By now the WCL had abandoned the 'leftist' inclinations of its initial years and seemed disposed to return to its earlier christian roots. With the departure of the CFDT and NKV, there were few if any remaining advocates of radical social change, or of organic unity with the ICFTU. Eventually, even the item of collaboration with the ICFTU was removed from its agenda (Pasture 1994, 118-20).

The 1990s saw further lost opportunities for unity. The collapse of the regimes of central and eastern Europe undermined the old official unions (which either disintegrated or transformed themselves into new organisations) and led to the virtual disappearance of WFTU. How would the vacuum be filled? Not long after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989, Vanderveken met the WCL president Willy Peirens to discuss how best to cooperate in the region. They agreed to seek to avoid the divisions which existed on other continents, and to keep one another informed of their initiatives in the region. This was followed by a meeting of executive representatives in November 1990, which agreed on 'closer collaboration on specific matters' and on a 'code of conduct'. This was to be followed by a meeting of their regional organisations, starting with ORIT and CLAT, but a meeting scheduled for January 1991 was cancelled by CLAT. Enzo Friso, who became general secretary after Vanderveken's retirement, made a last attempt at unity in 1992, which won the agreement of the major European affiliate of WCL, ACV-CSC, but not that of CLAT (interview notes: Friso). While president of the Belgian ACV-CSC, Peirens had developed good working relations with the head of the rival ABVV-FGTB; the same appeared true of his relationship with Vanderveken. Why did their understanding unravel? Vanderveken now believes that Peirens was 'disappointed' by the ICFTU's 'hasty' affiliation of the Czech unions, and may have considered that this violated their agreement (interview notes: Vanderveken). Subsequently, the WCL sought to win over new affiliates of its own, including unions in Hungary and Romania that may or may not have had an historic 'christian' base (interview notes: Oulatar; Pasture 1994, 120). Today, 25 years after the creation of a common European organisation and prospects of a similar agreement at world level, the two internationals appear to be as far apart as ever.

Conclusion

The road to unity is clearly paved with good intentions, at least as far as the ICFTU and its affiliates are concerned. The unity of the European and world labour movements has long been considered a major objective by many leaders and activists, as can be seen from this chapter. but it cannot be achieved without cost. The creation of the ETUC as an organisation outside the ICFTU was seen as necessary by Vetter, Debunne and other leaders of the European affiliates, in order to present a united front in relations with the EEC, but this meant giving up its status as a regional organisation of the ICFTU, and perhaps even more importantly, giving up a great deal of its internal cohesion (interview notes: Gobin). The consequences for the ICFTU were even more severe: the loss of its own European regional organisation endangered the unity and identity of the ICFTU as a world body, already weakened by the departure of the AFL-CIO. The ensuing difficulties with the ITSs and their European regional subsidiaries¹⁵ have not been resolved nearly thirty years later. Moreover, the resources available for action within the EEC, combined with the possibilities for dialogue with governments and employers' organisations at that level, have led the major European affiliates of the ICFTU, whatever their original intentions, to concentrate more and more of their international work on the EU.

It is an interesting to compare the success of the drive for unity at the European level with the relative failure at world level. In the European case, there were few sanctions available to the secretariat or the governing bodies to oblige the leading European affiliates to remain within a regional organisation of the ICFTU, nor did persuasion from the president and the general secretary, leaders of the ITSs and non-European affiliates succeed in changing their minds. In the handling of détente and the contacts with communist-controlled unions – one of the main reasons the AFL-CIO left the Confederation – the ICFTU in effect turned a blind eye by reiterating a policy that left considerable scope for interpretation. In both cases, the

¹⁵ Indeed some European Industrial Federations (as they are now known) were autonomous of the respective ITSs.

Confederation's leaders were keen not to lose its largest and richest affiliates, which is perfectly understandable. The need for internal unity meant a certain flexibility in the interpretation of the ideology of the organisation, and an acceptance of a potentially damaging change to the regional structure. In the case of the WCL, in contrast, there was much less at stake, and the Confederation held fast to its identity and key interests – controlling representation at the ILO and the UN institutions; maintaining its hegemonic position as the 'voice' of world labour – despite the desire of the FNV and some other affiliates to move towards world unity with its former rival. As Vanderveken put it, the ICFTU did not need a 'bridge'; it could stand alone.

Chapter 4

The ICFTU in the Field:

Regional Organisation and Human Rights

The last chapter focused primarily on the conflict of ideas and actions at the level of the secretariat and the governing bodies of the Confederation, as they have dealt with challenges to its internal cohesion and relations with its external environment. The present chapter will examine its work in what is called 'the field', in order to grasp the nature and functioning of its regional organisations, as well as to shed light on the process of decision making. At the same time, it will concentrate on one of the most important objectives of the ICFTU and the mainstay of its ideology, its work on human and trade union rights, where relations between individual affiliates, the regions, the secretariat and governing bodies have often come into conflict. Regional organisation and human rights are presented together because the history of the two is so closely linked, and because the focus of each is on individual countries and regions. However, I shall begin with an overview of the ideological approach of the Confederation to both issues, and its structural and administrative approach to handling them.

Ideology and Structure

As pointed out above (chapter 2), the ICFTU was the first post-war international trade union body to set up its own regional organisations. This innovation showed the Confederation's determination to represent workers in all parts of the world, but their role within the Brussels-based world body was never entirely clear. The ICFTU initially possessed four regional organisations. As explained above (chapter 3), the European Regional Organisation became

moribund and was reborn as the ETUC, but no longer as part of the ICFTU structure. There remained the Asian Regional Organisation (ARO), from 1984 the Asian-Pacific Regional Organisation (APRO); the African Regional Organisation (AFRO); and the Inter-American Regional Organisation (ORIT). There were a number of issues common to all. Many had to do with finance, including the difficulties of achieving regional self-sufficiency; efforts to devise a more equitable basis for affiliation fees from the developing countries; the use of the ISF for regional programmes; and the growth of bilateral projects (see chapter 2). Differences of policy between regions and the Confederation also arose over developments in individual countries or the actions of individual affiliates, often with regard to economic policy or human and trade union rights violations. Finally, the labour movement in all the regions had to contend with repressive regimes and hostile cultures, widely varying degrees of development and trade union organisation, and great economic and social hardship.

On world economic issues, representatives of the developing countries on the ICFTU's governing bodies in the 1970s and 80s tended to voice similar criticisms of policy documents based on the work of the OECD or TUAC with what they saw as a bias towards the industrialised countries of the north. Advocates of the concerns of the developing countries, such as Devan Nair and Narayanan, insisted that the Confederation's documents on economic and social policy give greater attention to the extreme poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment of their countries. Representatives of the Women's Committee also highlighted the special hardships suffered by women workers in the Third World (69EB/2; interview notes: Friso). Many leaders from the industrialised countries supported this call (interview notes: Friso, Vanderveken). These concerns were addressed in the 1978 ICFTU development charter *Towards a New Economic and Social Order* (70EB/8) and in the conclusions of the world conference on the trade union role in development, held in New Delhi in March 1981 (77EB/15(a)). Inspired by the ideas of the Brandt Commission report, *North-*

South: A Programme for Survival (1980), the development charter and the 'New Delhi Declaration' launched a period of intensive work by the Confederation on the inequities of world trade, the increased poverty caused by the debt crisis, and the social tensions created by structural adjustment, which coincided with an increase in representation for developing country affiliates within the EB and other bodies.

The political and social situation in the developing world was another major concern for the Confederation, and created misunderstandings and disagreements within the governing bodies and between them, the secretariat, the regional organisations and some affiliates. The Confederation's increasing militancy on violations of human and trade union rights in the 1980s often conflicted with the preference of affiliates in particular countries to use 'quiet diplomacy' (interview notes: Vanderveken). This was not only a question of some affiliates being too close to their respective governments; in all too many situations 'it was a question of life and death', where the wrong move could lead to disaster (interview notes: Dehareng). At the same time, the emphasis on cold war conflicts and the fight against communists (or those perceived to be so) in their regions led many trade union leaders to underestimate the dangers of repressive right-wing regimes (interview notes: Anderson, Friso). The general secretary and other ICFTU leaders often had to reiterate the need to oppose dictatorships of the right as much as those of the left.

The tendency of the Confederation's leaders, both at the secretariat and in the regional organisations, to view free trade unionism through western eyes led to a number of problems. Vanderveken now sees that the emphasis on collective bargaining and other purely industrial issues in the ICFTU's education programmes at the beginning of the 1970s was inappropriate for many countries in Latin America, Asia or Africa: 'collective bargaining does not exist without democracy' (interview notes). The focus on 'purely industrial issues' could mean

ignoring the basic problem of political systems, often involving corruption, nepotism, or outright repression (interview notes: Etty; Friso). One staff member has gone so far as to question the Confederation's even-handedness in attacking human rights violations in East Bloc countries and in those where its own affiliates were close to their respective governments (interview notes: Demaret). The governing bodies and leaders of affiliates, particularly from northern Europe, became increasingly impatient with what they saw as the failure to address basic questions of human and trade union rights in the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, as we shall see below in the discussion of human rights violations in Chile. It was in this period that the Confederation began to formalise its approach to human and trade union rights, by devoting more resources and staff time to the issue, and most importantly by publishing regular reports on human and trade union rights violations from 1983 onwards.

In the early 1970s, regional activities were the responsibilities of heads of department (52EB/2,12); in practice, the Education Department, usually headed by staff members from the Nordic countries (interview notes: Sterner). In the difficult financial circumstances of the time, staffing was concentrated in the Brussels headquarters; the Tokyo office was closed in 1977, the African research office in Addis Ababa in 1975, while the information service in Lagos was transferred to Brussels in 1976. An African desk was created at the secretariat in 1983 (interview notes: Kailembo) and an Asian desk two years later (84EB/14(a)). ARO and ORIT employed their own regional secretaries (renamed general secretaries in the 1980s); AFRO appointed a full-time general secretary only in the 1990s. The main staff involvement with developing countries was linked to development projects, largely funded by individual affiliates, often as conduits for government aid. The 1975 Congress called for a coordinating structure and a project unit was created in the secretariat. In 1984 the Project Administration and Coordination Department was set up with staffing both at headquarters and in the field, headed

by Peter Michalzik, of the DGB (interview notes: Peltzer; Vanderveken). A Project Committee was established in 1987, with representation from both donor and recipient affiliates.

While the Confederation has never fully solved the problem of bilateralism in project handling, many individual projects with a new 'socio-economic' approach launched in the 1980s and 1990s have been successful, in particular those aimed specifically at women workers (97EB/7; interview notes: Ramos; Cissé). An early precursor was ARO's 'Aurangabad experiment' in India, run in cooperation with the Canadian CIDA and the ILO. This project focused on rural workers and received praise for its innovative combination of literacy, family planning, employment creation, self-help and cooperatives, and traditional trade union education for women (68EB/2,11(b)). Further education programmes, often including literacy training, were inspired by the success of Aurangabad and by the development of new pedagogical techniques and broader concepts of the nature and purposes of education. Many succeeded in providing training suited to local requirements for workers in Asia, Africa and Latin America (89EB/9). Members of the EB called for the creation of an education committee as early as 1974 (Nedzynski, in 61EB/2,10(b)(viii)). An Education Policy Committee was set up in 1978, chaired by the ICFTU president, Narayanan (72EB/15).

The situation of the affiliates in the developing countries has varied widely, but from the 1970s to the present, the internal situation for most Third World affiliates has been difficult: governmental hostility or repression on the one hand, on the other limited countervailing power because of divisions within the trade union movement and low rates of organisation. The ICFTU has been in competition with the regional bodies of its two international rivals, notably the WCL organisations in Latin America (CLAT) and Asia (BATU). There are also regional organisations separate from the three internationals, notably the OATUU, founded in 1973 with the assistance of the countries grouped in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), as part of

their efforts to promote pan-Africanism. Other regional bodies have included the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, formed in 1956 and politically close to WFTU. The ICFTU has managed to work quite productively with OATUU, but the other regional bodies have been seen as a basis for disunity and a threat to the Confederation.

There have been marked variations both within and between the regions in terms of economic and social development, levels of trade union membership and financial and organisational resources. At the beginning of the 1970s, union organisation was relatively strong in Asia, while in Africa it was clearly weakest, meaning that effective regional organisation was possible only with substantial external support. ORIT brought together two completely distinct regions, North and South America, and was largely subsidised by the former. All three have made significant progress in the course of the period, as a result of their own efforts, political and economic changes, and greater attention from the Confederation, but the world economic situation has again worsened so that the fundamental inequality between north and south has if anything become further entrenched. At the same time, however, some of the worst violators of human and trade union rights have been overthrown, often through the efforts of the trade union movement. The following sections will present the main developments in regional organisation and the Confederation's response to human rights and other political issues within each of the three regions: Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Africa

For much of the ICFTU's existence, one of the overriding international questions for the world's trade unions – including, naturally, the members of its African Regional Organisation – has been the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. Given its central

importance, this will be discussed in a separate chapter. The following account therefore focuses on issues which, significant in their own right, were nevertheless of less global impact.

AFRO had been inactive for some time at the beginning of the 1970s. Both Buiters and Kersten resisted calls for its reactivation, considering that such a move would be costly and 'premature' (53EB/2,16; 56EB). The reluctance to devote more resources to Africa at this time was not based solely on financial or organisational grounds; in the early 1970s, African trade unionism was experiencing great difficulties. The most important was probably the hostile attitude of many post-independence governments, suspicious of the autonomy of trade union movements that in many cases enjoyed great popular support going back to the time of the liberation struggles (interview notes: Kailembo). The ideology of pan-Africanism, as promoted by Kwame Nkrumah and other political leaders from the 1950s onwards, was hostile to any 'non-African' ideologies and to affiliations by African organisations to bodies outside the continent. In some perspectives, the legacy of colonialism had imposed a model of trade unionism based on the unions of the colonial powers, not suited to the economic and political situation of Africa. In a largely rural setting, marked by divides of ethnicity and language, trade unionism was often seen as suspect and foreign, irrelevant to the needs of workers on the land and in the informal sector (interview notes: Cissé). The strongest trade unions were in North Africa, which was also the most industrialised part of the continent (interview notes: Friso). Elsewhere, unions in the former British colonies were on the whole stronger than those in their French counterparts, in part because the British colonial system had generally tolerated them and had even allowed a 'check-off' system to operate (interview notes: Kailembo). In the early 1970s some major countries, such as Angola and Mozambique, were still colonies; others were under white minority rule, most importantly South Africa, Namibia, and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

Renewal of the African Regional Organisation

In May 1972 the ICFTU organised a conference in Addis Ababa which agreed to reactivate AFRO (56EB/9). While this was initially opposed by the FGPC and the EB on the grounds of cost, the designated president Y. Kaltungo argued convincingly that it was absolutely necessary to set up a purely African organisation based in Africa in response to the lure of Pan-Africanism. He was supported by Narayanan, Walcott and others. In the end the EB decided to discuss the matter further with the African affiliates and to devise a plan for a regional structure that would mean no extra cost to the Confederation (58EB/2,9). After the Congress in July endorsed the decision to reactivate AFRO, Fisseha Tsion Tekie of the Ethiopia affiliate CELU was designated regional secretary, as recommended by the conference. A regional office was to be set up in Addis Ababa, where the ICFTU already had a representative and research facilities (58EB/9(a), 59EB/4(c), *Report on Activities 1972-1974*: 99).

In a development all too typical of the volatile political situation in Africa, unrest in Ethiopia led to a military take-over in September 1974 and the arrest of the new regional secretary and other trade union leaders, including the president of CELU, Beyene Solomon, a member of the ILO Governing Body (63EB/2, 15(a)(ii)). The ICFTU launched a campaign of solidarity with Tekie and the other leaders under arrest, sending two missions to Ethiopia led by Vanderveken, and submitting a complaint to the ILO (63EB/2, 15(a)(ii); 63EB/11(b)). CELU was dissolved by the authorities in May 1975, and subsequently reinstated with a pro-government leadership which decided to disaffiliate from the ICFTU. The Confederation challenged the credentials of the Ethiopian workers' delegation to the 1975 International Labour Conference, and successfully lobbied members of the Workers' Group to re-elect the still-imprisoned Solomon (63EB/11(b)). Most of the trade unionists were released in 1976, but Solomon was re-arrested the following year (67EB/2,13(a)(i); 68EB/13(a)(i)). The ICFTU was obliged to transfer its

operations out of Ethiopia. George Palmer, of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, temporarily took on the task of keeping AFRO alive; he was succeeded by Amos Gray of Liberia, and the office was moved, again on a temporary basis, to Monrovia (interview notes: Kailembo). Partly because of anti-trade union repression in many countries, by 1976 AFRO had only ten affiliates in a continent with over 50 countries (67EB/2,13(a)(i)). In the meantime, on the initiative of the OAU, a new regional organisation had been created, the OATUU, providing new opportunities for the growth of trade unionism on the continent.

OATUU and ICFTU

OATUU held its founding Congress in Kenya in April 1973, chaired by Tekie, and elected as its first general secretary Dennis Akumu from Kenya. Though ICFTU affiliates played an important part in the founding Congress, there was strong pressure from some quarters for OATUU members to disaffiliate from any 'non-African' bodies. The Tunisian ICFTU affiliate UGTT walked out, fearing that their 'principles were jeopardised', in the words of its secretary, Habib Achour, but returned when an acceptable compromise was reached: OATUU members should retain their 'independence vis-à-vis international organisations' but were not required to disaffiliate (61EB/2,10(a)). The compromise proved short-lived, as the second OATUU Congress in Tripoli in 1976, under strong pressure from the Libyan government, passed a resolution calling for members to disaffiliate from all international organisations (interview notes: Kailembo). This decision, subsequently incorporated as Article 8 of the OATUU constitution, provoked the ICFTU affiliate in Sierra Leone to leave OATUU in 1979 (73EB/8(a)).

Despite these difficulties, the ICFTU established a cooperative working relationship with OATUU, particularly within the ILO, where the two organisations agreed on common

candidates from Africa for the Workers' Group (interview notes: Kailembo; Vanderveken). Notwithstanding its constitutional provision to the contrary, OATUU continued to accept ICFTU affiliates as members. OATUU also developed an education programme together with the ICFTU's Swedish affiliates LO and TCO (82EB/9(a)(ii)), but this ran into difficulties with some ITSs, who feared that the OATUU would set up its own industrial federations, and with AFRO, whose leaders felt that assistance from ICFTU affiliates should go only to other member unions (80EB/17; 82WB/9(a)(ii); interview notes: Nedzynski). The ICFTU supported the re-election of Akumu as general secretary of OATUU at its third Congress in 1980, opposing WFTU manoeuvres to oust him, but was unsuccessful in winning any modification of Article 8 (76EB/7(a); 80EB/10(a)).

While the situation in Ethiopia continued to fester, and violations of trade union rights were on the increase in Nigeria and elsewhere in the region, ICFTU leaders decided to step up the Confederation's activities in Africa, a move welcomed by the African affiliates and by leaders of the ITSs (interview notes: Nedzynski). One important reason for increased interest in Africa was the decision of the new democratic government in Portugal in 1974 to offer independence to its African colonies, Angola, Mozambique and Guinée-Bissau (62EB/15(a)(iv)). This presented an opportunity for the ICFTU to pursue links with the newly independent trade unions, and to discourage them from going elsewhere. The ICFTU planned delegations to each of the former colonies and discussed the possibilities for assistance with political and trade union leaders of the emerging independent states, but AFRO was informed only after the event and no AFRO representative was included in the delegations to Angola and Mozambique (Kaltungo, in 64EB/2,11(a)). Despite concerns that assistance might be premature in an extremely unsettled political situation, the Confederation quickly organised education and technical programmes, along with financial aid (62EB/15(a)(iv)). Angola at first seemed more promising than Mozambique, but when the MPLA came to power the Angolan national centre

UNTA developed closer relations with WFTU, which was involved in the organisation of an OATUU-UNTA conference on Solidarity with the Workers and Peoples of Southern Africa, held in Luanda in early 1977 (68EB/13(a)(v); 69EB/2(13)(v)). Wim Kok and other ICFTU leaders expressed displeasure that the Confederation was even present, but it was clear that Kailembo and his colleagues had not been informed of WFTU's key role in advance. When WFTU proposed a joint committee of the three internationals to pursue solidarity actions in Southern Africa, the ICFTU representatives were afraid of endangering their relations with OATUU and friendly national centres if they declined to participate, so instead proposed joint action within the ILO Workers' Group (68EB/13(a)(v); 69EB/2(13)(v)).

The 'Exemplary Case' of Tunisia

Human and trade union rights were central concerns for the Confederation in its work in Africa. During this period the leading ICFTU affiliate in North Africa, the UGTT, suffered a long wave of government repression which impelled the Confederation into one of its longest-running campaigns of solidarity (Friso 1998, 61-74). UGTT leaders had been deeply involved in the independence struggle, from the time of the union's foundation as a purely Tunisian organisation in 1946, and retained friendly relations with the post-independence government, while striving to retain their autonomy.

In 1977, the government attempted to restrict wage bargaining in response to economic problems, leading to protests and demonstrations against the rising cost of living. The UGTT formulated a programme of demands for sectoral improvements, and organised strikes in a number of industries (interview notes: Vanderveken; Mourgues). The ICFTU offered its support, and Kersten visited the country, meeting both government and trade union leaders in a vain attempt to reach a compromise. Following attacks on union officials and offices, a general

strike was called for 26 January 1978. A state of emergency was declared, Achour and ten other UGTT leaders were arrested, and dozens of people were killed in rioting. The ICFTU and its affiliates reacted immediately, calling for the liberation of the union leaders, making a complaint to the ILO and providing legal and humanitarian assistance; Renate Peltzer, Kersten's personal assistant, was expelled from the country when attempting to deliver humanitarian relief (Friso 1998; interview notes: Vanderveken; Walsh). A visit by Friso was followed in February by a delegation of top ICFTU leaders. (72EB/9(b); *Report on Activities 1975-1978*: 96-101, 165-7).

A series of trials took place between July and September 1978; the final trial, involving Achour and his colleagues, was attended by Vanderveken (interview notes: Vanderveken). When the prosecution demanded the death penalty, the ICFTU organised a major campaign, mobilising threats of economic sanctions against Tunisia; according to the subsequent ICFTU report, 'these actions certainly saved the Tunisian brothers' lives' (*Report on Activities 1975-1978*: 99-100). Nevertheless Achour was sentenced to 10 years hard labour, and several of his colleagues to shorter terms. The conditions of detention were particularly harsh, and the health of Achour and his colleagues began to suffer. The ICFTU sent a representative to the prison in December 1978, and Kersten was allowed to visit Achour at the office of the Ministry of the Interior (Friso 1998: 69; 72EB/9(b)). On Tunisia's independence day in March 1980, some UGTT leaders were released, and Achour, whose immense personal prestige remained undiminished, was transferred to house arrest (interview notes: Friso; Walsh). Friso and Vanderveken visited the country for talks with the government and the UGTT leaders, in pursuit of the normalisation of the trade union situation (Friso 1998: 69; 75EB/9(d); 77EB/9(e)). Achour was finally released from house arrest in November 1981, at which point the UGTT resumed its participation in the ICFTU and Achour again attended EB meetings (*Report on Activities 1975-1978*: 99-100; *Report on Activities 1979-1982*: 81-2).

The respite was only temporary. The economy began to deteriorate again in 1983 and by 1985 resulted in new repressive measures: 'what started in early 1985 as a conflict between the government and the Union... over the national wage policy became a clear attempt to destroy the UGTT as a strong and independent trade union organisation' (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*: 81-3). In July the union newspaper was suspended, and soon afterwards its national and regional offices were occupied by police. Having already sent a letter of protest to President Bourguiba in August, the ICFTU decided to send a high-level mission in October, led by Friso (92EB/17(a)). Michael Walsh of the TUC recalls a tense moment when the members of the mission arrived at the UGTT headquarters in the country's second largest city, Sfax. The glass building had been wrecked by soldiers and police, who stood outside confronting an angry crowd of workers. In the highly charged atmosphere, the wrong move could have led to loss of life. Friso climbed through the broken glass to the balcony of the shattered building and appealed for calm, calling on the workers to show their strength by refusing to respond to provocation. According to Walsh, 'you could feel the temperature going down as Friso spoke'; the meeting ended peacefully. The members of the mission took part in a press conference the next day in Tunis, in which Achour denounced the violation of trade union rights of his members and compared the actions of his government to the apartheid regime (Friso, 20.3.98; interview notes: Laval; Mourgues; Walsh).¹

Achour was placed again under house arrest in November 1985, and UGTT offices were taken over by 'provisional committees', backed by the police. The ICFTU continued to campaign for his release (88EB/11(b)(ii)), and in December reached apparent agreement with the government on the normalisation of industrial relations; but a few weeks later Achour was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, and in January 1986 the union's headquarters were taken over by the

police. Despite ICFTU protests, Achour received a further two-year sentence in April 1986. Allouche, who had accompanied the ICFTU mission, became acting general secretary. Following personal intervention by leaders of ICFTU affiliates and by the ILO Director-General and Deputy Director General, Achour was released from detention in 1987 (88EB/11(b)(ii); interview notes: Walsh), but was only able to resume his union activities for a year before retiring. He had paid a heavy price for his independence, and now suffered from diabetes and a chronic eye complaint. He thanked the ICFTU for its support, but was no longer able to take part in its activities in person. The Confederation continued to support its affiliate, and the situation improved following the replacement of Bourguiba by Ben Ali. The UGTT was gradually allowed to resume normal activities under a new leadership. The long ICFTU campaign had borne fruit, and the Confederation's prestige was enhanced; the UGTT registered its thanks at the 1992 Congress (*Report of the Fifteenth World Congress*, 1992: 501).

The Development of AFRO

In the 1980s the ICFTU intensified its activities in Africa and eventually re-established an African office and leadership. Alongside campaigns of solidarity with South Africa and opposition to violations of trade union rights in Tunisia it had to intervene in numerous other countries in defence of free trade unionism: the report for the end of the decade listed cases in Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*: 81). The Confederation had to address the grave socio-economic problems afflicting the continent. One factor was the burden of high interest rates on debts accumulated by governments without consulting their workers, who were nonetheless the first to suffer. Under these circumstances, AFRO warned that African unions were 'no longer prepared to serve as transmission belts for party or

¹. Achour was subsequently accused of giving support to Islamic fundamentalists and to other opponents of the regime; but there was no convincing evidence of this. His personal prestige within

government policy', and the severity of the crisis had the positive side effect of enhancing the unions' role in economic development (97EB/6(b)(ii)). In conjunction with the trade union Confederation of Senegal the ICFTU organised a Pan-African conference on 'The African Worker and the World Economic Crisis' in Dakar in March 1984 (85EB/9(a)(iv); *Report on Activities 1983-1986*: 126). It focused on the role of the multinationals in the African economy, the economic crisis in the region and the need for unions to be more involved in development. The conference was the first of its kind to bring together African trade union leaders from across the continent and led to new contacts for the ICFTU in the region. This was followed by sub-regional meetings for Kenya, the SADCC and the francophone countries (86EB/13).

The AFRO conference in Mbabane, Swaziland, in July 1988 elected a new regional secretary, Kandeh Yilla of Sierra Leone, together with K. Boulash of the UGTT as president and Alice Ranthimo of Lesotho as women's representative. Yilla's election was a major step forward in the development of a fully African-based programme (Kailembo, 20.11.98); he was freed from some of his national responsibilities in order to work part-time for AFRO, with the aid of an assistant regional secretary, Ditiro Saleshando of Botswana (94EB/8(c)(1)). In April 1990, following an ICFTU-AFRO-OATUU conference on the African development challenge, Boulash, Yilla and other AFRO leaders were joined by Kailembo, Vanderveken and James Howard of the economic and social policy department for a meeting with the OAU secretary-general, Ahmed Salim. Their discussion focused on measures to relieve the African debt situation and to promote the role of trade unions in economic recovery programmes. Salim agreed that governments needed popular support and participation in order for development to succeed, and recognised the work by the ICFTU on South Africa as 'one of the major factors behind the positive developments' which were leading towards an end of the apartheid regime (97EB/6(b)(ii)).

the ICFTU was very high, as confirmed by Friso, Laval, Mourgues, Vanderveken and Walsh.

AFRO also promoted local education projects to enhance the capacities of workers to participate in and benefit from development. The Confederation decided in 1988 to continue the joint AFRO-OATUU education programme sponsored by LO and TCO, despite the continued misgivings of some ITSs (Nedzynski, in the report of the ITS General Conference, 85EB/10; 94EB/8(c)(ii)), and a special joint education committee was set up to oversee this. New education techniques were introduced as a result of a conference on education in Kampala in 1994 (interview notes: Kailembo). One of the most important concerns addressed by education programmes was the low participation of women in the trade unions and the vulnerability of women working in the rural and informal sectors. This concern was shared by many in Brussels: Friso declared that African women were victims of 'dual exploitation' were 'in the weakest position, and worked the hardest' in conditions that were sometimes 'worse than slavery' (interview notes: Friso). Through special programmes aimed at women workers, such as one sponsored by FNV, AFRO sought to encourage women's self-confidence and organisational capacities (ICFTU-AFRO, *Report on Activities 1993-1996*: 72). A leading role in this project was played by Mamounata Cissé, at that time women's representative in the Burkina Faso national centre ONSL, who coordinated the FNV project in four francophone countries from 1992 to 1997 (interview notes: Cissé; 98EB/10).

The appointment of Alice Ranthimo as AFRO women's representative led to a great increase in women's activities in the region. Ranthimo, Cissé and other women trade union leaders in the region 'pushed hard', in Cissé's words, for the creation of an AFRO women's committee, which was formally constituted in 1992 (interview notes). The committee's chair, initially Binkie Kerileng of the BFTU Botswana, succeeded by Ruth Ekout of the CSTC Cameroon, automatically became a titular member of the AFRO EB (ICFTU-AFRO: 1997, 68-71). Another important step forward was the election of Cissé as chair of the ICFTU women's

committee in 1993, and as a vice-president of the Confederation, the first woman from a developing country to achieve this position (ICFTU-AFRO, 1997. 18).

The AFRO conference in Harare in April 1993 agreed to open a regional office with a full-time general secretary . At the invitation of the Kenyan national centre COTU, the office was based in Nairobi; Andrew Kailembo was elected general secretary (*Report on Activities 1991-1994: 211-2*). By 1996, there were 11 staff in Nairobi office and a sub-regional office was set up in Benin for the francophone countries. The consolidation of AFRO went hand in hand with a remarkable increase in membership. At the start of the decade there were little more than half a million members, from 17 unions in 15 countries. Within a few years there were over 40 affiliates drawn from the majority of the 53 countries on the continent, and total membership was well over 5 million (ICFTU-AFRO 1997, 3, 10).

Nevertheless African unionism as a whole continued to face great difficulties at the end of the 1990s. The essential weakness of unions and national centres in largely rural societies remains, and outside help has clearly been no substitute for strength on the ground (interview notes: Walsh; Pursey). Suspicion of unions as outside influences modelled along western lines has never totally disappeared, but new types of programmes aimed at the informal sector and at organising women workers have sought to address the problem (interview notes: Cissé).

Africa's economic situation is perhaps the biggest challenge to the unions, and many unions have been 'demoralised' as the world economic crisis continues to hit their members especially hard (interview notes: Friso; Kailembo). However, this makes unions more valuable to governments eager to promote economic development and avoid social unrest, as they remain among the few unifying and democratic forces within civil society. Unions have also played a major role in the ending of white minority rule in the former colonies as well as in South Africa, and many of the political leaders in these newly democratised countries have been

drawn from the trade union movement. The rise in women's membership and activism and new approaches to union organising, as in the informal sector, points to the potential for future growth (interview notes: Cissé; Ramos).

Asia

Asia is in many ways the most diverse of all the regions, creating both dangers and opportunities. In the early 1970s, ARO benefited from the membership of strong trade unions from the Indian subcontinent, Australia and New Zealand, and subsequently Japan. In the 1970s it extended its coverage to the Middle East, leading to the affiliation of unions in Israel, the Lebanon, and Turkey. Accordingly, at this time ARO had fewer problems with finances than the other regional organisations and exercised strong leadership within the Confederation, sometimes expressing a distinct regional voice within its governing bodies. At the same time, Asia was also plagued by some of the most repressive and anti-union governments in the world, in countries such as China, Indonesia, Thailand and later Burma (Myanmar). Other countries, like the Philippines and Sri Lanka, were torn by internal civil strife. In the majority of countries, even where the political environment was relatively stable and democratic, economic and social underdevelopment prevailed and much of the population worked under abysmal conditions, suffering from extreme poverty and discrimination based on sex, religion, or caste. As in Africa, largely urban or industrial unions often found it difficult to engage with the circumstances of the rural masses.

Another problem was the tradition of company unionism in countries like Japan and South Korea; the close relationship between unions and employers could risk compromising the principle of trade union independence (interview notes: Nedzynski). The same was true of the

links between unions and some governments, notably in newly decolonised countries where the unions had played a major role in the independence movements; in some countries, governments did not allow unions to seek international affiliation. Ideological divisions among ICFTU affiliates existed in several countries, making coordinated action difficult. Finally, both the WCL and WFTU had a significant presence in Asia (interview notes: Izumi). The WCL had most influence in the Philippines, while WFTU had an affiliate in India, and close links with some unions or national centres in Australia, the Philippines, and elsewhere. The WFTU presence, however marginal, was taken especially seriously at a time of general instability in the region: in 1972 the war in Vietnam was still raging, and would extend to conflict throughout Indo-China; North Korea and the Peoples' Republic of China were seen as major threats to democracy in the region. At EB meetings, Narayanan and others often expressed fears for the survival of democracy in Asia (53EB/7; 54EB/2; 75EB/10(b)).

ARO's Voice in the ICFTU

Devan Nair's candidature for general secretary in 1972 was the first serious bid for that post from outside Europe, indicating the desire of the Asian trade union movement to make its voice heard. The support which he gained from unions in the region – the Japanese federation *Domei* and several member unions of *Sohyo*, the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and *Hind Mazdoor Sabha* (HMS), and the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) (53EB/7(b)(i),9), as well as from the ARO Executive Board – was seen as a sign of 'regionalism' by many non-Asians (54EB/2; Debunne, in 55EB/2; interview notes: Debunne; Walsh). There was no doubt an element of hypocrisy in this view, but it held some truth. Devan Nair put himself forward as a non-European, a candidate from the developing world, and this

inspired much of his support; though his strong anti-communism won him the backing of the French FO (interview notes: Bergeron; Laval; Mourgues).²

No such tensions occurred a few years later when the ARO EB recommended Narayanan for the post of ICFTU president (66EB/3). On this occasion, the views of the regional organisation were shared by the Confederation as a whole, and he was elected at the 1975 Congress as the first president of the ICFTU from a developing country. He was re-elected at the following three Congresses, retiring in 1992: the longest-serving of all ICFTU presidents (94EB/3). The widespread support he received reflected his excellent reputation as a fighter for the improvement of the conditions of the Malaysian plantation workers (interview notes: Lewis).

In the 1970s the dominant personalities in ARO, both elected officers and staff, were from the Indian subcontinent. Mathur, the regional secretary, was Indian; Devan Nair and Narayanan were both of Indian ethnic origin. This caused some discomfort among affiliates in other parts of the world, who feared that ARO was dominated by an elite associated with a single country and might 'defer too much to the... affiliates concerned', in the words of a CLC official.³ The main reason for this dominance was probably the ability of Indian trade unionists to speak English. This advantage declined in importance as English was spoken more and more throughout the region, but never disappeared completely (interview notes: Izumi). For similar reasons, the regional offices were based in New Delhi; this sometimes led to problems between Mathur, originally from HMS, and the larger Indian affiliate, INTUC (interview notes: Vanderveken).

² Other affiliates opposed Devan Nair's candidature because his politics were considered too extreme and dogmatic (interview notes: Shaw, Walsh); earlier, in 1970, he had denounced the ITF Asian organisation as 'communist-influenced' (interview notes: Lewis).

³ Harker, internal memo, 27 March 1981, in CLC archives. See also notes by Morris on back of letter from Nielsen, 16 December 1976, box 30, CLC archives.

ARO developed a distinctive style and strategy in its operations, with an emphasis on socio-economic projects for employment creation and the organisation of rural workers. At the EB in June 1975, Mathur stressed the crisis of unemployment in the region and the need to develop a programme aimed at the rural poor, backed by Devan Nair (63EB/2,15(b)). There were programmes of education and project work at local level throughout the 1970s, including the successful Aurangabad experiment, mentioned above. Many of these projects were aimed at women workers, in the hope that their self-organisation at local level, in literacy and employment creation schemes, would lead to unionisation (interview notes: Peltzer). An ambitious blueprint to extend this work was set out in the 'Bangkok Declaration' adopted by the ARO conference in May 1980 (75EB/10(a)(i)). While the Confederation was reluctant to increase its financial assistance to support these programmes, extra contributions from affiliates funded many projects. Financial backing and expertise came from the Israeli national centre Histadrut, which was accepted as a member of ARO in 1973 and provided considerable assistance in the development of cooperatives and other socio-economic project work (60EB/10(b); 62EB/2,21(b)(i); 63EB/2,15(b)). The Asian Labour Summit, held in May 1977, was 'entirely financed by funds raised within Asia', in Devan Nair's words, and demonstrated a high degree of self-sufficiency (69EB/2,13(b)(i)).⁴

Despite its financial resources, ARO had significant gaps in its coverage. A number of important national centres remained outside, most importantly the largest Japanese confederation *Sohyo*, although the other main centre *Domei* and eight sectoral unions (some of which were *Sohyo* members) were affiliated (interview notes: Izumi; Nedzynski.). The changing circumstances of the 1980s provided new opportunities for ARO to expand its coverage, while giving rise to important new issues.

⁴ It is not clear if the phrase 'funds raised within Asia' referred to funds from ARO affiliates only, from the regional organisations of the ITSS, or from other bodies, like the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or

Human and Trade Union Rights

Much of Asia suffered from dictatorial regimes, political instability and anti-union attitudes; even in more liberal societies, the imperative of economic development often made governments unsympathetic to free trade unionism. In consequence, violations of human and trade union rights were a constant issue for ARO.

A specific problem was the status of public sector workers, a major component of trade union membership, whose right to organise or to strike was subject to widespread restrictions (interview notes: Izumi; Nedzynski; Storti, in 59EB/2(9)(b)(ii)). This was a long-running problem in Japan, and came to international prominence in 1973 following government moves to ban strikes in the state sector. The ICFTU, together with *Domei*, the postal and telegraph workers' union *Zentei*, and the PTTI, submitted a complaint to the ILO in November 1973, calling the attention of the Japanese government to 'the importance which must be attached to the right of free collective bargaining in the public services' (*Report on Activities 1972-1974*: 122). On the EB Nedzynski, general secretary of PTTI, argued that if public sector rights were not respected in Japan, then they were unlikely to be anywhere else in the region (59EB/2, 17). Thanks to the efforts of the Confederation, the ITSs and national affiliates, support grew for a new ILO Convention on the rights of public sector workers (Suslow to McDermott, 19.1.78; Swerdlow (ILO Special Advisor) to Nedzynski, 22.12.72, CLC archives). This initiative also encouraged the two main Japanese national centres to work more closely together (interview notes: Horii; Izumi).

The campaign on Japan provided an opportunity for the ICFTU and ARO to develop a programme for the support of human and trade union rights in Asia. At the EB it was proposed

the AAFLI, which had an important presence in the region.

to set up a committee on trade union rights in the public sector in Japan. I. Shioji, an ARO vice-president who represented *Domei* on the EB, objected to the formation of such a committee for Japan alone; the remit was therefore extended to other Asian countries (59EB/2,17). In the following year, ARO initiated a dialogue with Asian ministers of labour around the issue of violations of trade union rights by MNCs operating in Asia. (Dehareng, in 62EB/2,9)

Trade union rights in India became a major issue for the ICFTU a few years later, a concern that was not welcomed by leaders of all the Indian affiliates or by the leadership of ARO. The government of Indira Gandhi declared illegal a national rail strike in May 1974 and arrested several thousand workers. In June 1975, in a climate of deepening civil unrest, Gandhi declared a state of emergency, introduced press censorship and carried out widespread arrests. INTUC, the larger of the ICFTU affiliates, was connected to the ruling Congress party and backed the government. Thus at the EB, when Knox (NZFoL) called for the ICFTU to carry out a mission to India, Devan Nair and Narayanan replied that the state of emergency was a 'temporary' measure, and warned that a mission would 'hinder, not help' the situation (Narayanan, in 67EB/13(b)). Murray agreed with the need for caution, but added that the affiliates from outside the country had the right to express their concerns. Defending the secretariat's recommendation for a mission, Kersten argued that the ICFTU 'should always oppose martial law and states of emergency'. It was agreed that the general secretary would make further recommendations following discussion within ARO. Kersten and Narayanan both met the Indian prime minister and expressed their disquiet over the harshness with which the state of emergency was applied to industrial disputes (*Report on Activities 1975-1978*: 176). As repression continued, Kersten wrote that 'even those friends in Asia who initially were sympathetic to Indira Gandhi's actions are now becoming perturbed... and feel that something needs to be done' (Kersten to Morris, 27.9.1976, in CLC archives, 1992/0297. box 30). According to Vanderveken, the Indian and

other Asian affiliates preferred 'quiet diplomacy' and were resistant to ICFTU intervention (interview notes).

The state of emergency was lifted after the victory of the opposition parties in the 1977 elections; but after Gandhi was re-elected in January 1980, the government promulgated new and more draconian emergency powers under the Essential Services Maintenance Act, allowing it to prohibit industrial action and empowering the police to arrest suspects without a warrant (*Report on Activities 1979-1982*: 146-7). On this occasion, the Indian trade union movement was openly divided. INTUC considered that the measures were justified as strikes had been misused by 'communist-led' unions, notably the railway workers (who were close to HMS); the HMS and all other national centres opposed the measures as a 'threat to national freedoms'. Kersten visited the country again, meeting leaders of the affiliates and government officials in January 1982. In response to a claim by the Minister of Labour that the ESMA was 'a security measure, not an industrial relations measure', the general secretary forcefully defended the ICFTU's fundamental values: the right to strike was 'inalienable'. When a call for a general strike on 19 January 1982 was forestalled by mass arrests, Kersten appealed successfully to the Minister for the release of the detainees. The EB offered its good offices to help resolve the dispute between the Indian affiliates, and called on them to establish a close working relationship on trade union rights and to express their 'apprehension' at restrictions on those rights (79EB/9(c)).

In Search of a Policy on Indonesia

One of the most serious threats to trade union rights in the region was in Indonesia. The Confederation had four small affiliates: GASBIINDO, whose president, Agus Sudono, sat on the EB, SARBUMUSI, GOBSI and KBIM, with a combined membership of some 300,000 (in

the fifth most populated country in the world!). In 1971 the government set up its own structure of organisations, with membership compulsory for most public employees, causing serious damage to the ICFTU affiliates. In May 1972, Kersten and Mathur visited the country, urging on the government 'the need for an independent democratic trade union movement in Indonesia'; and recommended the four affiliates to join in a confederation, which they did a few months later. In February 1973 a new national centre was created, FBSI, as a precursor to restructuring trade unionism on industrial lines. Sudono became its president, and the head of SARBUMUSI one of his deputies. The local ICFTU liaison officer maintained good relations with FBSI as well as assisting the four affiliates; but there was evident disquiet within the Confederation, and several fact-finding delegations visited the country (*Report on Activities 1969-1971*: 113-4; *1972-1974*: 121-2; *1975-1978*: 178-9; *1979-1982*: 147-8; 60EB/2,21(3)(iii); 62EB/2,21(b)(ii),31(b)(ii); interview notes: Izumi).

In the 1980s it was impossible to maintain the illusion of cordial relations with the government-supported union movement. 'In the course of the last few years, increasing doubts have been raised about the ability of the Indonesian workers' movement to give independent expression to the workers' needs and demands,' it was finally reported in 1988. In response to pressure from Nedzynski of the PTTI and Etty of FNV in particular, the EB agreed to send a high-level mission in 1984. This discovered 'flagrant restrictions on human and trade union rights, including governmental controls on trade union activities and the absence of workers' trade unions in the public services and state enterprises' (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*: 146-7). Nevertheless the ICFTU maintained the affiliation of the four Indonesian unions; and despite its criticisms, the EB expressed optimism that 'the FBSI might grow... into a representative and democratic organisation within a democratic society' (85EB/9(c)(ii)).

This was a vain hope. In November 1985 the FBSI Congress decided to change its name to SPSI. More importantly, the new body would no longer be a federation of industrial unions but a unitary organisation, in which the 21 previously separate unions were to be merged into nine industrial departments. GASBIINDO and the other unions were given six months to effect their own merger; after this, industrial departments would be created by the executive. This change was opposed by some Indonesian unions and was viewed with alarm by the ICFTU. A report from the secretariat after the Congress concluded that the new leaders were 'beholden to and... responsive to the government', and that 'the monolithic organisation by the SPSI of all workers in private industry clearly transgresses the rights of workers to form and join trade unions freely...'. The developments that followed confirmed the worst fears of the ICFTU, as military officers filled leadership posts in the industrial departments. There were growing pressures for a formal complaint to the ILO (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*; 89EB/7(b)(ii); interview notes: Izumi, Lewis).

The separate affiliation of GASBIINDO and the three other unions in the ICFTU became increasingly problematic, as they lost all real autonomy and indeed even disappeared as formal entities. The 1985 report from the secretariat referred to the continued representation of GASBIINDO on the EB as 'a convenient fiction... which was possible... as long as the FBSI chairmanship and GASBIINDO presidency was linked through the person of Agus Sudono'. But this changed in 1985, when the SPSI dropped Sudono and replaced him with Sudarwo, chosen by the Minister of Manpower when the executive was evenly divided between candidates. Sudono, who in the EB had previously defended the actions of FBSI and downplayed criticisms of violations of trade union rights, now joined the supporters of action against the Indonesian government, and provided the ICFTU with vital evidence. The EB proceeded to authorise representations to the Indonesian government, followed by a formal complaint to the ILO for violations of its Conventions on freedom of association. The ICFTU

suspended its education and assistance programmes and maintained a 'low profile' presence in Jakarta; but it agreed to renew its education programmes in 1987 when it emerged that the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the American Asia Free Labor Institute (AAFLI) were continuing their operations (89EB/7(b)(ii); 91EB/11(c)(i); interview notes: Ety; Nedzynski).

Yet support developed within the ICFTU for the affiliation of SPSI, primarily from unions in countries with close economic ties with Indonesia – leaders of APRO and of the Japanese and other Asian unions, as well as the NZFoL (New Zealand Federation of Labour, from 1989 New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, NZCTU) and the AFL-CIO. The strongest opponents were the ITs, in particular PTTI, and the FNV, which had the most familiarity with the situation in the country. Following a mission by Friso and APRO president Usami in April 1988, the EB discussed the situation at length, with representatives of FNV making it very clear that they would oppose SPSI's affiliation. According to Nedzynski, the other members of the EB were not sufficiently informed but should have made it their business to find out. Throughout the 1980s, 'Tom Ety and I were the only ones to oppose [the affiliation of SPSI].... For me it was a matter of principle. I didn't see the point of... trying to talk to them – 'influencing' them – it didn't work. Everyone came around to our view later.... The system was rotten.' (interview notes: Nedzynski).

The Confederation sought to establish closer relations with SPSI, taking part in a seminar in Jakarta on international labour standards which it organised in cooperation with APRO in September 1990. One of the results of the seminar, however, was to reveal to those not already aware of the situation the lack of opportunities for the unions to act independently of government. Friso, who had previously been the ICFTU representative in Jakarta, was reported to have stated after the seminar: 'SPSI will never be affiliated until I die'. When SPSI did make an approach for affiliation in March 1989, it was observed that an application was 'not likely

to receive a sufficiently enthusiastic welcome', and that the application should be re-submitted when the general secretary was satisfied that SPSI was a 'bona fide' national centre. In 1992 the four Indonesian affiliates were suspended by APRO and then by the ICFTU, on the grounds that they were no longer able to operate as 'bona fide' national centres – though at the end of the decade their formal status still remained that of members 'in abeyance' (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*: 158-60; TUC, *General Council Report*, 1993, p. 138; interview notes: Etty, Izumi). In the 1990s the situation in Indonesia remained fraught, with the emergence of an independent union, SBSI, which organised strikes and demonstrations in 1994 and was at once subject to extreme repression. The ICFTU declared its solidarity with the SBSI president. Muchtar Pakpahan, provided legal assistance in what was denounced as a 'mock trial', and protested at the three-year sentence he received. He was eventually released after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 (*Report on Activities 1991-1994*: 131-4, 254-6; Friso 1998, 12-4).

From ARO to APRO

In the 1980s and 1990s, ARO continued to expand its activities, in keeping with the priorities set out in the Bangkok Declaration of 1980. The ICFTU held its world conference on the trade union role in development in New Delhi in March 1981, taking account of the ideas launched by the Asian region to encourage workers' self-help and economic development. One issue where the ICFTU and some Asian affiliates did not agree was the social clause, which INTUC opposed as a 'protectionist' measure. A reference to the social clause was retained in the final document, but the Confederation also recommended that further work be carried out on issues of trade and structural adjustment. Trade union rights in Asia were the main theme of the ARO conference in Seoul in May 1984, which also adopted a number of important changes in the regional structure. The name was changed from ARO to APRO (Asian and Pacific Regional Organisation), in keeping with the development of trade union activities in the wider region.

The conference also decided to set up a women's committee, whose representatives would sit on the APRO governing bodies as observers. Tadanobu Usami of *Domei* was elected president (having acted in this role since 1982, following Devan Nair's resignation), and Mathur re-elected regional secretary (75EB/10(a)(i); 77EB/15(a); 85EB/9(c)(i)).

The new name was just one sign of change. The election of Usami as president marked a shift from leaders of Indian descent towards a greater role for trade unionists from Japan, Australia and New Zealand. When Mathur retired in 1989 he was succeeded as regional secretary by Takashi Izumi, and the regional office was moved from New Delhi to Singapore; Usami was succeeded as president by Gopeshwar of INTUC. He was succeeded in 1994 by Ken Douglas of the NZCTU, signifying a further reduction of Indian influence. The Japanese affiliates were the major financial support of APRO, and their growing prominence reflected this. However, it was an obvious anomaly that the main Japanese confederation, Sohyo, abstained from any international affiliation even though many of its individual sectoral unions belonged to the ICFTU.⁵ Efforts to overcome the internal divisions began to bear fruits with the creation in 1982 of *Zemmin Rokyo*, a council of 41 unions and federations including the ICFTU affiliate *Domei*, with a membership of over 4 million. In November 1987 the unification was consolidated in a new confederation *Rengo*, which immediately sought affiliation to the ICFTU. Vanderveken appealed to delegates at *Sohyo*'s annual convention in 1988 to overcome 'the differences that had kept [*Sohyo* and *Domei*] apart for... four decades'. A year later *Sohyo* joined the ICFTU, and at a special convention in November 1989 it decided to dissolve, in favour of a 'grand unity' with *Rengo* in a new confederation JTUC-RENGO. The new national centre would play an influential role within the ICFTU and APRO in the 1990s. With its 8 million members it was a substantial contributor both to general ICFTU funds and to the ISF;

⁵ This was not just a problem in Japan; the Malaysian public sector union CUEPACS applied for affiliation in 1985 (97EB/10). The ITS general conference discussed this and concluded that 'such affiliations should be exceptional, and that in each case the ITS concerned should be consulted prior to the matter being considered by the ICFTU Executive Board'.

the Japan International Labour Foundation (JILAF), also created in 1989, was to be an additional factor in *Rengo's* influence within the region (*Report on Activities 1979-1982*: 148; *1983-1986*: 160-1; 87EB/10; 2EB/5; 96EB/5; interview notes: Horii; Izumi; Vanderveken).

Unions, Governments and Union Rights

The 1980s saw major social unrest in Asia, violations of trade union rights in a number of countries, including Sri Lanka, Turkey, South Korea and the Philippines, and the election of a conservative anti-union government in New Zealand. ICFTU and APRO consequently faced challenges which they did not always handle consistently. APRO usually acted with great caution, deferring to the wishes of affiliates in the countries concerned. This was not unreasonable in itself, but when these affiliates were themselves close to government they sometimes appeared to support attacks on freedom of association.

An important instance was the general strike in Sri Lanka in July 1980, involving 100,000 workers, primarily in the public services. The government declared a state of emergency and dismissed some 40,000 strikers, closed union offices and seized union property. It was also reported that the government was preparing new legislation prohibiting strikes, already restricted under the provisions of the Essential Public Services Act. These measures were serious enough in the eyes of ICFTU leaders, but were complicated by the presence in the Sri Lankan cabinet of S. Thondaman, leader of the ICFTU affiliate, the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC). Thondaman, a major plantation owner as well as president of the union that represented tea plantation workers of Tamil origin, was considered a defender of the rights of the Tamil minority in the country against repression by the Sinhalese majority. In his capacity as minister of rural development, he was seen as promoting the economic welfare of the impoverished Tamil population; in this sense, he and the CWC itself carried out both a political

and a trade union role, which was not unusual in the region. The problem arose when a trade union leader was a member of a government which attacked trade union rights (*Report on Activities 1979-1982*: 151-2; 77EB/10(c); 80EB/11(c); TUC, *General Council Report*, 1981: 258-9; interview notes: Ford; Vanderveken).⁶

While taking into account the 'very peculiar circumstances' of Sri Lanka, the ICFTU secretariat insisted that Thondaman's presence in government 'should not be a precedent elsewhere'. It accepted the argument of the CWC that Thondaman had used his influence to mitigate the measures taken against the public sector workers, although the TUC noted that thousands of strikers had not been reinstated and that several union leaders faced serious criminal charges over six months later. The EB called for the reinstatement of all workers and for an end to emergency powers, and filed a formal complaint to the ILO; in May 1981 the ILO Governing Body concluded that trade union rights had indeed been violated (77EB/10(c); TUC, *Report to the General Council*, 1981: 259). A further wave of civil unrest hit the country in 1983, affecting the Tamil minority, and many Sinhalese unionists came to the aid of the Tamils. The ICFTU saw the need to broaden its base in the country in order to represent both ethnic groups and a wider variety of occupations, and began to send assistance through ITS affiliates in the country to unions other than the CWC. However it 'held in abeyance' applications for affiliation by two other unions, in the hope that wider unification of the labour movement might be achieved (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*: 153-4; 77EB/10(c); 79EB/2; 84EB/9(b)(ii); 86EB/5).⁷

⁶ Bavin of the IFPAAW was a strong defender of the CWC as protector of the 'plantation Tamil' minority; IFPAAW co-sponsored projects for the Tamils with the ICFTU, LO Norway and Japanese affiliates.

⁷ While the ICFTU took no action against the CWC, the IUF decided to expel the union, which was also its own affiliate. When the CWC complained to the ICFTU, the issue arose of how to handle this difference of approach between two organisations in the same 'trade union family'. At the 1982 ITS general conference, both the IUF and the ICFTU presented their positions; the general conference

The secretariat had stated that Sri Lanka 'should not be a precedent elsewhere,' and another case of union involvement in repressive action by government was handled very differently indeed. The military take-over in Turkey in September 1980 led to massive violations of human and trade union rights: the new government suspended the right to strike, abolished collective bargaining and banned the smaller of the two national union centres, DISK, as well as a number of the industrial federations of the ICFTU affiliate, Türk-Is. DISK's president, Abdullah Bastürk, and most its other leaders were arrested and its offices and assets seized. By the end of October, as many as 11,000 trade unionists and other political opponents of the new regime were under arrest. The immediate reaction of Türk-Is was lukewarm, to say the least: the leadership stated that while they were not in favour of coups, the military had taken power in response to 'terrorism'. That Türk-Is had not itself been banned was explained by its having 'always scrupulously observed the laws', implying that DISK had not. Even more seriously, the general secretary of Türk-Is, Sadek Side, accepted a post in the government as Minister of Social Security, with the approval of the union's executive and without giving up his union position. Kersten discussed the situation with the Türk-Is president at a meeting in London in November 1980, stressing the danger of allowing a 'confusion between government and trade union responsibilities'. The secretariat recommended a mission, having carried out an initial visit in October. Several affiliates, including the Swedish and Danish LO, CISL and UIL, protested at the actions of Türk-Is and called for a full discussion by the EB (*Report on Activities 1979-1982*: 153-4; 76EB/9, appendices III and IV; G. Nilsson and L. Bodström to Kersten, 10.11.1980; E. Gabaglio and A. Izzo to Kersten, 17.11.1980).

A high-level ICFTU/ITS mission headed by Kersten visited Turkey in April 1981. It reported severe violations of human and trade union rights, going way beyond 'suppression of terrorism' (the regime's justification) to attacks on legally constituted organisations such as DISK, with

agreed that consultations were desirable, but that 'ITSs are entirely autonomous and... bound by their own rules and procedures' (80EB/17).

no record of violence. The mission held lengthy talks with Türk-Is and DISK, and received the impression that many leaders and activists of the former were opposed to the actions of the government and the role of the general secretary as a minister. The mission recommended the EB to take 'drastic steps in the matter to save the ICFTU's reputation'. The ARO EB wrote asking for Türk-Is to be given more time to resolve the problem; this was resented by leaders from other regions, one of whom wrote that the issue of Turkey 'has further divided Asia from the rest of the ICFTU' (Harker to Sloan, 26.10.1981, in CLC archives). The strongest advocates of suspension were the Swedish and Danish LO and the Italian affiliates CISL and UIL, along with the FNV and TUC, which had established links with DISK as early as 1967; Narayanan and some other representatives of Asian affiliates urged delay, as did Bergeron of FO. In the end the EB decided unanimously for suspension from August 1981 (77EB/11; 79EB/9(b); interview notes: ETTY; Vanderveken; Walsh).⁸

In November 1981, with Side still a minister, government prosecutors indicted 52 leaders of DISK including its president, Bastürk, for capital crimes including the use of the labour movement for the revolutionary overthrow of the 'constitutional order'. The DISK leaders were not accused of any acts of violence; the strikes and other forms of industrial action which they were accused of fomenting were all legal at the time they were undertaken. Nonetheless, the prosecution called for the death sentence. The ICFTU and its affiliates sent substantial humanitarian aid and provided the services of leading trade union lawyers. Many observers from most major affiliates of the ICFTU, and also the ETUC and WCL, attended the trial, which opened on 24 November 1981 and lasted several years.

The suspension of Türk-Is was lifted by the EB in November 1982, after Side was finally persuaded to take leave from his post as general secretary of the Confederation. The presidency

⁸ Some Türk-Is industrial federations, such as the road workers' union Yol-Is, had also been targets of government repression, and the mission observed that Türk-Is as a whole had 'a respectable history of

of Türk-Is had also changed and the new leader, Sevket Yilmaz, head of the textile workers' union, began to express more vigorous opposition to government measures. Indeed, Türk-Is emerged as a leading opponent of the new draft constitution, made public in July 1982, denouncing it as meaning 'an end to free and independent trade unionism' (80EB/11(d); 81EB/9(a)(supplement)). The lifting of the suspension was followed by what Vanderveken described as a 'spectacular visit' to Turkey in December 1982, his first important trip since taking over as general secretary. The members of the mission were allowed to attend the DISK trial and visit the prisoners, who were detained under appalling conditions. They were accompanied at the trial by Saraj, president of the road workers' union Yol-Is, the first Türk-Is leader to show open solidarity with the defendants. Türk-Is went on to express more open opposition to the government's violations of trade union rights against DISK unions as well as its own affiliates, and organised demonstrations against the draft constitution and labour legislation. While many restrictions remained, the DISK defendants were released in August 1984 after four years' detention. The trial went on, however, until December 1986, when Bastürk and five other DISK officers were sentenced to ten years in prison, and 258 others from five to eight years. DISK and its affiliates were formally dissolved. Defence lawyers appealed against the penalties, which the ICFTU condemned as 'outrageous and unjustified sentences which drastically infringe trade union rights and international labour standards'. The Confederation joined the ETUC and WCL in opposing Turkey's entry to the Council of Europe and the EC while trade union rights were still violated in the country; and the Socialist group of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe held a meeting on human rights in Istanbul, providing the first chance for Bastürk to speak at an international forum since his release. The Confederation continued its long-running campaign in the years that followed; with a return to partial democracy, eventually DISK was legalised in 1991. Though previously fiercely opposed to the ICFTU in its official literature, it applied for affiliation and was

service to workers'.

accepted in 1992 (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*: 154-5; *1987-1990*: 169; 82EB/9(b); 84EB/2(a),9(c); 91EB/11(d)(i); interview notes: Ford; Lewis; Vanderveken).

Growth in the 1990s

The late 1980s and the 1990s saw further expansion for APRO. Moves towards partial democracy in some countries, for example Turkey, South Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines, were accompanied or to some extent brought about by the rise of industrial militancy and of new autonomous unions. The ICFTU did its best to encourage these developments. But authoritarian regimes remained in power or took over in countries like Burma, where the ICFTU was unable to establish any contact; elsewhere democratisation often proved fragile, particularly with the Asian financial crisis of the 1997-98. In South Korea, the government attempted to buttress its austerity programme with anti-union legislation, provoking united mass protest by the officially recognised confederation FKTU, an ICFTU affiliate, and the more militant KCTU. Jordan and other ICFTU leaders visited Korea in 1997 in a display of solidarity. An ICFTU/APRO committee for the defence of human and trade union rights held its first meeting in November 1991, chaired by Friso (100EB/8(b)(ii); interview notes: Friso; Izumi).

As already noted, in 1989 Izumi became APRO regional secretary and the headquarters were moved to Singapore, with a sub-regional office remaining in New Delhi. The Pacific sub-region received increasing attention in this period. The ACTU and NZFoL took the lead in establishing a South Pacific Trade Union Forum in the mid-1980s, seen by some within the secretariat as a 'parallel' and potentially rival operation. For his part, Cliff Dolan, president of the ACTU, was reported to have been 'furious' when the ICFTU appointed a representative for the Pacific without consulting him or other leaders in the region beforehand. Representatives of

some other affiliates were also uneasy about the plans of the ICFTU secretariat, which they felt emphasised the 'security' aspects of the region rather than its trade union needs. These differences were ultimately resolved with the creation of a steering committee of Pacific unions in 1989, with the new ACTU president, Simon Crean, as the interim chair. The Forum was dissolved, and a new ICFTU sub-regional organisation, the South Pacific and Oceanic Council of Trade Unions, was founded in July 1990 (86EB/10(a)(ii); 90EB/9(a)(ii); 98EB/7(b)(ii); Vanderveken to Harker, 24.6.1985; Harker to McDermott, 29.9.1983 (CLC archives)).⁹

Another important area of expansion was the development of women's programmes. One of the main problems for organisation in the region was that most women worked in the informal sector, and few were union members. The foundation of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India in the 1970s provided new opportunities for such women to organise. Such initiatives received the backing of some ITSs, most notably the ITGLWF and the IUF, but some APRO leaders regarded this as properly the work of NGOs rather than the trade union movement.¹⁰ The informal sector began to receive more support within the international trade union movement in the course of the late 1980s and 1990s, largely through the efforts of women trade unionists, the ICFTU Women's Committee and the ITSs, with sustained pressure for an ILO Convention on home-based work. Women's activities within APRO received a great boost with the creation of the women's committee in 1984 and the support of leading women trade unionists from the region. On the occasion of the ICFTU Congress in Melbourne in 1988, the ACTU's Working Women's Centre organised a seminar for women trade unionists. In the 1990s, APRO launched a programme, 'one plus one', for each woman trade unionist to recruit another woman member (90EB/15(b); interview notes:

⁹ According to Harker, he and Walsh (TUC) warned of the danger of exaggerated anti-communism during a meeting of the FGPC in April 1985. Harker also expressed fears that the ICFTU programme in the Pacific could turn into 'an Irving Brown extravaganza'; this is confirmed by Walsh (interview notes).

¹⁰ SEWA was affiliated (with a hiatus in membership in the late 1980s) to the ITGLWF, and to the IUF (interview notes: Ford, Izumi).

Izumi, Rea). Women's activities were now recognised as an important way forward for the unions.

In the late 1990s, the economic and financial crisis that hit Asia created new demands for more aggressive union action and organisation, beyond the traditional 'quiet diplomacy' and company unionism characteristic of much of the region. The ICFTU established relations with the independent unions in a number of countries, such as South Korea and Indonesia, but found itself in an awkward position with some of its existing affiliates. At the same time, APRO had to confront the issue of contacts with the official unions in the People's Republic of China, which were supported by some of its leaders but strongly opposed by other unions in the region, in particular the ACTU, and by many western affiliates. This remained an important unanswered question not only for the region, but for the Confederation as a whole.

Latin America

Central and South America displayed a wide variety of political regimes and levels of development. There were few stable democracies in the area: in several countries, authoritarian regimes were the norm; in others, the overthrow of an elected government by the military was all too familiar. The coup in Chile in 1973 and the repressive dictatorship which followed represented only the most brutal example of a familiar pattern. Much of Latin America was also marked during these decades by a shift from relatively closed economies in which trade unions could win significant benefits for their members to integration in global markets.

The region had some highly industrialised countries, most notably Brazil, Chile and Argentina; others were largely dependent on the export of agricultural products or raw materials, often

dominated by foreign (particularly US) multinationals. In many countries there were immense internal disparities of wealth and income, often linked to highly inequitable patterns of land ownership and discrimination against indigenous or other minority ethnic groups. In some countries with strong labour movements, such as Venezuela, Argentina and Mexico, unions were closely allied to the ruling political parties, raising doubts as to their independence. National centres were often weak, with individual national or local unions holding the real power. Labour movements in Central America and in other countries marked by civil strife, such as Colombia, were targets of severe repression by right-wing authoritarian regimes, with some of the worst violations of human and trade union rights in the world. The development of ICFTU policies and programmes gave rise to particularly intense controversies, both within the region and in the Confederation more generally. These difficulties were accentuated by the troublesome status of its regional organisation.

The Anomaly of ORIT

The *Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores* (Inter-American Regional Organisation of Workers), always known by its Spanish acronym ORIT, was an anomaly within the ICFTU regional structures. Its predecessor, the *Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores* (CIT), was founded in Peru in 1948, one year before the ICFTU. CIT, which became ORIT in 1951, therefore came to the ICFTU as a pre-existing organisation, with its membership including North American unions – the CLC, AFL, CIO and UMWA – as well as those in Latin America and the Caribbean. After the AFL-CIO left the Confederation in 1969 it continued its membership of ORIT, although the ICFTU constitution clearly stated that only its affiliates were ‘eligible for membership’ of its regional organisations. Initially, when it was hoped that the AFL-CIO would soon return to the ICFTU, this anomaly was not widely challenged; later it created serious tensions (Reiser 1962: 34-46).

As with many problems, this was both a political and a procedural matter. For both Kersten and Vanderveken, the return of the AFL-CIO to the fold was a major priority, and to oppose its continued membership in ORIT would be to cut off an important organisational link with the former affiliate. This view was shared by Storti, ICFTU president up to the 1972 Congress, who argued that the AFL-CIO should be allowed to remain in ORIT (though he later added that this was 'on the understanding that such participation contributed to the promotion of ICFTU policies in the region'), and by many other leading figures. Other heads of affiliates, such as Hawke and Narayanan, insisted that 'no exception should be made on the constitution'. Narayanan and other leaders of the Asian region were concerned at the precedent that might be set for their own regional organisation, and foresaw difficulties with the US-backed institute AAFLI in Asia as long as the AFL-CIO remained outside the Confederation. Leading European affiliates, in particular those from the Nordic countries, were wary of the independent influence of the AFL-CIO in the regional organisation; 'they regarded US labour activities in Latin America as far too cosily allied with US and local business interests and possibly even intertwined with CIA operations' (Windmuller 1976a: 253). In the end, a procedural compromise was found to take account of the political realities, whereby the AFL-CIO's continued membership was deemed acceptable on the grounds that at the time it joined ORIT it *was* a member of ICFTU. But this 'fudge', as Vanderveken later called it, was never universally accepted (52EB/2,5; 66EB/2; interview notes: Dewil; Peltzer; Vanderveken).

The continued presence of the AFL-CIO had an impact on the internal workings of ORIT, as well as its policies and programmes, especially now that the American national centre was not obliged to follow the general policies of the Confederation. Some influence was exerted directly through ORIT, where the AFL-CIO usually held key positions on the staff and among the

officers,¹¹ some through national unions, often in cooperation with their respective ITSs.¹² but most importantly, through the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). This was largely funded by the US government and was jointly headed by Meany and by Peter Grace, president of a huge multinational. At the 1972 ICFTU Congress, ter Heide of the NVV declared that ‘the participation of some of the multinational American companies, such as the United Fruit Company and the ITT, in the AIFLD makes this institute, in my view, unsuitable as an instrument for aiding free and democratic unions in developing countries’ (*Report of the Tenth World Congress*, p. 309). Employers were removed from the formal governance of AIFLD when the AFL-CIO was negotiating its re-entry to the ICFTU

The political orientation of ORIT in the early 1970s placed a strong emphasis on the ‘East-West conflict’, as Luis Anderson subsequently put it, as the fundamental guide to policy. This dogmatic anti-communism was shared by many trade unionists in Latin America, where unionism was polarised along ideological lines. Accordingly the US unionists allied themselves with trade unionists in Latin America with the same political orientation, whether or not theirs were the most representative organisations. At the same time, this bias often made ORIT more tolerant of dictatorships of the right than of the left. At the 1972 ICFTU Congress, Kok complained that despite evidence of the arbitrary imprisonment and torture of trade unionists in Brazil and Paraguay, ‘the ICFTU – during the past three years – has not protested openly against such clear violations of human and trade union rights’. The presence of the AFL-CIO put off some national centres, such as those of Colombia and Argentina, from joining the ICFTU, while the Brazilian national centre CNTI disaffiliated in 1971 on the grounds that

¹¹ During this period, one of the US affiliates always held the key position of treasurer. Initially this was José Estrada, a Cuban émigré with US citizenship; from 1977 Michel Verdu; from 1981 Paul Somogyi and from 1986 Roberto Torres.

¹² For example, the US union AFSCME handled Latin American programmes for the Public Service International (PSI), and the Retail Clerks for the IUF, until these operations were ended after the election of Gallin as general secretary; interview notes: ETTY, Lewis; Wedin 1974).

ORIT had 'become one more hired hand in the service of the AFL-CIO' (*Report of the Tenth World Congress*, p. 398; 52EB/12; 66EB/2; interview notes: Anderson; ETTY; Lewis).

ORIT's Internal Difficulties

The strong influence of the US affiliates in part reflected the weakness of trade union organisation in Central and South America. Only in Brazil and Mexico were more than a million members affiliated. Argentina, Colombia, Jamaica and Venezuela were the only other countries with over 100,000. In 1973, the CLC reported that approximately 90% of ORIT's real income came from the AFL-CIO, the CLC and the ICFTU itself. Many of the larger affiliates, as in Mexico and Venezuela, did not always pay their dues in full: national centres were not the strong point in trade union organisation, and the payment of dues was considered of minor importance. The unreliability of regular contributions from affiliates in the region created an unhealthy situation for ORIT, which was dependent on help from outside and yet resented the need to seek that help. ORIT was frequently forced to apply for additional funds from the ICFTU or to ask for an advance on regular funds when dues from the affiliates failed to appear. By 1973, there was a deficit of \$80,000, a problem that was to recur over the years that followed (R. Maione to Morris, 12.12.1973 and Morris to MacDonald, 25.5.1971, CLC archives, 1992/0195, box 28; interview notes: Anderson; Friso).

In the early 1970s, Arturo Jáuregui Hurtado was general secretary of ORIT. He had been financial and administrative secretary of CIT on its foundation in 1948; his continuity of office presumably implied his acceptability to the AFL-CIO. Yet at an ICFTU EB meeting in 1971, Jáuregui complained of 'US interference' at trade union meetings in the region, and was also reported to have complained of 'interference' by non-Latin staff at ORIT and the Cuernavaca Institute. This trade union college at Cuernavaca in Mexico was officially separate from ORIT.

and was funded primarily by the ICFTU, but by 1972 there were serious financial as well as political and organisational problems. There were allegations of interference by ORIT staff in its work, and of attempts to use funds earmarked for the Institute for ORIT's own activities. The German head of education, Dieter Kneitschel, complained of AIFLD influence, and both he and the director, the Canadian J. H. Craigs, wrote that students were often accepted on the basis of the 'political situation' rather than on merit. Attempts by Kneitschel to hire more professional teaching staff were met by warnings not to use lecturers from the University of Mexico, as it was 'filled with Communists', and the AIFLD proposed sending its own staff instead to teach 'democratic ideology'. The ICFTU sent a mission to Mexico in March 1972, headed by John Simonds of the CLC and José Aguiriano of the secretariat, to clarify the misunderstandings that had arisen between the Institute and ORIT. The mission recommended 'the closest possible cooperation' between ORIT and the institute on financial and education matters, but within months the director had resigned, complaining bitterly of the 'mischievous and damaging interference' of Jáuregui and of the transfer of ORIT operations to the Cuernavaca campus, severely hindering its regular educational activity (54EB/2; Doherty to Jáuregui, 17.12.1971; Kneitschel to Pedersen (ICFTU director of education), 6.7.1972; Craigs to Kersten, 22.8.1972 and 9.10.1972; Craigs to MacDonald, 25.9.1972, CLC archives, 1992/0195, box 28).

These problems came to a head just over a year later. ORIT's organisational weakness and dependence, and widespread charges of corruption and mismanagement, gave rise to a relationship later termed 'mutual interdependent loathing' (interview notes: Lewis). Although this remark referred to ORIT's relations with the AFL-CIO, it might well have applied to its relations with the ICFTU. The ORIT leadership was widely considered to have reacted badly to the crisis over Chile (see below), further damaging the image of ORIT and the ICFTU itself both within and outside the region.

In 1973, Meany wrote that the AFL-CIO 'did not intend to continue with its financial contribution to ORIT... [without] changes in leadership'. This led to a further deterioration in ORIT's already parlous financial situation, and an extraordinary meeting of the ORIT EB was held in October in Mexico City. Jáuregui complained that the AFL-CIO 'had been after him for years', and said that he would resign only if asked by ORIT. Although Kersten spoke up for the regional secretary – 'no one said that Arturo had to go' – an agreement was reached whereby Jáuregui would not stand for re-election, and the congress would be moved forward. In January 1974 a new secretary was elected, Julio Etcheverry Espinola, from the Paraguayan affiliate *Confederación Paraguaya de Trabajadores* (CPT) in exile,¹³, described by the CLC representative as 'an unknown quantity' who had been trained by the AIFLD. The new president was Rafael Camacho Guzman of the Mexican CTM (60EB/10(c)(i),15; 61EB/2,10(c),21(c)(i); Maione to MacDonald, 30.10.1973, Maione to Morris, 12.12.1973, CLC archives, 1992/0195, box 28; CLC report of the 8th ORIT Congress; interview notes: Anderson).

The Congress was beset by organisational and political tensions. The official from the Chilean maritime union COMACH (*Confederación Marítima de Chile*) 'harangued the delegates against the evils of the Allende regime', in the words of the CLC representative, who objected to 'judgmental' phrases in the draft resolution about the Allende government, which were removed. Delegates faced the difficult problem of the \$81,000 deficit, and approved proposals to raise dues and to call on the ICFTU to increase its advance of \$30,000 for operating expenses. Congress also agreed changes in the constitution, some of which appeared to conflict with that of the ICFTU: omitting references to ORIT as a regional organisation of the ICFTU, and of the latter's authority to suspend or dissolve ORIT activities. Significantly, a new clause

¹³ As well as the Paraguay-based CPT, which was affiliated to the ICFTU, a parallel organisation operated in exile during the Stroesser regime.

allowed for 'voluntary contributions' to be made from 'all other legitimate sources' as well as affiliates: a veiled reference, some believed, to the AIFLD (62EB/2,15(d)(supplement),21(c)(i); CLC report of the 8th ORIT Congress; Harker to McDermott, 23.5.1978).

The situation in ORIT now aroused great concern within the ICFTU. The EB recommended suspending the affiliation of the official Paraguayan union CPT, although Etcheverry asked for it to be given more time, as well as the Chilean affiliate *Federación Nacional de la Industria Azucarera* (FENAZU), and held in abeyance an application from COMACH until 'free trade unions are once again able to operate'. In March 1975 a mission headed by Kersten visited the region. While its members observed some improvement in the profile of the ICFTU, they voiced grave concern over ORIT's 'inadequacies', especially the fact that 'positions it has adopted have been used by small but vocal groups as propaganda against the free trade union movement'. The mission recommended thorough reform to make ORIT more dynamic in supporting workers' struggles and opposing violations of human and trade union rights. In an appendix to the main report, LO Denmark made further specific recommendations: the suspension of ORIT, the appointment of a commission with members of the EB from the region and the general secretary to plan future activities, and the winding down of the Cuernavaca Institute (62EB/2, 25,26; 63EB/9, appendix, letter from LO Denmark, 26.5.1975).

At the EB, Nielsen of Denmark remarked that the problems over ORIT had gone on for many years and that there had been many complaints about its 'reactionary' stance and links with US foreign policy and secret intelligence agencies; these the official report of the mission failed to address. He noted that the Swedish affiliates were considering suspending their contributions to the ISF unless ORIT's affairs were 'cleaned up', and recommended that a working party be set up with the aim of initiating reforms. If these were not accomplished by the next EB meeting, he recommended that ORIT be disbanded. In response, Etcheverry defended his record in

reducing the deficit, and affirmed that ORIT actions in defence of human and trade union rights in the region were consistent with ICFTU policy. Morris, the incoming CLC president, agreed with Nielsen that the regional organisation should be 'revitalised and rebuilt', and reminded his colleagues of the fundamental problem posed by the AFL-CIO, 'whose overwhelming presence had long degraded the strength of ORIT and its affiliates'. The Board agreed to set up a working party, composed of members from the region and the general secretary, in order to make specific proposals (64EB/2, p. 20; on accusations of CIA involvement, see Harker to McDermott, 23.5.1978).

The working party met in Mexico in October 1975. Its report expressed the hope that the AFL-CIO would return to the ICFTU; in the meantime its participation in ORIT was acceptable as long as it would 'contribute to the promotion of ICFTU policies in the region'. There should be a thorough restructuring of the regional organisation, with a constitution in conformity with that of the ICFTU, and more effort from the affiliates in terms of 'ideas, energy and finance'. The EB approved these recommendations, and agreed that an extraordinary congress of ORIT should be called for representatives of the region to draw up their own plan of action. The FGPC discussed ways of winding up the Cuernavaca Institute, which was eventually purchased by the CTM (63EB/14; 64EB/7; 66EB/2; 67EB/17(a); Harker to Morris, 1.11.1976).

The Coup in Chile

The military coup in Chile on 11 September 1973, and the inhuman actions of the Pinochet regime which usurped power, inspired world-wide trade union protest. At the time, however, the response from ORIT was modest. Jáuregui sent out a press release as follows: 'a military coup d'état has brutally overthrown the Chilean government, which was democratically elected three years ago and which, on account of its social reforms, could have formed an example for

the whole of Latin America' (60EB/10(c)(iii)).¹⁴ Yet ORIT had previously been ambivalent in its attitude to the Allende government. The ICFTU had only one tiny affiliate in the country, following the suspension of COMACH in 1971 for non-payment of dues – though the latter remained a member of ORIT. The largest national centre, the *Central Unica de Trabajadores* (CUT), was regarded with suspicion as too close to WFTU (59EB/13(c)(iii)).¹⁵ COMACH was close to the opposition christian-democratic party and strongly opposed the Allende government, although it did not endorse the coup.

Shortly after the coup, Erwin Kristofferson, DGB international secretary, visited Chile and reported that the junta had dissolved CUT and jailed or murdered many of its members and leadership, and that there were already some 2,000 refugees. He defended CUT as a broadly-based organisation that united all political tendencies in opposition to the coup; it was not 'communist-inspired', as had been claimed by some in ORIT. The EB, meeting in November 1973, agreed enthusiastically to a suggestion from FO and the Danish LO to set up a fund for Chilean trade unionists facing repression from the new anti-union regime. Kersten was able to arrange safe passage for twelve Chileans who had sought refuge at a number of embassies through a direct approach to the UN secretary-general, Waldheim, and the Confederation sent a representative to Chile to find out how best to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees and the relatives of the many trade unionists imprisoned or executed by the new regime. By early 1974, \$11,000 had been raised from affiliates and the ISF, some of which was channelled through CUT's office in exile, set up in Brussels with the help of the ABVV-FGTB.

Considerably more funds were raised in the course of the campaign. The strong interest of many affiliates for action over Chile led to the creation of an ICFTU-CUT coordinating

¹⁴ Numerous sources, including Friso (1998: 27), state that ORIT sent out a press release congratulating Pinochet on the coup. According to Anderson, the report of such a telegram became widespread throughout Latin America, causing great damage to the reputation of ORIT and the ICFTU, but he has never seen it himself. Anderson agrees however (interview notes) that 'ORIT didn't do enough at the time'.

committee aimed at encouraging international solidarity and humanitarian assistance. A small working group met representatives of CUT in exile in Oslo in October 1974 (*Report on Activities 1972-1974*, 146-150; 60EB/10(c)(iii), 61EB/2,10,25; 62EB/15(d)).

The Confederation also pursued action within the ILO and other international bodies, and succeeded with the help of the ILO secretary-general in repudiating the official Chilean workers' delegation to the 1974 International Labour Conference. Following an official complaint from the ICFTU over violations of human and trade union rights in Chile, the ILO set up a commission of inquiry, which heard testimony from the ICFTU, WCL and WFTU in October 1974, as well as from the president of COMACH, Edouardo Rios, a christian democrat who argued in favour of the junta. An official ILO mission went to Chile in November 1974, shortly after a visit from the ITF, led by Lewis and Jones, which was harassed by the authorities and forced to leave within two days, but was able to gather valuable information for the ILO investigation. The ITF Congress recommended 'short, sharp action' against Chilean transport, a 48-hour boycott which took place in September 1974. Naturally, the attitude of the leadership of COMACH made action more difficult, and also aroused concern within the EB where Bavin lamented the 'divergence of approach' with ORIT over Chile (*Report on Activities 1972-1974*; 62EB/15(d); 63EB/2; Jones 1986: 290-2; interview notes: Lewis).

ICFTU action took a dramatic turn at the eleventh world Congress in Mexico City in October 1975. In advance of the meeting, Murray and Charles Blyth, general secretaries of the TUC and ITF respectively, had each written to Kersten, proposing that the ICFTU send a mission during Congress and also send more humanitarian aid. This was agreed unanimously by the EB and endorsed with acclamation by the delegates in the opening session. The emergency mission was led by the general secretary, accompanied by Jones, Morris, Adolf Mirkes of the DGB and

¹⁵ CUT had sent a delegation to the ICFTU in November 1972, seeking its support for an international conference on MNCs in Santiago. The ICFTU declined because of the involvement of WFTU.

the ITGLWF, and José Raquel Mercado, president of the Colombian affiliate CTC and vice-president of ORIT. Jones recalls the moving experience of meeting the Archbishop of Santiago, Msgr. Silva Henriquez, and pinning the ICFTU badge on his robes. Much of the humanitarian aid sent by the Confederation and its affiliates and the ITSs had been distributed by the interdenominational peace committee headed by the archbishop. The members of the mission also met political opponents of the regime who were not yet in prison, but were unable to visit any detainees or government officials. They were closely watched during their entire one-day visit, and Jones was separated from the others and his papers seized as the group arrived at the airport. 'This is what the Fascists do to a visitor from a friendly country. They are thieves. They have taken my property!', he shouted, and was then allowed to join the others. Reporting back to Congress, Kersten noted that 'it was quite clear by the end of our trip that the land we were visiting was no normal country, but a land in which methods are used which only dictatorships employ'. In the subsequent debate on human and trade union rights, Luis Meneses of the CUT gave a rousing address, and delegates unanimously adopted a resolution condemning 'the Fascist suppression of basic human and trade union liberties' and committing the ICFTU to 'give all possible moral and material support to CUT' and to work for the complete economic and diplomatic isolation of the Chilean regime (*Report of the Eleventh World Congress*: 345-6, 405-6, 585-6, 627, 672-3; 64EB/9; 66EB/2,9; Jones 1986: 293; interview notes: Jones).

Opposition to the junta within the country grew as repressive measures intensified. The ICFTU marked the anniversary of the coup in September 1976 with a statement and press conference, but there was a growing feeling within the Confederation that not enough was being done. More than two years after the ITF action of September 1974, only New Zealand and Australia maintained a total trade union boycott of Chilean transport and goods. Many affiliates faced serious legal and practical obstacles in carrying out boycott actions in their countries, and

concentrated instead on humanitarian aid, such as the resettlement of refugees, and protests. The ICFTU-CUT coordinating committee met four times in 1976 alone, but complications arose when other trade union groupings emerged in Chile, some with no links to CUT. In January 1977 members of the secretariat visited Chile for an update on the situation, following which a meeting was convened which resolved to 'foster the greatest possible cohesion among all anti-fascist trade union groupings'. A 'group of ten' largely christian-democrat trade unionists made contact with the ICFTU in March 1977, and representatives of the Confederation and affiliates met the group on several occasions. ICFTU leaders were heartened by the spread of opposition to the regime, but warned that unionists from outside the main trade union groupings 'should not be welcomed with open arms', as Jones put it, which could encourage a splintering of the free Chilean trade union movement. The Confederation was careful to avoid giving this impression, and instead continued working through the CUT while establishing relations with other groups, and maintained pressure within the ILO and other UN institutions (*Report on Activities 1975-1978*: 101-3, 207-11; 67EB/12(c)(v); 68EB/2,12(c)(v),13(c)(v,vi); 69EB/2,13(c)(vi); interview notes: Hawke; Jones; Lewis).

The ICFTU and ORIT jointly organised a conference on trade union freedom and human rights in Cuernavaca in April 1977, immediately preceding the ORIT Congress, and passed a resolution denouncing Chile's fascist regime. The ICFTU welcomed the concern for human rights of the new US administration, headed by President Carter, and supported Amnesty International's 'Prisoner of Conscience Year'. The ORIT Executive Council, meeting in Lima in November 1978, called for a boycott of Chile, Nicaragua (still under the Somoza dictatorship) and Cuba. When this resolution was presented to the EB at the end of that month, representatives of the CLC, the Nordic unions and others opposed the inclusion of Cuba, which had not been the subject of any debate within the Confederation for many years. The resolution was not endorsed, but referred for discussion to the newly created ICFTU committee for the

defence of human and trade union rights in Latin America. The matter was hotly debated in a number of meetings that followed, including one in Washington in early January 1979. Angry that there were objections to the proposal to include Cuba in the boycott, Meany recommended instead that all boycott action be postponed. This was vehemently opposed by many participants, including José Vargas, chair of the new committee and president of the influential Venezuelan affiliate CTV, who said that there was considerable pressure from the region to institute a unilateral boycott; and Del Pino, who had succeeded Etcheverry as secretary of ORIT, and threatened to resign if the boycott was not implemented. According to the CLC, Friso reported that 'Meany had upset not only the Venezuelans but all the Latinos, who felt the AFL-CIO was just trying to use ORIT to further State Department policy'. In the meantime Lewis, the newly elected ITF general secretary, also voiced his opposition to the inclusion of Cuba in the boycott, and asserted that a boycott of transport or handling of goods had to be decided by the ITF, not by ORIT or the ICFTU (68EB/11; CLC Executive Council Meeting, 12.12.1978; summary of the oral report submitted to the 71st ICFTU Executive Board; McDermott to Kersten, 4.1.1979; Harker to McDermott, 17.1.1979; Lewis to Otero, 22.12.1978, CLC archives).

The first official meeting of the committee for the defence of human and trade union rights, in February 1979, accepted that ORIT had previously concentrated too much on anti-communism, and stressed the need for immediate action on Chile and Nicaragua. The ITS general conference also discussed the boycott, and by the time of the second meeting of the committee in July 1979, the ITF had a specific proposal for a week of solidarity actions, including boycotts, to take place in September 1979. It was decided to proceed, with non-participating unions paying an indemnity for those taking part. The participants agreed with the view of Shirley Carr, CLC vice-president, that 'Chile can sell': this was one of the rare international trade union issues, like South Africa, that aroused the solidarity of workers

around the world. To coincide, the ICFTU and ORIT organised a conference in Caracas on democracy, freedom of association and human rights in Latin America; this was regarded as an 'unprecedented step forward' in the 'cohesion of the international free trade union movement'. The week of action was a great success, with dockers in several countries refusing to load or unload ships, post and telecommunications with Chile disrupted and boycotts of all forms of air and sea transport (72EB/14; 73EB/10(a,b); TUC, *General Council Report*, 1980: 220; Carr to McDermott, 19.7.1979, in CLC archives).

The 'Redemption' of ORIT

ORIT's Congress in Cuernavaca in April 1977 made important changes that were to have a major impact on relations with the ICFTU in the years to come. Juan José Del Pino, of the Venezuelan CTV, was elected general secretary to succeed Etcheverry, and proceeded to carry out the reforms that the ICFTU and its affiliates had been urging for several years. Alfonso Sánchez Madariaga (CTM) was elected president. The EB welcomed the changes, which Friso said had shown 'a clearly manifested wish for closer identification with the world movement and its philosophy'. It was widely admitted that the Confederation had not done enough in the region in the past. The Congress also approved an amended draft of the ORIT constitution, 'taking fully into account the observations made by the ICFTU Executive Board', as the secretariat put it (68EB/13(c)(i,ii); 69EB/2, 13(c)(ii)).

The EB approved the new constitution in May 1977, although some members noted that it still contained the article allowing ORIT to receive outside funds, which would call for 'extreme vigilance' from the Confederation. It ought to have been clear that this meant that the AIFLD and other government-funded agencies could still contribute money directly to ORIT, without going through an affiliate; but when the time came for a contract between ORIT and the

AIFLD to be renewed, LO Sweden objected and its president, Gunnar Nilsson, wrote to Kersten stating that if this was approved, LO would no longer contribute to the ISF. At the next meeting of the FGPC in May 1978, Kersten insisted that Del Pino was wholly responsible, causing the new regional secretary to threaten to resign. A crisis was averted by Murray and other EB members, and the matter was referred to a later meeting while awaiting further information; but Kersten's handling of the situation was regarded as clumsy and likely to antagonise both the affiliates in Latin America and the Americans (69EB/2,13(c)(ii); 70EB/18(a); Harker to D McDermott, 23.5.1978).

The new regional secretary stepped up action in defence of human and trade union rights, not only in Chile but also in Argentina, where the military coup of March 1976 had led to mass arrests and 'disappearances', and Colombia, where the respected trade union leader Rafael Mercado, who had taken part in the emergency mission to Chile in 1975, was assassinated in April 1976 after being kidnapped and undergoing 'horrible suffering'. ORIT also finally recommended the suspension of the official national centre CPT in Paraguay, and sought to establish closer links with the CPT in exile, meeting its leaders in Buenos Aires. Most importantly, Del Pino cooperated with the ICFTU in inquiries into three affiliates, the *Confederación General de Sindicatos* (CGS) of El Salvador, the *Central de Trabajadores Federados* (CTF) of Guatemala, and the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (CGT) of Uruguay. The inquiry resulted in a recommendation to Congress that the three affiliates be expelled because of their close links to the dictatorship regimes then in place. It was reported that the failure of the CGS to condemn government repression and assassinations of trade unionists meant that it had not protected 'the fundamental interests of the working people of El Salvador' and had jeopardised 'the image of the free trade union movement'. The reports on the other two affiliates followed similar lines, and the EB agreed to put the proposal for expulsion to the next ICFTU Congress. Such strong action had rarely been taken before, and

demonstrated the strength of feeling among the affiliates and within ORIT and the secretariat over the abuses of human rights in the region. This action meant ‘redemption’ for ORIT. declared Anderson subsequently (67EB/12(c)(ii,iv); 70EB/14(c)(i,v,vi,vii); 73EB/5,10(e); interview notes: Anderson).

Reporting on this period in 1979, Kersten applauded the fact that ‘the new leaders of our regional organisation, ORIT, are showing interest and enthusiasm in the fight for freedom, democracy and the effective integration of our affiliated organisations in Latin America into the free and democratic international trade union family’ – as much as to say that this had not been true in the past. Indeed he noted that ‘some of our affiliates in Latin America have not taken a clear stand against dictatorship’ and that initiatives taken with funding by agencies such as AIFLD were constrained by the fact that ‘they have to be approved in advance by the governments of the countries in which they are carried out’. Friso summed up the change succinctly: Del Pino had performed an ‘heroic’ role in cleaning up ORIT (*Report on Activities 1975-1978*: 194-5; Friso 1998: 24).

ORIT in the 1980s and 1990s

The ICFTU Congress in November 1979 agreed to exclude the three Latin American affiliates, applauded the week of action over Chile, and called on affiliates ‘to take all the measures in their power, including trade bans, which can contribute to the restoration of a democratic form of government’. Another resolution condemned the anti-union repression in Argentina, and a general resolution on the trade union and political situation in Latin America denounced the arbitrary arrest, torture and assassination of trade unionists in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay in addition. On the positive side, there was welcome for the

democratisation process in Nicaragua and also in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and (partially) Brazil (*Report of the Twelfth World Congress: 657-60*).

Opposition to the Chilean junta continued to grow, and trade unionists of the various tendencies formed a common organisation, the *Comando Nacional de Defensa de los Derechos Sindicales en Chile*, which the ICFTU supported by funding projects both within and outside the country, contributing over \$400,000 to the *Comando* in 1980 alone. In the meantime, violations of human and trade union rights were becoming endemic. Following a coup in Bolivia, Friso and other members of an ICFTU delegation were arrested and detained for several days in July 1980. The election of Reagan as US president in 1980 (following the victory of Thatcher in Britain in the previous year) was seen as a signal that the dictators had little to fear from the outside world. Nevertheless, the committee for the defence of human and trade union rights continued to meet regularly roughly twice a year, coordinating activity with representatives of clandestine unions in dictatorship countries or unions in exile (75EB/12(b); *Report on Activities 1979-1982*, 82-88, 159-170; 80EB/9(b); Friso 1998, 43-43; Harker to McDermott, 8.12.1980).

Del Pino was re-elected general secretary of ORIT at its Congress in May 1981 but resigned in 1982, following a heart attack. After a short interregnum with Tulio Cuevas of Colombia, the post of general secretary was taken by Luis Anderson, leader of the *Confederación de Trabajadores de la República de Panama* (CTP). He resigned in January 1985 to become Minister of Labour of Panama, being succeeded by Isamaro Gonzalez of Venezuela, but resumed the position in February 1986. With the election of Anderson, ORIT finally found organisational and political stability. As Friso later wrote, 'Juan José Del Pino represented a courageous rupture with an incoherent past with respect to the policies of the ICFTU; with

Luis Anderson, ORIT found not only conformity with a coherent policy, but also organisational efficiency' (77EB/8(a); 80EB/9(a); Friso 1998: 33-4).

This new-found stability was greatly aided by the return of the AFL-CIO to the Confederation in 1982, although there was still no clear definition of the status of the Institutes or their role in the regional organisations. In the 1980s and 1990s, ORIT expanded its activities to cover economic questions and popular resistance to austerity policies in the era of structural adjustment, and called for economic democracy to go along with the growth of political democracy on the continent. But major abuses of human rights continued: the 1983 Congress adopted resolutions referring specifically to Chile and Argentina and more generally to Central and South America (*Report of the Thirteenth World Congress: A-62, 66-8*).

The committee for the defence of human and trade union rights continued with a full agenda, dealing with rights abuses in twelve Latin American countries between 1983 and 1986. Chile remained a key concern. The conditions were made starkly clear –if they were not painfully so already – in March 1986 when José Vargas Garcia, Bavin's successor as secretary of the IFPAAW, was murdered by the secret police while on a mission to Chile. In November 1986 the EB admitted two new affiliates: the *Central Democrática de Trabajadores* (CDT), a successor of COMACH, which was regarded by many as too close to the Pinochet regime but was supported by the AIFLD; and the *Comité de Coordinadora Nacional Sindical* (CNS) which was a product of the *Comando*. Speaking for the CNS at the 1988 Congress, Manuel Bustos made a renewed appeal for solidarity with the struggle of the Chilean workers against dictatorship, declaring that the opposition was uniting to achieve a rejection of the regime in the plebiscite which Pinochet had announced. A few months later, in August 1988, the CUT was reconstituted (absorbing the CNS) with Bustos as president and Arturo Martínez as general secretary. A few days later, both were sent into internal exile (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*,

83-84, 165-178; *Report on Activities 1987-1990*, 194-195; *Report of the Thirteenth World Congress*, 386-389; interview notes: Anderson; Dehareng).

But for once, optimism was justified: the next ICFTU report could record that ‘Latin America has continued to move towards democratisation and the establishment of legitimate elected governments. The two bloodiest dictatorships in the Southern Cone have fallen.’ The committee for the defence of human and trade union rights sent observers to the plebiscite in October 1998, which resulted in defeat for Pinochet’s bid to retain power. In December 1989 a general election brought the restoration of democracy; and the ICFTU was represented at the investiture of President Aylwin the following March. CUT was admitted to the ICFTU in December 1994, by which time the CDT had dissolved. Liberalisation was also under way elsewhere in Latin America; in 1989 and 1990 it was possible for the ICFTU and ORIT to organise two conferences on ‘Peace and Democracy in Central America’ without inviting derision (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*: 187, 191-5).

It was clear that unqualified celebration would be premature. The ICFTU report for 1991-1994 noted that as far as human rights were concerned, ‘intolerable situations have persisted... in some countries’. The ‘fragile democracies’ which had emerged faced ‘serious economic crisis’. Mass unemployment, restrictions on freedom of association, oppressive employment conditions in *maquiladora* enterprises and forms of forced labour were widespread, confronting trade unions with continuing obstacles (*Report on Activities 1991-1994*: 297-8). It was nevertheless now possible for ORIT to give greater attention to issues which had long been ICFTU priorities elsewhere in the world. Notably, women workers’ concerns began to acquire a higher profile – a trend symbolised by the election of Hilda Anderson de Rojas (CTM Mexico) as vice-chair of the ICFTU women’s committee in 1987. Following the example of APRO, ORIT appointed a women’s coordinator in 1988 and established a women’s department the following year, and

developed a range of projects in individual countries. The inaugural meeting of the ORIT regional women's committee took place in Guatemala City in 1990, with one or two meetings a year thereafter.

Conclusion

The sheer weight of detail in this chapter should reveal one thing: the ICFTU is capable of great persistence in defending its affiliates when it believes that human and trade union rights are in danger. It has even given support to non-affiliated organisations, like the Turkish DISK, which openly declared its hostility to the ICFTU. However, it is equally true that it has taken the Confederation far longer to intervene in some cases than in others, and that it has on some occasions turned a blind eye to oppression. Indonesia provides a good example: it required persistent pressure from a single national centre and a single ITS to persuade the EB to pay attention to the abuses of trade union rights in that country. In other cases, most spectacularly in Chile, the affiliates have been divided, and it took years to build up an effective campaign. In both cases, the regional organisations were cool towards intervention by the secretariat or the Confederation, whether because they preferred 'quiet diplomacy' or because they were unsympathetic to the cause of the trade unionists in question. In other cases, individual affiliates in the country concerned, or in neighbouring countries, have opposed intervention, as on the Indian sub-continent.

Beyond these organisational points, we must face the question of ideology and the difficulty of defining free trade unionism in practice. For many years, free trade unionism was seen by many leaders of the Confederation as hostility to communism; many affiliates were accepted and given practical support because they were anti-communist, whether or not they were

independent of outside forces and were effective representatives of their members' interests, or even whether they possessed significant membership at all. Similarly, other unions were not accepted, or did not seek affiliation, because they were considered too far to the left. This is not to say that the ICFTU's claims to defend human and trade union rights are meaningless, but rather that this objective interacts with others – such as the struggle against 'totalitarianism' – and requires a complex interaction between individual affiliates, regional organisations and the Confederation before it can be put into practice.

This leads to the more general question of the role of the regional organisations within the Confederation. Clearly, they have sometimes acted to block initiatives in certain countries or in support of certain organisations, but have less often promoted positive ideas or programmes within the world body. The regional organisations have tended to act as recipients of policies or resources, rather than initiators, not only through their own volition but also through the structure of the Confederation and the place of regions and regional organisations within it. The ICFTU Constitution does not grant the regional organisations full autonomy, and the Confederation has intervened in the affairs of regional organisations when it considered it necessary in order to protect its integrity as a world body, as in the case of ORIT. The Confederation has opted for a policy of internationalism – centralised decision-making over policies and resources – as opposed to one of decentralised regionalism; but the situation is not entirely straightforward: it did not intervene to sustain the European Regional Organisation, nor has it been able to prevent some western affiliates from exercising an independent influence through bilateral programmes and the funding and administration of the ISF. In a sense, this amounts to regionalism for some; internationalism for others.

Chapter 5

The ICFTU in Action:

The Campaign for Women's Equality and the Struggle against Apartheid

This chapter covers two of the most successful campaigns of the ICFTU in its recent history. Neither was a success for the ICFTU alone: both were heavily dependent on pressure from below, not as in most other cases primarily from the leaders of the affiliates or the general secretaries of the ITSs, although their role was crucial. Both the struggle for freedom in South Africa and the struggle for the equality of women throughout the world were (are) truly mass struggles, undertaken and won through the combined efforts of trade unionists and other groups in civil society, parties and governments. Both were also genuinely international campaigns, involving a high degree of coordination between countries and levels of action. Indeed, the ICFTU is not usually regarded as having played a significant role in either case: its role in South Africa was extremely complex, and could be seen as an example of the Confederation being forced to take action *from below*. In contrast, the struggle for women's equality within the trade union movement can be viewed at least in part as the result of leadership *from above* (from the secretariat and from the Women's Committee) combining with pressure from within the affiliates to increase women's representation and bring women's concerns to the centre of the trade union agenda. I shall begin with South Africa, as it relates directly to the previous chapter's discussion of human and trade union rights.

The Struggle against Apartheid

The victory of the South African people in their struggle for democracy, and of the South African workers in their fight for free trade unionism, was also one of the most important campaigns in the history of ICFTU. Over several decades, the Confederation campaigned for solidarity with the freedom movement, helped coordinate pressure on governments and employers, and gave substantial financial and organisational assistance to the independent black unions in that country. There were many uncertainties within the Confederation over the appropriate action to undertake, to some extent reflecting political differences and the inevitable difficulties of achieving united action on a global scale, and it took considerable pressure from key affiliates and their members before the Confederation undertook its most decisive actions; yet the degree of coordinated intervention ultimately achieved was impressive.

The consolidation of South Africa as a repressive police state imposing rigid racial discrimination coincided with the formative period of the ICFTU. The first meeting of its General Council, in Berlin in July 1952, had denounced 'this stain which today brings shame to the entire free world'. In 1959 the Confederation called for a boycott of South African goods, and it played an active role in pressing complaints at the ILO, leading to moves to expel the country from the Organisation; these resulted in its withdrawal in 1964. It also campaigned for an effective arms boycott, and coordinated action by European trade unions to dissuade their members from emigrating to the country.

What could be achieved by external pressure alone was limited. So thorough and systematic was the regime's repression that by the end of the 1960s most leaders of an independent labour movement who had not been killed were in prison or in exile; effective independent trade unionism on the ground was virtually destroyed. But in the early 1970s the situation was transformed by the resurgence of black labour unrest and political protest, to a large extent

spontaneous and coordinated only by informal networks of activists in the black communities. The first major sign of a new era was the series of strikes involving over 100,000 workers in Durban in 1973; another was the Soweto uprising of 1976. The response of the South African regime was contradictory: the Wiehahn Commission, appointed in 1977 to recommend changes in labour legislation, proposed that black unions (never explicitly illegal) should receive official recognition; and many large employers saw the need for formal structures of worker representation in their companies. While the iron hand of the police state remained omnipresent, the framework was established for the explosion of black trade unionism in the 1980s (MacShane et al. 1984). As a result, new opportunities arose for effective intervention by the ICFTU.

The 1970s: External Pressure

In 1972, none of these developments could be anticipated; and even the Durban strikes the following year seemed at first to have no long-term effects. In the wake of the treason trials and government attacks on the trade unions in the 1960s, the leading black trade union centre, SACTU, which had been formed in 1955, was driven into exile and depended on financial and moral support from WFTU. Some individual unions (such as TASS and the Musicians' Union in Britain, or the Ontario Federation of Labour in Canada) maintained contacts with SACTU, but their national centres shied away from official links. The white-dominated trade union centre TUCSA was ambivalent and paternalistic at best; some member unions, such as the busmen and miners, were frankly racist. The ICFTU refused to meet TUCSA representatives after the latter excluded black workers from membership in 1969 to comply with government legislation. The TUC however continued to meet its general secretary Grobbelaar on his regular visits to Britain, in the hopes of gleaning some information about the situation within the country; but Michael Walsh, then a young member of the International Department, now

describes these 'courtesy visits' as a 'waste of time' (interview notes: ETTY; Jones; Murray; Walsh; *Report on Activities 1969-1971*, 53; TUC, *General Council Reports*, 1964 and 1966; CLC papers, memo from Harker to McDermott, 15.11.83).

As noted earlier, the ICFTU faced considerable difficulties in reconciling its firm line on contacts with communist organisations with the prominent involvement of communist governments, WFTU affiliates and other left or communist-linked unionists in western countries in initiatives on South Africa. This was apparent in the preparations for the 1973 International Trade Union Conference against Apartheid. UN representatives invited the ICFTU to participate in an international conference on the issue, together with the WCL and WFTU, but the secretariat rebuffed this approach, and reported to the next EB that the Confederation should instead step up its own independent activities on South Africa. The EB, however, felt otherwise: as Narayanan argued, the ICFTU could not afford to 'sit on the fence' on such an important issue, and risked being outflanked in Africa by its rivals (55EB/18).

The EB proposed as an alternative that the conference take place within the ILO framework, where there was a precedent of working together with WFTU. This was accepted by the UN, and the entire process shifted to the ILO, where the major players were Harold Dunning, then head of the Workers' Relations Branch, and Joe Morris of the CLC, a vice-president of the Confederation and chair of the Workers' Group. The preparatory committee was dominated by ICFTU representatives and chaired by Morris. They strongly resisted moves by WFTU and the WCL for a permanent coordinating committee on apartheid, and worked behind the scenes with Dennis Akumu, general secretary of OATUU, for a compromise whereby the preparatory committee would be associated with the work of the UN Special Committee on Apartheid. The conference in Geneva in June 1973 brought together 380 delegates, and adopted a composite resolution the contents of which the ICFTU was largely able to shape. Its most important

elements were a call for trade unions to take international action against apartheid through such measures as opposing emigration to South Africa, bringing pressure on companies operating there, boycotting the loading and unloading of goods, organising a consumer boycott, and holding a world-wide week of action against apartheid in December 1973 (54EB/8; 55EB/8; 59EB/7; 60EB/2, 7; memo from Harker to Morris, 8.12.1977).

Solidarity on the Ground

How should the Confederation sustain the momentum of the ILO conference? One consequence of the international efforts to isolate South Africa was that developments on the ground were difficult to follow, and it was therefore proposed that the ICFTU should send a fact-finding mission. This was however a contentious suggestion, and when the British TUC decided in late 1973 to send a team to South Africa the ICFTU welcomed this and concluded that its own proposed mission would be 'counter-productive' for the time being. The mission was seen as an opportunity to gather information and assess the potential for international solidarity action, although it aroused some opposition within the TUC itself at its 1973 Congress. The mission, in October 1973, was publicly opposed by African regional secretary Fissohu Tekie and EB member Y. Kaltungo, and at the November EB also by Löfblad, on behalf of the ITSs, all on the grounds that the TUC had paid a courtesy visit to the South African premier. Narayanan, and Bob Hawke, president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), supported the TUC, stressing that they 'went there to help' and may have gained useful information for the Confederation's own future actions. Jack Jones, who was a member of the mission, recalls that one outcome was that it became clear that there was no way productively to work with TUCSA, whose 'benevolent' stance on missions outside the country masked overtly racist practices inside it. Jones argued however that opposition to TUCSA as an organisation did not mean refusal to deal with all its members and affiliates: many individual white trade unionists

acted courageously in support of black workers (interview notes: Jones; 51EB/2, 10(a) (ii); 60EB/2, 7; 61EB; 62EB/2, 21(a)(2); TUC, *General Council Report 1973*, 202-5 and *Congress Report 1973*, 583-4).

Under these circumstances, it was not easy to decide how best to extend support to the black South African workers. Some members of the EB feared that the ICFTU would be compromised by action within the country, when so many activists were imprisoned or exiled, and stressed the need to 'isolate' South Africa and apply pressure from outside. The new African regional secretary Amos Gray argued that South African workers needed more than the right to belong to unions, as they were 'suffering untold miseries under a system of apartheid which separated them, on their own soil, from whites'. But the TUC in particular argued strongly for action in support of black workers within South Africa: the ICFTU was in a key position to assist 'the job of building black unions' (interview notes: Murray). The TUC's position, which may have been influenced by its tradition of links with unions in former colonies, and by the strong economic ties between Britain and South Africa, was initially a minority view, but was taken up by Andrew Kailembo, who was responsible for starting up a South African programme at the secretariat. In practice, the two positions were not totally opposed, as both groups supported international pressure on the apartheid regime – action from outside – but were undecided on how best to support workers inside the country. In the end, after the creation of credible independent black trade unions with which the ICFTU could establish links, the way was clear to lend them its support (interview notes: Kailembo; Walsh; 61EB/2, 10(a)(ii); 62EB/2, 21(a)(ii); 69EB/2, 13(iii)).

The ICFTU/ITS Coordinating Committee

In 1974 the Confederation set up an ICFTU/ITS coordinating committee on South Africa, which continued in existence until the end of the apartheid regime. The committee dealt with all forms of action to be taken by the ICFTU, its national affiliates and the ITSs: both support to unions within South Africa, and actions by trade unions outside to pressure the South African government and economy in order to bring an end to the apartheid regime. The coordinating committee played an important role in keeping the South African issue at the centre of attention over the long years of the struggle against apartheid. However, tensions arose over the nature and extent of its coordinating role, and between those representing the unions most active in anti-apartheid work and those less active or more cautious in their approach.

Individual affiliates contributed significantly to developing ICFTU policy and action on South Africa: the TUC and NVV (later FNV) were the first to pledge financial assistance, soon followed by other European unions, Histadrut in Israel and the CLC, which also contributed to political pressure through the leadership of Morris and his successor Shirley Carr in the ILO and UN. The Australian and New Zealand affiliates took the lead in boycotts and industrial actions against apartheid, and within the Commonwealth. African representatives like Gray, Kaltungo (who chaired the committee) and the Tunisian Sadok Allouche were actively involved. There was less involvement from unions in the developing countries of Asia and Latin America, apart from the guiding role of Narayanan as ICFTU president and the active participation of Walcott of Barbados (62EB/2,15(a)(iii),21(a)(ii); 68EB/2,12(a)(iii); EB/9(a)(iii).

The ICFTU organised a series of events, the first a study week in February 1975, which concentrated on explaining the South African situation to European workers and carrying out investigations of recruiting offices and the activities of the MNCs. Following the Soweto uprising and massacres in June 1976 it organised a conference on Southern Africa in

September, in conjunction with the ITSs and social-democratic parties; a second week of action in January 1977, in reaction to the banning of 24 South African trade unionists; and a new protest campaign in the autumn of 1977 in reaction to the death of Steve Biko in police custody and a further wave of bannings. Within the EB, Allouche backed calls for more concerted intervention: 'if our friends in South Africa did not find support in the free world they might turn elsewhere'. He argued for ambitious action including large-scale rallies, press and publicity campaigns with African personalities, and most importantly the 'grounding of South African aircraft and ships, and... boycott of unloading and loading of goods destined for or coming from South Africa' (63EB/2,15(a)(iii);67EB/12(a)(iii); 68EB/2,12(a)(iii)).

Building up International Pressure

For the ICFTU, external pressure remained important: opposing the emigration of skilled white labour through publicity amongst trade unions in the countries of origin and putting pressure on MNCs with operations in South Africa to respect labour rights for black workers, through codes of conduct, sanctions and an end to new investments, and governmental and intergovernmental action. The efforts by affiliates and individual unions to persuade their members not to emigrate, as well as to push for the closure of recruitment offices in their countries, were significant forms of solidarity from an early stage, as the apartheid regime depended on a steady supply of skilled white workers to maintain white dominance of the economy and to provide new recruits for its conscript army. The ICFTU argued that the South African recruitment efforts could be stopped under anti-discrimination laws already in force in many Western countries. This form of action was particularly important in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and other European countries that were the main source of immigrants (63EB/11(c); 87EB/2).

The focus shifted increasingly throughout the 1970s to targeting the activities of the MNCs. In order to provide a basis for more effective action, the secretariat compiled a list of around 3,000 MNCs operating in South Africa, either directly or through subsidiaries and licensees. The publication of the list proved controversial within the ICFTU; some affiliates, notably the Japanese, complained about the inclusion of MNCs from their own country, such as Toyota. The list, regularly updated, proved significant not only in guiding the actions of trade unions but also for governmental action, forming the basis for the 1977 EEC code of conduct for companies operating in South Africa. Such codes of conduct were a rallying cry for anti-apartheid activists and trade unionists alike. Although the ICFTU consistently pointed out the limitations in the OECD's proposed code of 1976, the Sullivan code drawn up by the US Congress, and the EEC code, it supported them as an additional form of pressure on the South African government and publicity for the struggle against apartheid. The ICFTU came out in support of sanctions against South African business interests, as recommended by the 1973 International Trade Union Conference and demanded by the anti-apartheid movement and many national unions; but this position did not have universal support within the ICFTU, as the TUC and some other western affiliates expressed concern about the potentially harmful effects on black workers inside South Africa. A more specific demand was for the reduction and eventual elimination of the investment of trade union pension contributions in companies with interests in South Africa, an action which the TUC accomplished by the end of 1973. The ICFTU – which insisted that its campaign on the MNCs was undertaken 'at the request of Black workers within South Africa' – attempted to reconcile these differences by urging a ban on new investments, rather than what it considered to be an unrealistic call for abandoning existing investments in the country (interview notes: Jones; Kailembo; Walsh; *Report on Activities 1975-1978*, 96; 59EB/7; 61EB/2,10(a)(ii); 62EB/2,21(a)(ii); 67EB/2; 76EB/7(c), Appendix I; 85EB/7(a); 87EB/2; Vanderveken, ICFTU press conference, 12.4.1985, in CLC files, 216-35/51-A).

One of the most important forms of action was pressure on MNCs to improve their labour relations and recognise black workers' unions in their South African subsidiaries. In 1974, the NVV undertook a number of initiatives, including writing to companies with interests in South Africa, urging them to recognise black workers' organisations. The DGB sent information on the South African situation to works councils of German firms with interests there. By far the most extensive action of this kind took place over a number of years in the UK, which had the largest number of MNCs operating in South Africa. The TUC, and many individual unions, supported the efforts of the independent black trade unions in their recruitment drives and strikes, meeting officials at the companies' head offices, organising publicity and solidarity campaigns at UK plants, and later arranging exchanges between South African and British unionists within the same company. The first British-based MNC to sign an agreement with a black South African union was the textile firm Smith and Nephew, which recognised the National Union of Textile Workers in 1974. The 1975 ICFTU Congress, in a long resolution on South Africa, called for this approach to be generalised in order to press parent companies to recognise African trade unions and train black workers for skilled positions; if they refused the response should be a campaign for disinvestment (interview notes: Walsh; 62EB/2,10(a)(2),15(a)(iii), 21(a)(ii); Fine and Welch 1982).

Direct action by individual unions and ITSs, under the umbrella of the ICFTU or national centres, was also seriously considered from an early stage. Jones, general secretary of the largest British union and an executive member of the ITF, was the most vigorous and credible advocate of industrial action, together with the Australian Bob Hawke and the New Zealander Jim Knox. From an early stage, it was clear to ICFTU leaders that the South African issue was unique in its appeal to the wide spectrum of the labour movement and in its potential for united action. Hawke argued eloquently in the EB that he 'could not think of an issue more important

to the ICFTU's integrity'. Yet the Australian and New Zealand unions were almost the only national centres that put themselves on the line by carrying out boycotts of South African ships, blocking the visits of South African sports teams, and other direct action, which over several years created considerable hardship among dockers and other workers affected (interview notes: Hawke; Lewis). The DGB expressed fears that German unions would get into legal difficulties if they organised boycotts, and other unions (for example the Dutch NVV/FNV, according to ETTY) felt similarly. Despite calls from Jones and other transport workers' leaders, the ITF general secretary, Harold Lewis, was cautious about commitment to an international boycott which the Federation was in no position to deliver. Lewis supported some actions, in the form of strikes of limited scope and duration: for example those during the ICFTU week of action in January 1977, which were valuable as publicity and as pressure on the South African regime. In the event, one-day stoppages did manage to inflict some damage on South African interests, when postal workers and airline staff also took part (interview notes: ETTY; Hawke; Kailembo; Lewis; 61EB/2, 10(a)(2); 68EB/2, 12(a)(iii); *Report of the Eleventh World Congress*, 667-8).

Pressure on governments was another major activity. In the late 1970s, the UN, the Commonwealth and the EEC became a major focus for the struggle against apartheid. The Carter administration in the USA declared its desire to support human rights around the world, and the AFL-CIO was active in lobbying the US government (interview notes: Baker). One outcome was the mandatory arms embargo agreed by the UN. The ICFTU submitted resolutions to the Commonwealth prime ministers' conference in 1976 (interview notes: Hawke), and the Nordic affiliates called on their governments to press for an embargo on new investments, helping achieve legislation by the Danish parliament for mandatory sanctions. Hawke, who went on to become Australia's prime minister, played a major role (together with the Commonwealth TUC) in pressing for sanctions within the Commonwealth.

Support for Trade Unions inside South Africa

With the revival of black trade unionism in the 1970s many ICFTU affiliates, in particular the more influential organisations in northern Europe and North America, were able to extend substantial financial assistance, largely from governmental and EEC sources. The ICFTU was keen to coordinate and channel such assistance, not only to avoid duplication but also to ensure that aid went to those organisations it wished to promote. Ideological divisions within the emerging black trade union movement, and political differences among the donor affiliates, were viewed as a potential challenge to the political unity of the Confederation. From the mid-1970s the ICFTU channelled considerable financial assistance to a variety of unions and to other organisations concerned with issues such as health and safety and workers' education. Other areas of ICFTU support included providing equipment, legal aid and relief for victims of the regime. The latter was particularly important in a situation where black trade unionists were the targets of government repression; Kailembo argues that the legal assistance in defending black shop stewards who might otherwise have faced lengthy prison sentences did much to promote effective national leadership over the longer term (interview notes: Kailembo; Vanderveken; 63EB/2, 15(a)(iii)).

From the outset there was criticism from organisations operating from outside South Africa, in particular SACTU, which had strong links with the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). SACTU attacked internal black trade unions as 'stooges' of the apartheid regime, and called for all assistance to be distributed through its own channels. Some trade unionists in the West were sympathetic to this argument, most notably in Canada and Britain. However, in the extremely unstable political situation of the 1970s, SACTU appears to have given some tacit support to the organisation of independent black

trade unions, and to the search for international funding through ICFTU affiliates (interview notes: Fine). Within the ILO and other UN bodies, SACTU was willing to work with the ICFTU, as it did on the occasion of the 1973 International Trade Union Conference against Apartheid (interview notes: Vanderveken; Harker to McDermott, 12.9.1983, in CLC archives; MacShane et al. 1984, 118-26).

Within South Africa, black trade unionists adopted varying approaches to cooperation with the ICFTU and to international affiliation. Those inspired by the black consciousness movement, who were to found the Council of Unions of South African (CUSA) in 1980, were in general well-disposed to the ICFTU. These unions were hostile to communist ideology in general and to SACTU in particular, and benefited greatly from ICFTU assistance with organising and education. Other unions opposed the approach of black separatism and worked instead for non-racial unionism. Many of their leaders were white, drawn from the radical student movement and inspired by the left ideologies that dominated these movements around the world at the time. These unions, most of which took part in founding the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979, had a more complex attitude to the ICFTU. While critical of the sometimes heavy-handed Stalinism of SACTU, many FOSATU activists nonetheless held the ANC and SACP in high esteem for their leading role in the fight against apartheid (interview notes: Fine). Many were also suspicious of the intentions of the ICFTU, critical of what they saw as its extreme anti-communist stance, and keen that the South African unions should not suffer from these cold war divisions. Most of these unionists were happy to establish contacts with what they saw as the more progressive affiliates of the ICFTU, for example those in the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, and especially with the ITSs, as long as they could maintain their own independence and not endanger their sometimes fragile internal unity. In the pragmatic view of most FOSATU leaders, in the absence of a significant WFTU or WCL presence, the only route to international funding and support was the ICFTU and its affiliates –

whatever their suspicions of the ICFTU itself, and the role within it of unions from the old colonial powers, in particular the British TUC (interview notes: Fine; Walsh; Fine and Welch 1982; MacShane et al 1984).

The ICFTU adopted an undogmatic approach, giving substantial assistance to CUSA and FOSATU and their affiliates as well as to unions outside the two groupings, encouraging affiliation but not making this a prerequisite for assistance, and maintaining formal neutrality towards the internal divisions within the South African labour movement. The ICFTU/ITS committee did its best to coordinate this assistance in order to prevent misunderstandings or duplication of efforts, but did not stand in the way of individual affiliates and ITSs setting up their own programmes, as long as it was kept informed. This was an approach that would soon bear fruit, in the affiliation of CUSA in 1982 and in the establishment of close working relations with FOSATU (68EB/2,12 (a)(iii); 77EB/9(b); 80EB; notes of 26th meeting of ICFTU coordinating committee on South Africa, 7-8.11.1985, in CLC archives).

The Struggle Continues in the 1980s

In the 1980s the Confederation continued its two-fold approach of building up international pressure against the apartheid regime, an essentially political task, and supporting the black trade unions within the country, in the tradition of trade union development work. The ICFTU held an international conference in London in 1980, which adopted a programme including political and financial assistance to black unions and 'appropriate solidarity actions' on the part of ITSs, individual unions and shop-floor workers. Built into the programme of action was regular follow-up by the coordinating committee and the EB. Meanwhile the black trade unions were growing rapidly. According to an ILO report, by 1983 FOSATU had 106,000 members and CUSA 148,000 (cited in MacShane et al., 35). They had won some 250 collective

agreements with major employers – many of them multinationals. The ICFTU expressed strong support for trade union unity in South Africa but avoided involvement in internal union politics. For this reason it continued to support FOSATU unions after the affiliation of CUSA in 1982, even though CUSA leaders expressed some dissatisfaction with this (80EB/6; 84EB/9(a)(iii)). In the view of Lewis, accepting CUSA as an affiliate was an error: ‘the ICFTU got the worst of both worlds. Affiliation gave CUSA a significance out of all proportion to its real strength and a resentful and suspicious FOSATU/COSATU had to be treated virtually as an affiliate because everyone knew it was the *real* force’ (interview notes: Lewis).

The South African government responded to the upsurge of militant unionism with a new wave of repression, intervening violently in strikes and arresting many trade union leaders. When Neil Aggett, a white union official, was found dead in his cell in 1982, the ICFTU and affiliates sent strong protests to the authorities, and reported that the government was so ‘shaken by the extent of public outcry’ that many detained unionists were released or transferred to hospital. The ICFTU Women’s Committee and women’s organisations in the affiliates lent support to Emma Mashinini of the Commercial and Catering Workers’ Union, who remained in detention. In 1982 the Confederation organised a symposium on women workers in Southern Africa in Gabarone, decrying the ‘double oppression’ faced by African women workers (80EB/10(c),(d); 90EB/15(b)).

In January 1984 the ICFTU reviewed its programme at a conference in Düsseldorf. International boycotts had not really taken off, and in some countries legislation impeded effective industrial action. However, many unions had been able to support black workers in South Africa during organising drives and strikes, by intervening with head offices of MNCs operating in South Africa and by arranging educational exchanges, financial and other forms of assistance. One example was the successful intervention by the German *IG Metall* and its

members in support of black South African workers fighting for a living wage at the Volkswagen plants in the Eastern Cape.

The Labour Relations Amendment Act of July 1984 made union organising even more difficult, obliging unions and employers to submit reports on their agreements and file details of union constitutions and membership. Both unions and employers' organisations opposed the legislation. By this time, indeed, many employers considered that repression of the unions was counter-productive, believing it necessary to work together with the black unions for industrial and political stability. One consequence was that a number of industrial relations specialists and employers' representatives testified for the defence at the trial of Skakes Sikhakhane, general secretary of the CUSA Food and Beverage Workers' Union, in a key test case of the right of trade union officials to intervene in disputes. This was seen by the ICFTU as vindication of its emphasis on putting pressure on the transnationals operating in South Africa (interview notes: Ford; Walsh; 85EB/9(a)(iii); 86EB/10(e)(ii); 87EB/2).

Beating Apartheid

Hopes for progress were soon dashed. In November 1984 the government held a constitutional referendum to allow 'coloureds' and Indians to vote while still disfranchising the black majority. Both FOSATU and CUSA called for a boycott of the referendum, and organised a two-day national strike. The entire strike committee was arrested, including Piroshaw Camay, general secretary of CUSA, and Chris Dlamini, president of FOSATU, alongside over a thousand other activists. The leading employers' associations and TUCSA joined the ICFTU in protesting at the arrests. The ICFTU launched a world-wide campaign to 'free the union 21', resulting in the release of the FOSATU and CUSA leaders and six of their fellow detainees. But further repressive measures soon followed: in early 1985, 16 union leaders were arrested

and subsequently charged with treason. There ensued a general clampdown on opposition groups, and escalating violence which culminated in the declaration of a state of emergency in July, giving the government even more draconian powers (86EB/10(e)(ii); 87EB/2).

The meeting of the ICFTU EB in April 1984 in Washington was preceded by an unprecedented day-long session on the South African crisis. Lane Kirkland, who as the new president of the AFL-CIO had promoted its re-affiliation two years earlier, sought to make up for his organisation's previous absence from the ICFTU and the international scene by demonstrating great zeal in promoting action on South Africa.¹ The AFL-CIO had not taken part in boycott action against South African goods, partly because of legal obstacles, but had lobbied in support of the Sullivan principles on disinvestment. Many member unions, in particular the UAW, had extended support to organising efforts by black unions in South Africa (interview notes: Baker). At its special session, the Board adopted a new programme of action, outlined in a statement, *Beating Apartheid*. This contained all the elements of previous policy, but placed much greater emphasis on mandatory sanctions, disinvestment by MNCs in the armaments, energy and high technology sectors, and the complete isolation of the apartheid regime. The programme also stressed the need to strengthen South Africa's neighbours, the SADCC countries, through political, economic and trade union support. As for trade union action, *Beating Apartheid* stressed the targeting of individual MNCs for campaigns, chosen in consultation with the South African unions (interview notes: Jones; 87EB/2). Leaders of the affiliates most involved in anti-apartheid action were keen to move quickly in implementing the new programme. In a heated committee meeting in June 1985, representatives of the CLC and TUC demanded that the ICFTU launch a coordinated international campaign against those MNCs which were the worst offenders against union rights. The ITF general secretary, Lewis, agreed to measures to target airlines, following the successful blocking by Australian unions of

¹ This caused some irritation to affiliates with a long record of anti-apartheid action, including the CLC. See memo from Mallon to McDermott, 23 January 1985, CLC archives.

Quantas flights to South Africa. Some progress was reported by the affiliates, in particular the legislation just passed in Denmark stopping all new investment in South Africa (interview notes: Lewis; Shaw; Walsh; Purritt, notes from ICFTU/SACC meeting, 4.6.1985, in CLC archives).

The Formation of COSATU

The state of emergency failed to check the rise of the independent trade unions; on the contrary, their leading role in opposition to the government won them enhanced prestige and many new members. By 1985 it was estimated that the union movement had some half a million members, and was increasingly recognised as ‘the single most effective means for the repressed majority in South Africa to gain freedom and justice and to abolish apartheid, without undue violence and bloodshed’ (85EB/9(a)(iii)). In November 1985, a long series of summits between FOSATU, CUSA and the independent unions culminated in the formation of a new federation, COSATU (Confederation of South African Trade Unions). In the end CUSA chose to remain outside, though it maintained reasonably friendly relations with the new confederation; but with the affiliation of most of the independent unions, the latter represented a clear majority of black trade unionists. CUSA itself established a new federation in 1986, eventually named NACTU (National Council of Trade Unions), and left the ICFTU (88EB/11(b)(i); notes of 26th meeting).

Many COSATU leaders (such as Cyril Ramaphosa and education director Alec Erwin) had long worked closely with the ICFTU. However, many of the independent unions that joined the new confederation were ‘community’ unions with a radical ideology; more importantly, the attitude of the ANC and the SACP had changed from hostility to independent union organisation inside the country to encouragement – as Walsh put it (interview notes), the

independent unions were 'all of a sudden the bees' knees'. The SACP and SACTU could now exert direct influence on the policies of the new confederation, particularly its international links (interview notes: Fine). Furthermore, as Friso noted during a mission to South Africa in September 1985, many trade unionists at the base were hostile to the ICFTU, confusing the policies of important affiliates like the TUC or AFL-CIO with those of their national governments and identifying it with 'divisions in the international trade union movement which prevent[ed] effective support for their struggle'² (88EB/11(b)(i), appendix II; notes of 26th meeting). For all these reasons, COSATU was initially keen to keep its distance from the ICFTU and explicitly opposed affiliation, while maintaining the right of its member unions to join their respective ITSs.

For the ICFTU the situation was extremely complex and required delicate handling. When a high-level delegation visited South Africa in July 1986, following prior consultations with COSATU, Vanderveken and his colleagues Willis, Todd and Walsh (TUC), Kirkland (AFL-CIO), Breit (DGB) and Sandegren (LO Norway) were told that the COSATU leadership would not meet the ICFTU representatives if Kirkland were present. The members of the mission held firm, and the meeting eventually took place. This mission helped the ICFTU establish closer relations with COSATU and also publicised the repressive methods of the regime, when the delegation was detained by police in Alexandra. 'I did not go unprepared or ignorant,' Vanderveken reported later. 'Nevertheless, I was shocked by the conditions that we saw there.' (interview notes: Vanderveken; Kailembo; Shaw; Walsh; 90EB/9(e)(iii); *Report on Activities 1983-1986*, 21).³ On the crucial issue of funding, COSATU sought assistance but asked that it be channelled through specific affiliates, in particular the Nordic and Dutch unions, while refusing involvement with the British, German and US unions. This placed the ICFTU in an

² Not unreasonably, considering the ICFTU's refusal (described above) to take part in international meetings on the South African situation if WFTU was involved.

almost impossible position, and required great dexterity to handle without alienating the South Africans, upsetting the affiliates or breaking up its own internal unity. In the end, the EB decided that all requests for funding, even those sent directly to affiliates or ITSs, should be submitted to the coordinating committee for decision; but following approval support could be channelled to South Africa through an individual affiliate or ITS (interview notes: Etty; Kailembo; Vanderveken; Walsh; 88EB/11(b)(i); report of meeting with COSATU, 6.5.1986, in CLC archives; notes of ICFTU coordinating meeting).

Government repression continued, with a second state of emergency declared in June 1986, and further mass detentions of trade union leaders, with the entire leadership of COSATU forced into hiding. In the following year there were mass arrests and detentions without trial; many trade union offices were fire-bombed; and armed police occupied the headquarters of both COSATU and NACTU. The situation became even worse in 1988, with more union leaders arrested or subject to restriction orders, further attacks on union property, and the arrest of the whole leadership of the United Democratic Front. In cooperation with the TUC, the ICFTU provided some half a million pounds for the successful legal defence of the 'Alexandra Five' who were on trial on a capital charge of high treason; they included Moses Mayekiso, leader of the mineworkers' union NUMSA. His union had played an important role in the creation of COSATU and in talks between the new confederation and the ANC. A further challenge was the new Labour Relations Amendment Bill which restricted trade union rights; despite a mass campaign of opposition it came into law in September 1988. Two Workers' Summits to protest against the act were convened in 1989, in the face of severe police restrictions. The ICFTU offered full support, and launched a weekly *Spotlight on South Africa*, a telexed news-sheet for affiliates (interview notes: Fine; Walsh; 90EB/9(e)(iii), 14).

³ The delegation visited the family of a detained CUSA official, Thami Mcerwa, subsequently an MA student and close friend of mine at the University of Warwick, who was assassinated on his return to

‘Victory for the Long Campaign’

Finally the regime began to crack. In February 1990 the ban on the ANC was lifted and Nelson Mandela was released. Later in the year the state of emergency was ended. The ICFTU hailed these changes as ‘a victory for the long campaign waged by the people of South Africa and the international community against apartheid’ (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*, 87). In April 1994 the first democratic elections resulted in the overwhelming victory of the ANC and the creation of a new South Africa. NACTU affiliated to the ICFTU at the end of that year, COSATU in 1998. ‘South Africa was a priority for us long before it became a fashionable issue,’ said Vanderveken a decade later (interview notes). For a wider public, it was almost certainly the efforts of individual unions or other organisations that counted – the campaigns of the TGWU or *IG Metall* for example – the coordinating role of the ITSs and the ICFTU was no doubt less visible to activists on the ground. The contribution made by the ICFTU to the struggle for freedom was nonetheless recognised by South African trade unionists themselves. As Mahlomola Skhosana of NACTU declared: ‘it was the ICFTU and its affiliates that spearheaded the isolation of the regime in South Africa’ (interview notes: Jones; Kailembo; Walsh; *Report of the Fifteenth World Congress*, 396; *Report on Activities 1983-1986*, 21).

Women’s Rights and Women’s Representation: The Long March towards Equality

Like the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the cause of women’s equality was popular within society as a whole, and was not simply a concern of the trade union movement. The ICFTU was similarly involved over many decades in quiet work on the subject, before it

South Africa in 1994.

became a major issue with the general public. Both causes became extremely popular, so that the Confederation was to some extent pushed into action. Unlike South Africa, however, the question of women's equality was not only a 'cause' to be taken up; it was also a key issue in organisational and representational terms. Women formed a 'constituency' within the Confederation and its affiliates as well as an important force within society. For this reason, the struggle for women's equality required a dual approach: the same sort of external lobbying, publicity and representational work as with other political causes such as South Africa, as well as the internal work of education and other forms of support to individual affiliates, and the reform of representation within the ICFTU's structures, typical of the Confederation's work in the field. I shall begin with a brief overview of the secretariat's work on women before it became a major area of the Confederation's work.

Women's Activities Before 1972: Laying the Groundwork

While the IFTU had a consultative body on women workers' questions (the International Committee of Trade Union Women, founded in 1924), women's rights received little attention within the international trade union movement at that time; and when WFTU was created in 1945, it did not immediately follow the example of its predecessor. The ICFTU, however, gave attention to women workers' questions from a very early stage. Recognising the need for trained women activists in the trade union movement, the Confederation organised a summer school for women only in June 1953, in La Brévière, France. At the 1953 Congress, the DGB proposed the creation of a committee to handle the issue of equal pay for work of equal value. While not accepted in this form, the proposal led to a decision by the EB in May 1955 to establish the joint ICFTU/ITS Consultative Committee for Women Workers' Questions. Its first meeting in February 1956 was chaired by Wilhelmine Moik (ÖGB), a strong advocate of the resolution at the 1953 Congress. Initially, all the members were from western Europe, with

five representatives from ICFTU affiliates and seven from the ITSs, two of them from Germany. The first secretary to the committee was Marcelle Dehareng, formerly from the ABVV-FGTB, who had a number of responsibilities in addition to women workers' issues, including relations with the UN, human and trade union rights, and Latin America. There was no question at this early stage of devoting the full-time services of an officer to women's activities, despite the wide remit of the committee (interview notes: Dehareng; Reinalda and Verhaaren 1989, 165-8).

In approving the creation of the committee, the EB removed the specific reference to equal pay and gave it a wider remit, including all social and economic problems affecting women workers; the recruitment, training and involvement of women in the trade unions; and work within the UN and ILO on issues of concern to women. The ILO had paved the way for progress toward equality in Conventions adopted in the early 1950s, including 100 on equal remuneration (1952) and 111 on the elimination of discrimination (1951). Women trade unionists were already using these Conventions in their fight for equal rights in their own countries, and WFTU had begun to organise women members itself, holding the first international women's trade union conference in Budapest in 1956. It was up to the ICFTU to build an international network of women working around these issues, and to promote further progress within its affiliates and through the ILO and UN institutions. The committee also had to monitor the implementation of earlier ILO Conventions, which for the most part emphasised women's maternity rights or their protection from unsafe conditions of work (interview notes: Dehareng, Peltzer, Ramos, Stewart).⁴ From the beginning, the committee faced tensions between the focus on equality of rights and opportunities, and the protection of women and provisions for their special needs. Dehareng recalls the strong influence in the early years of women from the christian-democratic fraction within the DGB, who emphasised the protection

⁴ The most important are Convention 3 (1919) on maternity protection, revised as 103 in 1952; and 89 on night work. See Brocas 1997, 155-65; Reinalda and Verhaaren 1989, 170-1.

of women's special functions of maternity and child-rearing.⁵ The emphasis shifted over the course of the next half-century from protection to equality, and from the promotion of greater participation of women in decision-making bodies to the integration of women's issues into the broader trade union agenda.

By the 1960s, women were beginning to make an impact on the unions and reacting more strongly to discrimination within the trade union movement and the broader society. The number of ICFTU affiliates with women's committees rose from ten in 1957 to 21 in 1965, as more and more women entered the workforce. At the 1965 Congress Nel Tegelaar, responsible for women's affairs in the NVV, pointed to the ICFTU emblem (representing three male workers clasping hands) behind her on the podium: 'this emblem might have been designed by a man who knew nothing about women working outside the home or about our women members... but it is not right that the ICFTU has approved it'.⁶ She went on to criticise the continued marginalisation of women within the trade union movement: there were still only a handful of women delegates to the ICFTU Congress, and an invitation to a reception from the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs contained the mention 'ladies welcome'. That said, it was the Amsterdam Congress that devoted the first significant attention to women's issues and adopted the first Charter of Rights of Working Women. The Charter, inspired by a document drawn up by an enlarged meeting of the committee in Vienna in April 1963, demonstrated the shift of policy from protection towards the fight against discrimination and the promotion of equal rights. In 1969, Tegelaar was elected chair of the committee and was co-opted as a member of the EB with consultative status, the first move toward formal representation of women on the ICFTU governing bodies. The committee welcomed this move, though expressing its preference

⁵ However, as Peltzer points out, the DGB was a federal organisation, and its representatives in ICFTU bodies put forward the common position of the national centre, not of a particular fraction within it. An emphasis on protection was widespread within the trade union movement as a whole at this time; see also Reinalda and Verhaaren 1989, 170-1.

for women to be directly elected to the EB by their own organisations. But things were beginning to move, and Tegelaar and Dehareng together began a major period of progress on women's issues within the Confederation (49EB/2,19; Reinalda and Verhaaren 1989, 176-8; van Eijl 1997, 85-8).

The Early 1970s: Beginning to Make an Impact

The committee did not act alone. While sometimes lacking support from within the secretariat, Dehareng and her colleagues always sought to achieve compromise and win the backing of members of the EB. From an early period, Histadrut had supported its policies and was the first affiliate to name a woman titular representative to the EB, Yehudit Simhonit, as early as 1960. Their attitude was strongly influenced by the progressive ideals of the early days of the Israeli state, which sought to establish equality between the sexes, and by the powerful women's organisation within the national centre. Another strong advocate of women's issues was Narayanan, who consistently called for more resources to be devoted to women's activities and for their expansion in regions outside Europe. In the early years, the limited budget available for women's activities prevented the regular participation of women from developing countries; instead, a network of correspondents was set up in countries without a member on the committee. By the 1970s, the absence of women from the Third World became a matter of great concern, for the committee itself and for others within the ICFTU. In 1970, Buiter recommended that some meetings be held outside Europe as a way of tackling this problem, an idea to which Tegelaar readily agreed; its first meeting outside Brussels was in Tokyo in 1971. By 1974, members were added from Latin America (Hilda Anderson Nevarez, subsequently Anderson de Rojas, of CTM) and Asia (Junko Takashima of *Domei*) (interview notes:

⁶ A photo of Tegelaar (alas not identified by name), pointing to the offending symbol at the 1965 Congress can be found in the special 50th anniversary issue of *Trade Union World*, September 1999, 26. What does this say about the invisible woman?

Dehareng; 52EB/2,15; 53EB/2,13; 54EB/2,6,8; 62EB/18; Reinalda and Verhaaren 1989, 168-9, 172).

The committee also struggled to extend its impact on ICFTU policy areas and decision-making bodies, an effort that was not always immediately successful. In 1971 it called for an observer on the Economic and Social Committee, which was agreed in 1973. Ruth Köhn (DGB and IUF) represented its views on the working party on MNCs in 1972. In the EB, Narayanan and Tegelaar proposed that representatives of women and youth be included in the working party preparing the agenda for the 1972 Congress. Though a member the working party, Tegelaar did not succeed in getting an item on women's issues onto the agenda, nor in inserting a text prepared by the committee into the main Congress document. Instead, she read out the proposed text to Congress, formally protesting at the Board's failure to include it in the official resolutions. A proposal from Itzhak Ben Aharon, on behalf of the Histadrut women's organisation, for more participation of women in ICFTU governing bodies and the creation of a board of working women received short shrift from the EB. But a long-anticipated conference on equal pay was finally held shortly after Congress, and adopted an important statement on equality within the unions themselves: 'the ICFTU pledges itself to ensure the integration of women at all levels of its own regional and international structure and will take steps to make sure that women members can take up functions with full equality'. Yet a request for more resources for women's activities in order to implement these words did not result in any extra funding or the appointment of a full-time officer. After Congress, Tegelaar took up new responsibilities within the NVV, the first woman elected to its executive; she was replaced as chair of the committee by Maria Zaugg-Alt, of the *Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund* (SGB) (52EB/2,10;15; 56EB/11; 58EB/2,11; 58EB/5; 59EB/2,13,16; *Report of Tenth World Congress*, 499; van Eijl 1997, 86).⁷

⁷ Tegelaar remained on the ICFTU EB in keeping with her new responsibilities for international affairs within the NVV, as first substitute to the titular member Georges Debunne.

Social and economic issues were the committee's main areas of interest in the early 1970s, with a strong focus on equal pay and the struggle against discrimination at the workplace. The Economic and Social Committee began to discuss economic issues affecting women. This marked further progress in integrating women's issues in the mainstream trade union agenda; Francesca Baduel Glorioso, international secretary of CISL, appealed at the EB for such a 'global approach'.⁸ The Economic and Social Committee held a series of important discussions on discrimination and equal pay, leading to a programme of action at the end of 1973 (59EB/16; 60EB/2,9; 'Programme of Concerted Action on Equal Pay', Brussels, 21-23.11.1973).

While action on economic issues such as discrimination at the workplace now attracted much support within the Confederation, other social questions aroused controversy, most notably a discussion of women's rights to control their own fertility which took place in 1972. The decision had been taken by the Committee over the objections of a long-serving member, Maria Weber (DGB), who feared it would imply acceptance of abortion. When the report of the meeting came to the attention of the EB, a number of members opposed the phrase that 'all women have the possibility of planning their family and a free choice in regard to motherhood'. MacDonald, who became president after the 1972 Congress, went so far as to state that this position 'could lead to the destruction of the family' and that the ICFTU should not have 'modernist' ideas imposed upon it. When another member suggested that the text should read instead that women had an 'equal right to participate in the planning of their family', Itzhak Ben Aharon, of Histadrut, retorted that the question was one of motherhood, not the family, and that there was no need to protect the equal rights of men! Though the text was referred back to the committee for rewording, an unrevised version was approved at the next EB

⁸ Baduel Glorioso was a second substitute on the EB.

meeting. Around the same time, a proposal from the Nordic Council of Trade Unions for the Consultative Committee on Women Workers' Questions to be re-structured as a committee on 'family policy' with equal numbers of male and female members was opposed by Zaugg-Alt and her colleagues, who stressed that the present Committee should continue as a 'pressure group' in an organisation where women were still underrepresented. In response to a claim by Nielsen of LO Denmark that sex discrimination had been eliminated in the Nordic countries, Dehareng observed that the proposal was 'naive', and the committee tartly requested that he and the other Nordic representatives provide information 'about the achievement of equal pay' in their countries. The proposal was withdrawn (interview notes: Dehareng; 58EB/2,11; 59EB/2,11; 60EB/12).

Another controversial issue, both within and outside the committee, was ILO Convention 89 on night work. At its enlarged meeting in Vienna in 1963 the committee moved towards rejecting its provisions for a total ban on night work by women, and at its Tokyo meeting in 1971 called for a study of the effects of night work on all workers; but opinion was still mixed. When the ILO announced its intention of revising the Convention in 1975, the Economic and Social Committee decided to study the issue and the Women's Committee was obliged to articulate a common position. In general, members feared that a relaxation of the stringent provisions of Convention 89 without adequate safeguards would lead to the exploitation of women workers by unscrupulous employers and endanger their health. While some felt that, faced with these dangers, it was better to retain the present convention, others believed that the time had come to broaden the ban on night work to all workers, as such work was harmful to the health and quality of life of men as well as women. Exemptions could be made for work in essential services where night work was unavoidable (55EB/2,11; 56EB/11; 59EB/16; 60EB/2,9; 61EB/2,12).

The 1975 Congress and the Revised Charter of Rights of Working Women

The revision of the Charter of Rights of Working Women was a main theme of the 1975 Congress. The Committee had planned to hold a conference on equal rights to coincide with the UN's International Women's Year, but it was decided to combine this with the ICFTU Congress so that the conference could take place in Mexico, with the assistance of the CTM and a large participation from Mexican women trade unionists. It was decided that at least one plenary session of Congress would be devoted to the revision of the Charter so that it would be given 'due importance'. In discussions of the organisation of Congress, Narayanan called for each delegation to include at least one or two women, and Murray proposed that women's organisations be invited. The EB approved the draft revisions to the Charter, including recommendations on the representation of women in trade union bodies and the creation of women's committees (53EB/2,12; 60EB/12; 61EB/7(b),24; 62EB/18; 63EB/2,5(a),6; 64EB/2,5(b)(i)).

The special half-day plenary session, preceded by the meeting with Mexican women trade unionists, marked an important step forward in the attention the Confederation was willing to devote to the concerns of women workers, and helped to consolidate a women's network within the ICFTU. The revised Charter was adopted, with amendments proposed from the floor by Rolande Brockart (ABVV-FGTB) and Elske ter Veld (NVV), by making the wording more imperative and including provisions for parental leave for fathers as well as mothers. This later recommendation was in keeping with the contribution of Aina Westin (LO Sweden), who stated that the trade unions in her country opposed special protection of women workers, except in connection with pregnancy and childbearing, and had thereby replaced maternity leave with parental leave that could be taken by either parent (interview notes: Dehareng). Concluding the debate, Kersten expressed his support for the revisions to the Charter and added: 'we all

know... that without the necessary funds it would all just be so much hot air. When we talk about doing more for women and supporting their integration... then we must have funds ready for this purpose, so that we can implement our action programme fully' (*Report of the Eleventh World Congress*, 417, 425, 446, 494-6).

This was not immediately forthcoming, however. A report from the FGPC recommended cutting funds for the Committee in the 1976 budget, so that it would meet only once a year; and women's activities at the secretariat would be reduced. This was opposed by some members of the FGPC, including Murray, who proposed cuts in other areas. The Committee criticised the failure to consult it in advance: 'joint participation and codetermination were still inoperative in the highest level'. Narayanan shared this view, insisting that 'the Committee should not be reduced to beggary', and Kersten promised to do his best to restore the full budget. This he did, and in 1977 the EB restored the Committee's two meetings per year. Audrey Prime (TUC) was elected the new chair in 1976 (66EB/19(d); 67EB/16; 68EB/17).

The unemployment of women, who were often the 'last hired and first fired', became a key concern of the Committee in the mid-1970s, as economic crisis preoccupied trade unions throughout the industrialised world. Paulette Hofman (FO), who became chair of the Committee in 1978, was thinking of unemployment when she observed: 'one can no longer speak of 'feminine problems', but the problems which affect the trade union movement often have a feminine dimension'. Many members feared that the rise in unemployment would lead to the revival of arguments that women's employment was 'secondary' and that unemployment could be solved by women returning to the home. The Committee began to pay more attention to challenging labour market segregation and promoting equal opportunities in education and training, expressing regret that so few women took up places on ICFTU education courses. Part-time work aroused the same sorts of divisions as those over night work: some members of

the Committee opposed such work in principle, arguing that part-time employees were at an inevitable disadvantage, while others stressed the value of choice for women on whether to devote more of their time to family responsibilities (60EB/12; 67EB/16; 69EB2,7,17; 71EB16).

The Committee also addressed the economic problems faced by women in developing countries, who suffered from both unemployment and persistent poverty. It pressed for greater involvement of women in ICFTU-sponsored training programmes and the development of special education courses for women trade unionists, particularly in Asia. ARO had already introduced the practice of reserving places for women in its regular seminars, but not enough women trade unionists were aware of the opportunities for further training. In 1977 the EB included in its Charter of Development a document from the Committee on *Women and Development*, which stressed that women had been hardest hit by unemployment and poverty. In 1979, C. Tiendrebeogo, of the Upper Volta affiliate OVSL, was named the first African representative on the Committee (54EB/11; 60EB/12; 61EB/19; 69EB2,7; 73EB/6(e)).

In October 1977 the Committee organised a seminar on the Integration of Women into Trade Unions, in Täljöviken, Sweden, with the assistance of LO and the Council of Nordic Trade Unions. The participants adopted a Programme of Action, which included proposals on the organisation of women in trade unions, their involvement in union activities and inclusion in decision-making structures; and recommended that all affiliates provide an annual report on the implementation of these measures. Some wanted targets or quotas for women's membership of the governing bodies of unions and national centres; others felt that this was premature or might marginalise women, and conflicted with the principle of trade union solidarity. In its conclusions, the Committee steered clear of recommending quotas, but observed that some affiliates had found that this system had 'enabled competent women to assume responsibilities'

where discrimination would otherwise have prevented them from doing so, and stressed the need for adequate trade union leadership training for women. It noted that women's committees and other consultative bodies had also proved useful, as a means to make women's concerns known to the broader movement, but on the whole opposed separate structures for women. This was also a theme addressed at the 1979 Congress, where Hofman warned that women would turn to other organisations, such as the growing feminist movement, if the trade unions did not respond quickly enough to their demands. Her views won the backing of Kok and of Bodström (TCO), who spoke of the need to overcome prejudice and discrimination against women throughout society (68EB/17; 69EB/16; 73EB/6(e); 'The Integration of Women into Trade Unions', in 70 EB/12; *Report of the Twelfth World Congress*, 552, 565, 569).

Extending Women's Activities and Representation in the 1980s

In the 1980s the Committee intensified its efforts to reform the internal structures of the ICFTU and its affiliates so as to increase the participation of women in decision-making bodies. In 1981 it requested that women workers' issues be discussed earlier in the agenda of the EB, instead of right at the end. Many of the issues affecting women, it was stressed again, were of general concern: employment conditions in export processing zones (EPZs), the practices of MNCs, child labour, and unemployment. The initial discussions of the draft ILO Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities led to renewed debates over precarious forms of work and cultural hostility to women's employment. Members of the Committee feared that the economic crisis in the industrialised countries might force women with family responsibilities out of the workforce or into part-time or precarious work, and that cuts in welfare and other social services would lead to disproportionate job losses for women in the public sector. New technology and its effect on women workers, many of whom were in the unskilled jobs that would be most affected by mechanisation and computerisation, were another growing concern,

and led the Committee to commission a report from Lois Stewart of the Economic and Social Policy Department. At a discussion in 1983, an ICEF representative pointed to the role of the MNCs in the development of new technology, emphasised the need for retraining and argued for reductions in working time in order to counteract the dangers of increased unemployment and of stress among those workers remaining. In the view of the Committee, 'men and women should fight together for employment' (77EB/20; 79EB/15; 81EB/16; 82EB/7).

The Committee continued to devote much attention to women's employment conditions and their participation in educational activities in the developing countries. When asked, the Education Department could not provide details of the number of women taking part in its programmes, stating that the selection of participants was left to the affiliates and it was impossible to monitor. However Silleman, head of the department, accepted the need to adapt training programmes to the needs of women and proposed that over the next four years the training of course leaders ('monitors') should be targeted exclusively at women. The rapid growth of EPZs – in which even the most basic labour standards often failed to apply – as a major field of women's employment became a serious concern for the Committee, which recommended a thorough study of the conditions of work of women in industry in the developing countries. In its Bangkok Declaration of 1980, as noted above, ARO placed women's activities high on its priorities for action over the next decade, particularly the unionisation of rural women workers and new forms of workers' education; special courses for women were arranged in Sri Lanka and India. The problems of African women received greater attention as the struggle against apartheid became a central concern of the ICFTU; as seen earlier, a seminar on women under apartheid was held in Gabarone in March 1982 and solidarity campaigns were organised in support of Emma Mashinini and other women trade unionists imprisoned by the South African regime (72EB/17; 75EB/10(a)(i); 77EB/20; 80EB/10(d)).

In 1980 the Committee set up a working group to draw up proposals for changes in the ICFTU constitution and structures in order to bring them into line with the Programme of Action for the Integration of Women into Trade Unions, as endorsed by the 1979 Congress. It called for the Committee's representative on the EB, who merely had consultative status, to become a full titular member. At that time, Shirley Carr was the only woman titular member on the Board, having been elected in 1979; Weber attended as a second substitute, but retired in 1982. The group further recommended that the status of the Committee itself be upgraded from a consultative committee to a special committee of the EB, and that the constitution should prescribe the participation of women in the governing bodies. Dehareng felt that the correct procedure would be for their representative to be a woman who had already been elected in her own right, and that only if no woman was a titular member should a representative of the Committee be co-opted. In her view, a representative would have more weight if she had been elected by her own affiliate, and this would strengthen the links between the Committee and the EB. The majority decided that the representative should be elected by the Committee, and it was this proposal that was accepted by the EB in 1981: 'a representative elected by the ICFTU/ITS Consultative Committee on Women Workers' Questions shall be co-opted as a member of the Executive Board with the right to vote'. The first titular representative was Hofman, followed by Evelyn D'Souza (INTUC), who succeeded her as chair of the Committee in 1982. Discussion by the EB of the other recommendations and proposed constitutional changes was put off from meeting to meeting – described by one member as 'shilly-shallying' – until formal proposals were finally drawn up shortly before Congress in 1983 (interview notes: Dehareng; 75EB/16; 76EB/2; 77EB(7)(a); 80EB/5,18; 81EB/2,6(c); *Report of the Thirteenth World Congress*, 37-8, 43).

The Congress endorsed the main recommendations from the Committee, upgrading its status and renaming it the Women's Committee, to take account of its more active, policy-making role. A second titular seat was also created, first held by Irmgard Blättel (DGB), who was also co-opted to the Education Policy Committee and made an associate member of the Sub-Committee of the EB. Congress also decided that any affiliate with more than 250,000 women members should nominate at least one woman as a Congress delegate, but set up no special procedure for ensuring that this would be carried out. While the Committee noted 'significant progress' in the participation of women in Congress, there was little discussion of women's issues in the plenary sessions, only a brief statement from D'Souza explaining the proposals and recommending their adoption. There were in addition two resolutions, on women's employment and on new technology and women's employment, which were endorsed by Congress without discussion. Shortly afterwards, a Women's Bureau was set up within the secretariat, marking a major expansion in the resources devoted to women's activities: a move that received strong support from the new general secretary, Vanderveken. Dehareng was named head of the bureau, joined by Elsa Ramos as co-ordinator for operational activities and Siham Friso as secretary (interview notes: Dehareng; Ramos; Stewart; 82EB/7; 84EB/4,12; 85EB/4(a); 87EB/9; 'Composition, terms of reference and standing orders of the Women's Committee', Appendix II to 84EB/4; *Report of the Thirteenth World Congress*, 336-7, 515-6; *Report of the Fourteenth World Congress*, 106).

The Fourth World Women's Conference and After

The Committee held its first meeting under its new status in April 1984. D'Souza and Blättel were re-elected chair and vice chair, and a new member was elected for Africa, Alice Ranthimo (LCFTU Lesotho), who had become coordinator of women's activities for AFRO. France Perez (FO) objected that while recognising the autonomy of the ITSs, 'a member of an

organisation not affiliated to the ICFTU should not become a member of the Committee', referring to the presence of a representative from the teachers' international IFFTU. The Committee noted FO's objection, but no action was taken. The members agreed that a major priority should be to increase participation from women in the developing countries. Another important point was to continue monitoring the implementation of the Programme of Action as a 'stimulus' for affiliates to make progress within their own organisations. Finally, the Committee recommended that a women's conference be organised for 1985, to mark the end of the UN Decade for Women; this was agreed by the EB in 1983. The secretariat was requested to carry out studies of alternative forms of work, including reductions in working time, home-based work, and the informal sector. Another important theme was child labour, a concern shared by the Confederation as a whole. A report on the ICFTU/INTUC Women's Committee training project in Bombay was commended by the Economic and Social Committee as a practical example of a trade union alternative to child labour. The ESC decided to make women workers' concerns a major focus of its World Economic Review for 1985, in time for the ICFTU and UN conferences⁹ (84EB/12; 85EB/2,12; 86EB/11; 87EB/3,11).

The Fourth World Women's Conference was held in Madrid in April 1985, with a record number of 257 delegates. It was addressed by Redondo, general secretary of the UGT which had helped to organise the conference, and by Vanderveken. The main themes were equal rights and responsibilities, employment and development, and peace and international cooperation. Each theme was presented by representatives from both the industrialised and the developing countries. The long-overdue conference made further revisions to the Charter of Rights of Working Women, and adopted a number of important positions, particularly in the statement on 'Women and Work: A Strategy for Employment and Development'. This emphasised the role of women in employment, pointing out the many ways in which women's contributions to

⁹ UN, 'Background Document Received from Non-Governmental Organisations: ICFTU', documentation for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United

the economy were under-valued and the negative impact of direct and indirect discrimination on economic development. In conclusion, it declared that equal opportunities in employment could 'help the world to eliminate the twin scourges of unemployment and poverty'. The women in the ICFTU were still adamant that the topics they raised were not simply 'women's issues' but matters of relevance to the movement as a whole (88EB/8(b); *Report of the Fourteenth World Congress*, 204-9).

Another statement adopted by the conference concerned women workers under apartheid; solidarity with women trade unionists remained an important element in ICFTU action on South Africa. Solidarity with women suffering under the dictatorship regimes in Chile and Argentina became a major issue as well, with a women's mission to those countries in 1986, led by Anne Spencer (TUC), who later became chair of the Committee. After hearing her report the Committee called for an international campaign for the liberation of M. A. Saa, president of the Chilean organisation Women for Life, and for better conditions for women political prisoners in both countries. A number of special seminars and educational activities for women were organised in Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, leading to renewed calls for the establishment of women's committees in affiliates in the developing countries (89EB/12; 90EB/15(b)).

The seminars in the regions also made it clear that sexual harassment was a major concern of women trade unionists; indeed, the World Women's Conference had already recognised this as a form of discrimination, and called on trade unions to fight it as one of their regular functions. The Committee recommended that a questionnaire be sent to affiliates for an initial study of the problem; this revealed the seriousness of the issue, and the Committee emphasised that harassment was 'a legitimate trade union concern' that could 'affect workers' employment and

Nations Decade for Women, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985.

promotion prospects, job security, and health and safety... and undermine attempts to achieve equality for women workers within the workplace'. Trade unions were urged to take action and increase awareness of the problem, and to set up grievance procedures to handle complaints. A draft trade union guide on sexual harassment at the workplace was published at the end of 1986; this was later revised to include provisions on sexual harassment within trade unions (including the ICFTU itself). A trade union seminar on positive action was also held in 1986, leading to a set of guidelines for the promotion of women's participation in trade unions (90EB/2; 90EB/15(b); *Report of the Fourteenth World Congress*, 107-11).

In 1989 the ILO initiated formal discussions on revising its Convention on night work. The Women's Bureau prepared a report on the issue, based on answers to a circular to affiliates. After long discussion, the Committee reached a compromise similar to that agreed in earlier meetings: in the absence of a ban on night work for all workers, it was preferable to retain the existing Convention while increasing the exemptions for work in essential services. The 1990 International Labour Conference adopted a protocol permitting member states to allow night work for women if based on agreements between unions and employers and with safeguards for women's health and other needs. Another concern for the Committee in the late 1980s was the informal sector, leading to the publication of special reports by ORIT and by the Brussels secretariat in 1990. Dehareng retired in 1986; her position as head of the Women's Bureau was taken by Stewart (89EB/12; 94EB/8(d)(i); 95EB/12; 98EB/10; *Report of the Fourteenth World Congress*, 109).

In the mid-1980s, more organisations began to nominate women to the EB (most often as substitute members), and by 1989, as seen earlier, a high-level mission to the Middle East had four women members out of a total of ten; no one appears to have found this remarkable. In 1987 the Committee revised its terms of reference and rules of procedure: elections would take

place before Congress, enabling its representatives to take their seats on the EB immediately afterwards. Spencer was elected the new chair of the Committee, with Anderson de Rojas as vice-chair. The number of titular members from the developing countries was increased from five to seven, with two each from Africa, Asia and Latin America and one from the Caribbean. The 1988 Congress had 39 women delegates out of 82 women participants, marking a significant increase in women's attendance. A women's seminar was organised immediately prior to Congress, with assistance from the host organisation, the ACTU, and financial support from some affiliates in the industrialised countries, enabling more women from developing countries to attend. Congress agreed revisions to make the constitution more gender-neutral, and adopted resolutions on positive action for women at the workplace and in the trade unions (interview notes: Ramos; Stewart; 94EB/8(d)(i); 95EB/6(b)(i); 98EB/10; *Report of the Fifteenth World Congress*, 117-21).

Brainstorming and Breakthrough in the 1990s

The regional co-ordinators for women's activities held their first joint meeting in October 1989, a 'brainstorming' session with members of the secretariat working on women, youth and related issues, concentrating on the development of women's solidarity. In 1990, a member of the Committee found herself in need of such solidarity: Alice Ranthimo of LCFTU was imprisoned for supporting a teachers' strike in her country. The Committee arranged protest actions and helped obtain her release. Activities in the developing countries continued to increase: APRO held a women's symposium in February 1990 in New Delhi, with participants from 30 national centres, and ORIT established a women's committee and a Department of Working Women's Questions in 1989. The Committee raised support for practical solidarity with the developing countries by promoting individual projects each year on International Women's Day, starting in El Salvador and Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta). A new

newsletter, *Union Women on the Move*, began publication in 1990. The ITSs also increased their attention to women workers' issues throughout this period, for example through the creation of six seats on the EB of the IUF at its 1989 Congress (interview notes: Ramos; Stewart; 96EB/9; 97EB/7; 98EB/10).

The Fifth World Women's Conference was held in Ottawa in 1991, attended by 291 delegates from around the world. It was the most representative gathering of women trade unionists ever, with more than 30% from the developing countries. Following the 1992 Congress in Caracas, the Women's Bureau was restructured as the Equality Department, with its staff increased from three to four. Mamounata Cissé (ONSL, Burkina Faso) was elected chair of the Committee just prior to Congress, with Joyce Miller (AFL-CIO) as vice-chair. Cissé was also elected a vice-president of the ICFTU, making her the first woman vice-president representing the Women's Committee and the first from a developing country. (Shirley Carr was the first woman vice-president, following her election as president of the CLC in November 1986.) Representation from the Women's Committee on the EB was increased to five, to include more representatives from developing countries. A recomposition of the Women's Committee further increased the representation of women from the Third World, with an extra titular seat each for Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and two for Central and Eastern Europe. The momentous changes in that region naturally attracted the attention of the Committee and the Women's Bureau, which set up special education and training programs for women, who were suffering from the loss of social protection and employment in the transition from the former communist regimes. Nancy Riche, vice-president of the CLC, succeeded Miller as vice-chair of the Committee in 1994, and served as its representative on the Economic and Social Committee (interview notes: Cissé; Ramos; Riche; Stewart; 96EB/10; 97EB/7; 99EB/7; 100EB/7; *Report of the Fifteenth World Congress*, 117-21, 400-1, 451-3).

By the 1992 Congress, affiliates with more than 100,000 women members were required to nominate at least one woman delegate, and those which did not comply were named (CGT Argentina, FUTD-CUT Colombia, FO France, FKTU Korea, UGT Portugal and CGT Brazil). There were 64 women delegates at Congress, representing 20% of the delegates, and women constituted 25% of the total number of all participants. A task force was set up to oversee the implementation of the Positive Action Programme, which was endorsed by Congress. The new general secretary, Friso, followed the lead of his predecessor as a strong advocate of women's equality and their participation in the unions. He gave special attention to the needs of women in the developing countries, and the Committee used this opportunity to promote the creation of women's committees in the affiliates and the development of regional activities and structures for women's affairs. APRO initiated a programme for the recruitment of women trade union members, 'one plus one', and ORIT devoted resources to such issues as sexual harassment and the informal sector. A world-wide project on Women and Development with funding from the FNV began in 1993, with pilot projects in each of the regions to assist them in developing positive action programmes for women in development cooperation. Cissé coordinated this project in French-speaking Africa, before joining the staff of the Equality Department. Stewart left the ICFTU in 1998 and was succeeded as head of the Department by Ramos (*Report on Activities 1991-1994*, 177-87; interview notes: Anderson; Cissé; Friso; Izumi; Ramos; Rea; Riche; Stewart).

As the representation of women increased on the ICFTU's governing bodies and those of its affiliates in the course of the 1990s, women in the ICFTU placed greater emphasis on integrating women's issues into more general trade union issues, particularly economic and social policy, and pressed for these issues to be covered in every major programme or policy document. This was also the position of Jordan, elected general secretary following the retirement of Friso in 1994. In one sense, the 'mainstreaming' of women's issues and activities

at the end of the 1990s implied an end to the traditional 'pressure group' role of the Women's Committee and Bureau, but the persistence of discrimination against women, both within the trade union movement and within society more generally, ensured a continued role for separate women's activities into the next century (interview notes: Cissé; Jordan; Ramos; Riche; Stewart).

Looking back over her years as head of the NVV women's bureau, Tegelaar wrote 'every year we had to write a report of activities. Now when you wrote down all these points it really looked like something, but when you had to repeat the same points again the next year you began to wonder if you were getting anywhere! But when you write it all down over fifty years, then you see that quite a lot has happened.' (van Eijl 1987, 86). The same might easily have been written by a member of the ICFTU Women's Bureau. Indeed, after long years of making the same points over and over again about the inclusion of women's activities in the budget, or of women's problems in policy documents, or of women members on missions or women delegates at Congress, a great deal has been achieved in the long run. This is also one area where the initiative has come from within the ICFTU itself, at least in the early years, before being taken up by a large number of affiliates. As Lindsey Rea, a member of the APRO Women's Committee, explains: women in their own national unions can put forward their demands and say 'this is ICFTU policy' (interview notes). The prestige and practical influence of the ICFTU – through education programmes and provisions for the inclusion of women in Congress delegations – combined to push the affiliates in the direction of equality. The Women's Bureau and Committee were also one of the first components of the ICFTU to devolve policy discussions and implementation to the regions, and to build up an effective network of cooperation between trade unionists from different parts of the world. Stewart observed that the struggle to promote equality within the ICFTU had to begin anew with every Congress and every general secretary, but that slowly and persistently the groundwork for

women's rights had been laid by her predecessors, and would no doubt be continued by her successors (interview notes: Cissé; Dehareng; Ramos; Rea; Riche; Stewart).¹⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two very different campaigns which the Confederation regards as among the most successful in its history. There is much to support that opinion, and the narrative above demonstrates that the ICFTU has certainly devoted considerable resources to both issues. However, a careful evaluation reveals the vital role played by a variety of other actors – especially in the South African case – in achieving that success. In the latter, clearly the most important force for change was the determination and courage of the mass of South Africans themselves, in a situation where the main problem was not a 'trade union' issue alone but above all one of the entire political and social system. Bob Hawke, one of the major players in trade union and political campaigns for change, now considers that governmental and intergovernmental action through the UN, the Commonwealth and ILO were the key factors in pressuring the regime and white South African society into accepting change (interview notes). However, it is also clear that unions in many countries played a major role in creating the climate of opinion that forced governments to act and in sustaining the spotlight on the issue over a long period, something which less entrenched social forces would have found more difficult to achieve.

It is important in this context to consider what types of trade union action provided the most effective tools for the campaign against apartheid. Solidarity did succeed, but not the sort of trade union solidarity associated with boycotts or strikes, for it was only briefly possible to form the consensus needed to carry out such actions. Despite the disgust now expressed by

¹⁰ 'Breaking down the barriers to equality', *Trade Union World*, September 1999, 37-8.

Hawke – ‘I was bloody angry’ – that no other major affiliate joined the Australian and New Zealand dockers in their refusal to handle South African goods (interview notes), other forms of action, such as intervention on works councils and supervisory boards, and campaigns targeting MNCs operating in South Africa, helped force companies to agree to recognise the new unions. Further, the ICFTU and ITSs provided training and legal assistance for these unions, helping to create an effective cadre of leaders for the liberation movement. Most importantly, however, it was the unions’ role in lobbying parties and governments and in publicising the situation, and their persistence in doing so, that probably made the difference. But the ICFTU’s campaign, like its work on human and trade union rights in Chile and elsewhere, took a long time to develop – much too long – and this through organisational inertia and the resistance of certain key affiliates.

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, the struggle for equality for women within the Confederation and the trade union movement as a whole was of a different kind, owing much more to the action of key individuals, including members of the secretariat and representatives of the affiliates. The role of Marcelle Dehareng in pushing for the secretariat to take women’s issues seriously cannot be over-estimated, but she had to work with the chairs and the other members of the Women’s Committee in order to force the Confederation to act. On women’s equality, as on the struggle against apartheid, certain affiliates and their member unions played a vital role in promoting the campaign: the Nordic and Dutch affiliates were of key importance in both cases; the TUC and CLC on South Africa; the DGB and ÖGB on women’s equality. In addition, leading figures from the developing countries gave crucial early support to both struggles, in particular Narayanan. Yet behind each of them was a society and a trade union movement that was calling for change. Nowhere is this more true than in the fight for women’s equality, which emerged through a slow process of social change in the industrialised societies.

coinciding with the growth of women's participation in trade unions. In both cases, ultimately, it was members and individual workers who counted.

Chapter 6

The ICFTU within the International System: Industrial and Political Action in the Global Economy

This chapter finally addresses what most observers would consider to be the most important objective of any international trade union organisation: its efforts to promote the interests of workers around the world. This is certainly the 'bread and butter' issue of national unions, but as I have tried to show above, labour internationals do not have access to all the instruments of action of national unions; nor is their remit exactly the same. The ICFTU's work on the world economy has had to take into account the concerns of different constituencies, which have changed over time; it has had to address the needs of women workers and of those in the developing countries; most of all, it has to work in a cooperative and productive way with the ITs, whose industrial remit is more direct. This chapter will show the ways the ICFTU, together with the ITs, has addressed the issue of the world economy, acting within the international system as we now know it while seeking to transform it.

Discussion of globalisation came into vogue in the 1990s, but the global dimension of economic activity has always been a focus for the ICFTU's work. Over the years, the emphasis of its efforts has subtly changed in keeping with the major transformations in the world economy and society, while maintaining a notable continuity in basic approach. The ICFTU has sustained and extended its long-established role as a formal representative of the labour movement within intergovernmental bodies and with national governments, and has more recently begun to pursue a more proactive, campaigning role in response to the challenge of an increasingly integrated international economy. Three major themes can be identified, the

relative significance of each varying in different periods: the response to the growing power of MNCs;¹ the unequal relationship between rich and poor nations and the consequences of Third World debt; and finally the pursuit of international labour standards, particularly within the framework of international trade agreements (interview notes: Pursey; Tapiola; Vanderveken). Throughout, the Confederation has worked closely with affiliates and the ITSs, often in response to their initiatives, and has had to place its work around the global economy in the context of its resources and other objectives.

The development of the ICFTU campaign in the 1970s

Throughout the 1970s a key focus of ICFTU work on the global economy was the search for regulation of the activities of the multinationals, through formal contacts at the highest level with representatives of governments and companies.² Its policies and activities were to a great extent undertaken in close cooperation with the ITSs and frequently at their initiative, though there were occasional tensions over their respective roles. This has been explained as a tension between an ‘industrial’ or ‘capital-directed’ strategy on the part of the ITSs, as opposed to the ‘state-directed’, ‘political’ or ‘representational’ strategy of the ICFTU and the other internationals based on national centres (Etty and Tudyka 1974; Koch-Baumgarten 1998; Rütters 1990). What the ICFTU had to add, beyond the mere coordination of the initiatives of others, was its representation within international institutions – its unique role as a ‘voice’ for

¹ In order to avoid confusion, I have used the terms ‘multinationals’ and MNCs, although ‘transnational enterprise’ was often used during this period.

² It is impossible to give more than a superficial overview of this subject in the space available. A rich literature in the 1970s on the initiatives of the world labour movement for regulation of MNCs and the world economy includes Olle (ed.) 1978; Tudyka et al. 1978; and of course, Levinson 1971 and 1972. One of the few works to refer in detail to the ICFTU role in these initiatives is Piehl 1974. Of more recent work on the subject, there has been considerable emphasis on the role of the ITSs (for example the contributions of the working group at the FU Berlin, including S. Mielke, S. Koch-Baumgarten, P. Rütters and W. Reutter, as cited below); works which consider the ICFTU include Bendiner 1987; Devin 1990; and Munck and Waterman (eds) 1999.

the world labour movement in the search for regulation of the MNCs and the development of an international industrial relations system.

The search by the world labour movement for the regulation of the multinationals goes back at least to the creation of the ILO and subsequently of the UN institutions (Haworth and Hughes 1997; Kyloh 1998, 6-14), but the issue achieved prominence only in the late 1960s and 1970s. The initiative came from a number of sources, including major national industrial unions such as the UAW in the United States and the German *IG Metall*, national centres in the major industrialised countries, the ITSs, especially those of metal, food and chemical workers (IMF, IUF and ICF), the other labour internationals WCL and WFTU, as well as the ICFTU itself. This period was also marked by a revival of left politics: the concerns of the world labour movement to increase workers' voice and to regulate the activities of the MNCs matched the mood of the times and were shared by some governments, as in the Nordic countries. The issue was part of a broader social project, advocated by leaders of the socialist and labour movements, for regulated economic expansion linked to a growth in industrial democracy and a reduction of social inequalities both within the industrialised countries and between them and the developing world. As Lennart Nyström, of LO Sweden, said to an ICFTU workshop in 1976:

Since the world is like it is, it will not, for a long time, be possible to have global solutions to the problems of employment, basic needs production and multinationals.

The international organisations will only be able to follow the smallest common denominator. Parallel to the lobbying work in international organisations, the international trade union movement should therefore use its contacts across borders to work on creating a development in the cooperation between political forces and governments that are prepared to create an expansionist economic policy with

production and employment for the poor and weak, that are prepared to control multinational companies and that are prepared to create and use economic and organisational resources to make legislative controls of multinationals effective (ICFTU workshop on the legislative control of international investment, Ottawa 18-20.10.1976, ICFTU archives, file 1631, economic and social policy).

Regulation by industry: the initiative of the ITSs

One of the first prominent advocates of a trade union approach to the multinationals was Walter Reuther, leader of the UAW and for a time vice-president of the ICFTU, who as early as the 1950s advocated that the IMF should undertake research on MNCs. The IMF was the first ITS to take up the issue, producing a series of reports and beginning to plan initiatives from the mid-1950s, under the responsibility of assistant general secretary Charles Levinson and subsequently Karl Casserini (previously secretary of TUAC), who first coined the term 'social clause' (interview notes: Ford). Reuther and his colleagues were clearly responding to the concerns of North American workers, who were beginning to fear the loss of jobs in this traditionally high-paid sector; but they did not wish to take the 'protectionist' route of controls on imports then favoured by many North American union leaders. Instead they aimed for the gradual standardisation of wages and working conditions to remove any advantage for unscrupulous employers in shifting production to low-wage countries. This could be achieved through assistance to unions in the developing countries, common expiry dates of collective agreements, and eventually the closer coordination of collective bargaining between unions in different countries. Reuther's vision led to the formation of the first world company councils (WCCs) at Ford and General Electric in 1966. Other councils were soon created by IMF affiliates in the motor and related industries, and the IMF launched a programme to promote and coordinate these under the leadership of its future general secretary, Herman Rebhan, a

former UAW official (Bendiner 1987, 62-4; Etty 1978a, 70-1; Etty and Tudyka 1974, 10, 21-2; Piehl 1974a, 239-42; interview notes: Ford).

By the 1970s, leaders in other ITSs were pursuing the issue. The most prominent was Levinson, who left the IMF to become head of the chemical and general workers' international ICF in 1963; another was Dan Gallin, general secretary of the food workers' IUF. The three large organisations collaborated in a range of initiatives, breathing new life into the international movement and sometimes coming into conflict with the ICFTU as well as with the established leaders of other ITSs. While the IMF may have initiated the first practical examples of WCCs, it was clearly Levinson who popularised the idea throughout the labour movement and the broader public with the publication of influential books and articles. The ICF set up a number of coordinating bodies, similar to WCCs, in leading industries in its sector. It was the council at the French-based multinational Saint-Gobain that in 1969 provided the first major success in achieving the aims of unions in dispute at national level through coordinated international action (Etty and Tudyka 1974, 14; Levinson 1972, 8-21; interview notes: Jordan).

However the ICF soon realised that the WCC was not as suited to the chemical and related industries as it was to the car industry. Coping with the large number of individual firms over-extended the ICF: it proved impossible to resource them adequately for a sustained period (interview notes: Catterson; Etty; Thorpe). The IMF also discovered the limited capacity of its company councils to intervene in disputes. After relative success in conflicts at Ford in Belgium and the UK in the early 1970s (Etty and Tudyka 1974, 31; Piehl 1974; Scanlon 1970, 3-4) the international labour movement lost much of the initial advantage of 'surprise' in its campaign against the MNCs, as was seen in the failure of international solidarity action to protect jobs at Enka/Akzo in 1975-76 (interview notes: Etty).³ Making exaggerated claims for

³ Ironically, Enka's operations in Breda (Netherlands) had been the scene of a previous successful international action in 1972. See Etty 1978a, 75; Van Cortenberghe and Terlingen 1972.

the potential of WCCs as an effective ‘countervailing power’ to the transnationals, or misinterpreted by supporters within the labour movement and the media, the advocates of this strategy became vulnerable to counter-attack by journalists and academics hostile to their aims.⁴ Very few WCCs stood the test of time or achieved the results for which they were intended. Some of the most successful were those founded by the IUF, particularly those at BSN-Danone and Nestlé (Reutter 1996).⁵

Another cause for the relative failure of ITS action against MNCs was the division in the world labour movement. Neither the WCL nor WFTU could compare with the membership or influence of the ICFTU-affiliated unions, and their industrial sections were severely limited by comparison with the ITSs. However, the leading role of WFTU affiliates in France, Italy and Spain created serious problems for the efforts of the ITSs and ICFTU to organise effectively in many MNCs. Officials and activists in a number of ICFTU affiliates – for example, many British shop stewards – were ideologically sympathetic with the French, Italian and Spanish communist unions, or at least felt that on practical grounds it was necessary to cooperate with them for an effective trade union response to the MNCs. This was totally at odds with ICFTU policy, and despite their radicalism on some issues the ITS leaders shared its anti-communism; not even the ICF was willing to include representatives of the CGIL in its initiatives. This led to a serious rift with its Italian affiliates CISL and UIL when they were pursuing unity with CGIL. Some shop-floor initiatives, as in the rubber industry in 1975, met fierce opposition from Levinson, who requested ICF affiliates to have nothing to do with such action because the CGT and CC.OO. were involved (Etty and Tudyka 1974, 19, 27-8; 64EB/8; 64EB/14). The

⁴ Most notably, Northrup and Rowan 1979. Suspicious of the motives of Northrup and Rowan, who were both at Wharton Business School, Levinson refused even to speak to them (interview notes: Thorpe). A later and more balanced response to Levinson’s arguments can be found in Haworth and Ramsey 1988 and Ramsey 1997, 503-537.

⁵ Reutter reports that in the metal sector in 1996 only the councils at VW, Nissan and Caterpillar were still operational; he does not include information on those set up by the ICF (now ICEM).

IUF shared this general suspicion of the WFTU unions, while expressing a willingness to form a 'coalition' with CGIL and CGT affiliates 'if the right conditions were met'.⁶

It can be argued that the WCCs represented a serious effort to articulate common objectives and strategies for trade unions at international level within the firms involved. But the reluctance of the national unions to give up power and invest real authority in the councils (or indeed in the ITSs), along with persistent differences of national interests within the labour movement, help explain the failure of the councils to achieve their more ambitious objectives. In addition, there was a risk that they could become vehicles of *Betriebsegoismus* ('company egoism', see Kothoff 1979) encouraging the fragmentation of the labour movement or the integration of its local representatives into the strategies of management, obstructing closer unity of objectives and action across companies. In a similar vein, Scanlon (then president of the British AEU), wrote: 'we must decisively reject all systems of so-called social partnership, of profit sharing, etc., which primarily seek to divorce the worker from his union and instil only loyalty to the firm. We need a strong, vigorous, and above everything, an independent voice' (Scanlon 1970, 7-8). In any event WCCs, as already indicated, provided a more appropriate opportunity for cross-national action in some industries than in others. It is no surprise that they were first created in the car industry: a highly concentrated, capital-intensive industry with an integrated production system and a strongly unionised work force, whose collective action could inflict serious pressure on employers. The same could not be said of industries such as textiles and clothing, where a low-skilled, decentralised and labour-intensive industry made the labour force especially vulnerable to exploitation, yet provided few opportunities for the ITGLWF to establish company-level structures, though it attempted to coordinate collective bargaining through ad hoc meetings. (interview notes: ETTY; Ford; Thorpe; ETTY and Tudyka, 1974, 31-2; Piehl 1974b, 239-47). For such workers, the ITS alone was unable to create a

⁶ Gallin, in an interview in *Der Gewerkschaftsspiegel*, 1 February 1973 (quoted in Piehl 1974b, 245). The IUF subsequently worked with CGIL affiliates in some of its company councils, including the

'countervailing power' to the transnationals: only the regulation of the activities of MNCs as a whole had any chance of achieving the labour movement's aims. This is precisely where the ICFTU came into the picture.

Regulating MNCs by international standards: the work of the ICFTU

The ICFTU had long shown concern with the issue of the multinationals, particularly through the work of Alfred Braunthal, head of its Economic and Social Department from 1949 to 1968; but the question assumed a far higher profile from the late 1960s, with pressure from a number of affiliates, notably the TUC. The 1969 Congress adopted a resolution calling for regulation of the activities of MNCs, which was circulated to affiliated unions and the ITSs and also raised with the UN and the ILO. In December 1970 the EB adopted a resolution on trade union freedom and MNCs, and this was one of the main themes of the World Economic Conference of Free Trade Unions in Geneva in June 1971, where the report on the multinationals was presented by *IG Metall* leader Otto Brenner (52EB/6). The decisions of the conference were incorporated into the main recommendations for action by the Confederation at its Congress in July 1972. The most important theme in the debate, emphasised by a number of speakers, was the need for cooperation with the ITSs in undertaking research into MNCs and developing common action (*Report of Congress*, 423-6, 431-7, 493-4). Subsequently the EB invited all ITSs to participate in a joint working party (interview notes: Vanderveken; 58EB/7a; 59EB/2).

This decision was not uncontroversial: Jones queried the effectiveness of creating yet another committee, warning that 'the real problem was the weakness of unions in individual plants and companies in certain countries' (59EB/2, 7). Levinson accused the ICFTU of seeking to appropriate for its own purposes the work already being carried out by the ITSs, and kept his

Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits (ibid., 251).

distance from the working party.⁷ The ICF attitude was influenced by its continuing jurisdictional conflict with the petroleum workers' IFPCW, which initially took part in the working party meetings, but also by the view, shared by other ITSs, that action around individual corporations was more likely to bear fruit than lobbying within intergovernmental institutions like the ILO. While they worked closely with the ICF as part of the same 'mobilisation coalition' and expressed concern over its absence from the meetings, the IMF and IUF did cooperate with the working party. Most ITSs, including IFPAAW and IUF, also agreed to the division of labour worked out by participants in the first meeting: relations between MNCs and unions would be the primary responsibility of the ITSs, while relations between these corporations and governments and intergovernmental organisations would be the responsibility of the ICFTU (*Report of Tenth World Congress*; 52EB/6; 58EB/7a; 59EB/2,6,7,9(a); ESC/2; Etty and Tudyka 1974, 18, 27; Piehl 1974a; interview notes: Etty; Ford; Nedzynski; Thorpe; Vanderveken).⁸

Formulating ICFTU policy

The working party held five meetings between February 1973 and the November 1975 Congress; the first were chaired by the general secretary; subsequently, Clas-Erik Odhner of LO Sweden and Charles Ford of the ITGLWF presided. While it was intended to include representatives of affiliates from the host countries of the MNCs, and Asian representatives attended the meeting held in Tokyo, all other meetings were in Europe and in practice most regular participants were from the industrialised countries, with those from the Nordic countries, Germany and the Netherlands playing a leading role. The ETUC and TUAC were

⁷ There were many efforts to persuade Levinson to take part. See, for example, a letter from Morris to Vanderveken, 20.12.1971, suggesting that Levinson be asked to be a member of the workers' group at a tripartite ILO meeting on the MNCs (CLC archives, file 1992/0195, box 28).

⁸ Piehl (1974a, 235-9) rightly stresses the potential problems for the working party posed by the 'distant' attitude of the three most active ITSs, but is incorrect in his assertion that the IMF and IUF refused to participate.

invited as observers from the beginning. The WCL, which was working along parallel lines on the MNCs, was not included in formal membership but was invited to conferences and seminars on the subject organised by the ICFTU, as well as to some meetings of the working party. The ICFTU Women's Committee also sought a representative; while this was not formally accepted, the Committee proposed that one of its ITS representatives, Ruth Köhn of the German food workers' union NGG, take part in the meetings. In 1990 the Women's Committee was still making the same request for formal representation (interview notes: Ford; Tapiola; Vanderveken; 59EB/16; 60EB/7(b); 61EB/20; 66EB/3,9; 88EB/12, ESC8; 98EB/10).

The approach agreed within the working party reflected the division of labour noted above: 'while the ITSs have been evolving new forms of organisation with the ultimate objective of arriving at international collective bargaining with the multinationals, the ICFTU has concentrated on promoting the legislative action (national and international) needed for imposing social controls on the activities of these companies' (*Report on Activities, 1972-1974*, 38). While offering support to the activities of national unions and ITSs in actions around individual companies, such as the clothing producers Farah and J. P. Stevens and the tea exporter Brooke Bond (interview notes: Ford; Walsh), the Confederation concentrated its efforts on work within the international institutions. Since MNCs could avoid the control of national laws and industrial relations systems by transfers of capital and production, using their power to pit workers in different countries against each other and to impose anti-union practices in host countries and home countries alike, the aim was to push for the adoption of a 'firm international legal framework' based on 'binding rules' (interview notes: Ford). The debate around MNCs coincided with the end of post-war economic expansion and prosperity in the industrialised countries and the disruptive impact of the 'oil shocks'; many important affiliates now felt on the defensive and, perhaps for the first time, needed the help of the ICFTU (interview notes: Pursey; Vanderveken). Through the development of a common, carefully

worked out alternative economic strategy and a series of specific proposals for legally binding rules, the international trade union movement could exert an influence on policy-makers and be present at the 'top table' when decisions affecting the world's workers were made (interview notes: Pursey), and could avoid the danger of being split into competing blocs by the manoeuvres of the MNCs: 'multiplication of jobs, not division', was Ford's apt phrase. The basis of this alternative economic policy was a form of neo-Keynesianism, although it was not always clearly stated in these words. Politically, the strategy was based on the view that it was in the interests of national governments to regulate the activities of the MNCs in order to protect national sovereignty and avoid a global 'race to the bottom', and that friendly governments could be persuaded to form a coalition with the labour movement to regulate the MNCs (Nyström, loc. cit.; 60EB/2,9; 61EB/14; 62EB/11; 63EB/5(b)(iii); interview notes: Ford, Nedzynski, Pursey, Tapiola, Vanderveken).

While the defence of workers' interests, jobs and standard of living in the industrialised countries was important, the link between world economic prosperity and the needs of the developing countries was always seen as significant, along with the negative impact of the MNCs on economic and social development in developing countries through an unequal world trading system. The issue of 'protectionism' was raised within the EB at an early stage, notably by Devan Nair, but supporters of regulation argued persuasively that control of the worst excesses of the MNCs would in fact help prevent protectionism and restraint of trade (interview notes: Pursey; Vanderveken). The general view was well expressed by Murray, who argued that the labour movement had to challenge the idea that 'gains on the part of industrialised countries, or of developing countries, could be made only at the expense of the other' and called for the regulation of the MNCs to be closely linked to development and full employment (Murray, in 69EB/2; 52/EB/6; 60EB/2,9; interview notes: Ford, Murray, Pursey, Vanderveken).

From the beginning, those formulating ICFTU policy were concerned by the negative impact of the MNCs on the environment and on workers' health and safety, especially in the Third World. The working party's 'Statement for submission to the UN Economic and Social Council', elaborated at its Tokyo meeting, October 1973, contains unusually strong language for the time: the unions 'insist on having their say in the formulation of universal environmental legislation which will withdraw from multinational companies the licence some now hold which leads not only to the exploitation but also to the maiming and even killing of workers' (*Report on Activities, 1972-1974*, 191). The defence of human and trade union rights around the world was another important consideration. Governments in some developing countries were willing to restrict rights of trade union organisation in order to attract investment by MNCs; conversely in some industrialised countries the same firms were adopting anti-union practices. Furthermore, labour legislation in many countries made it difficult for unions to carry out solidarity actions with workers with the same employer in other countries (Jones, in 59EB/2,7; Piehl 1974a, 230-1). The ICFTU was further concerned to protect its own status as a representative of the international labour movement within the ILO, the UN and other intergovernmental bodies (62EB/9; 63EB/2,8). As one Italian representative put it, the MNCs brought together many other issues of importance to the ICFTU and therefore necessitated a truly 'global approach' by the Confederation (Badel Glorioso, in 60EB/2,9; Kylvoh 1998, 18-19; interview notes: Ford, Jones, Lewis, Pursey, Vanderveken).

In the view of the ICFTU, 'the climate of international opinion is ripe for a purposeful attempt to introduce the rule of law into the largely unregulated jungle of multinational company activities' (*Report on Activities, 1972-1974*, 190). How was this to be achieved? The evolving strategy was profoundly marked by the political currents within many left parties and unions in the 1960s and 1970s, which called for the transformation of the economy and society through

the development of workers' control and an equitable world economic system. Advocates of this argument within the ICFTU emphasised the need to challenge managerial control and to extend industrial democracy within the MNCs and national economies, on the basis of coordinated international pressure for an expansionist economic policy in cooperation with like-minded political forces. At the world economic conference, Brenner argued for 'direct involvement in corporate management', as was already the case in the West German model of *Mitbestimmung*; similar views were expressed forcefully by Nyström and other Nordic leaders.

Others expressed themselves more cautiously: Feather of the TUC, speaking at the 1972 Congress, warned that 'our job is not to fight these companies at long range but to enter into the closest relationships we possibly can with them.... We must make them conform to ordinary industrial relations practice' (*Report of the Tenth Congress*, 426). Behind this 'common sense' argument was the idea that the trade unions' task was to check the excesses of the current economic system, not to work towards an alternative model of society, an idea which had worked quite well in the long post-war period of prosperity. By the beginning of the economic crisis of the 1970s, however, when the increased power of the MNCs and the limitations of traditional union strategies became manifest, more radical political and economic analyses acquired new weight. The arguments for workers' control put forward by national centres like the Belgian ABVV/FGTB and the French CFDT (not yet an ICFTU affiliate), and by left activists in individual unions like the British TGWU and German *IG Metall*, captured the attention of workers at a time of great activism within labour movements and helped shape the arguments within the ICFTU.⁹ In this respect, perhaps the most important role was played by the Nordic unionists, notably Odhner, head of research for Swedish LO, who chaired the working party in 1976 and also the working group which prepared the document on MNCs for the 1975 Congress (63EB/2,6; 64EB/5(b)(ii); 66EB/3,9; interview notes: Vanderveken).

⁹ For Belgium, see Coates (ed.) 1971; for France, see Groux and Mouriaux 1989. For a good overview of the attitudes of European unions to workers' control and industrial democracy, see Sorge 1976.

The long march through the institutions

The outcome was a draft Charter of Trade Union Demands for the Legislative Control of Multinational Companies. It called for action by governments to establish guidelines and machinery for intergovernmental cooperation; to promote coordinated national legislation and prevent competitive undercutting of standards in order to attract investment; to adopt international conventions with 'enforceable standards'; and to keep MNC activities under review. It formed the centrepiece of debate at the 1975 Congress, with fourteen speakers, for the most part highly enthusiastic, and was adopted without opposition. 'The finest programme in the world is totally useless if all we do is allow it to collect cobwebs in the archives,' declared John Harker, international secretary of the CLC, in presenting the Charter to Congress. 'We have to go out from here and fight for its adoption; fight for its adoption both by the United Nations in the form of international conventions and by the world's governments in the form of appropriate national legislation and administrative regulations' (*Report of Eleventh World Congress*, 505).

Yet the portents were not altogether favourable. One of the main areas of discussion at the early meetings of the working party was the UN 'Group of Eminent Persons' set up in 1973 to formulate proposals for UN action on multinationals, on the initiative of its Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Leaders of the ICFTU and ITSs were deeply unhappy that its twenty members, nominated by the secretary-general Kurt Waldheim, contained no trade union representatives while there were five 'spokesmen for big business and banking'. The ICFTU lambasted the 'blatantly unbalanced' composition of the group and the lack of any substantive attention to trade union concerns (six lines out of 100 pages, in the ICFTU's estimate!) in their initial report, *Multinational Corporations in World Development* (ESC/2, in 60EB/7(b)). Both

the ICFTU and the WCL boycotted the Group on the grounds that they had been invited as observers with no voting rights; but following an attempt by a senior UN official to repair the damage, the Confederation agreed to submit proposals directly to ECOSOC (*Report on Activities, 1972-1974*, 38-9). As a result of continued pressure from the ICFTU, ITSs, and friendly governments, in 1974 the Group issued its final recommendations, including the creation of a UN Commission on Transnational Corporations with formal participation of the international trade union movement. In July 1974, ECOSOC endorsed most of the proposals of the Group, but left the decision on the composition of the Commission to a special committee (62EB/9,11).

One means of increasing backing for the Charter was to seek allies. In the words of Lennart Nyström of LO Sweden, 'there is a clear trade union interest to work together with, or support and strengthen, those political forces that have an ideology in line with the interests of the workers and their trade unions' (Nyström, loc. cit.). In 1974 the working party had agreed to invite representatives of 'friendly political parties' and the Socialist International (SI) to attend one of its two annual meetings and to develop less formal consultation, and this collaboration continued for several years.¹⁰ The SI Bureau, attended by the secretary of the working party, John Riddell, subsequently agreed to formal participation (62EB/2,14; SI circular, B6/78, 11.8.78, in CLC archives, file 109-14, 1992/0195). The labour movement's allies in government became strong advocates in the UN, the OECD and the ILO of many of the proposals put forward by the ICFTU and its affiliates for the control of the MNCs (*Report on Activities, 1972-1974*, 39).

The creation of the UN Centre and Commission on Transnational Corporations was the first important step forward within the intergovernmental institutions. Shortly after adopting the

¹⁰ One of the most assiduous participants in the working party over the years was Oscar Debunne of the Belgian Socialist Party, a relation of ICFTU vice-president Georges Debunne.

Charter, ICFTU representatives met its director Klaus Sahlgren to discuss its provisions, and regular discussions with Sahlgren and his staff took place thereafter (66EB/3,11). On the advice of the ICFTU, Sahlgren appointed the international secretary of its Finnish affiliate SAK, Kari Tapiola, as one of his special advisors to liaise with trade unions and employers' organisations (interview notes: Tapiola). Formal membership of the Commission was never achieved, largely because of the opposition of Third World and Soviet bloc governments (67EB/2,8(a)), but five trade unionists were included in its panel of expert advisors; several others were included in national delegations. The panel of advisors included one each from the ICFTU, WCL, WFTU, OATUU and AFL-CIO. David Lea (TUC) was the first ICFTU nominee, and played an important role in the 1977 proposal for information and consultation arrangements with the MNCs (interview notes: Ford). The Commission, and even more the Centre, provided an opportunity for the ICFTU, ITSs and national unions to take part in consultations and publicise their views on the issues, and was also a significant source of information to the trade union movement. This work was coordinated by Beatrice von Roemer of the ICFTU's New York office with the participation of high-level officials from the Confederation and leading affiliates (66EB/3,11). The Centre and Commission provided a key forum for attempts to influence the behaviour of MNCs in South Africa (and later Chile) and provided expert testimony and information on the subject. Indeed, as described below, the earliest codes of conduct adopted by the UN system, the EEC, and individual states were aimed at eliminating the apartheid system in South Africa (interview notes: Pursey). However, the main goal of the trade unions, a UN code of conduct on MNCs, remained elusive, and had still not been adopted by the end of the 1990s. This was seen as the result of opposition from governments, mainly in the developing countries, to 'over-regulatory' measures (100EB/12(a)).

The first intergovernmental instruments regulating MNCs

While pursuing its action within the UN, the ICFTU was deeply engaged in pressure within other intergovernmental bodies, most notably the ILO. Through its control of the majority of Workers' Group, the Confederation pushed for the first tripartite meetings to discuss multinationals in the autumn of 1972 (58EB/7(a)). A leading role was played by Joe Morris, who became Workers' Vice-President of the International Labour Conference in 1970 and in 1977 chair of the Governing Body. Morris, who succeeded MacDonald as president of the CLC in 1974, worked closely with assistant general secretary Maier, Vanderveken and other ICFTU officials on the strategy and tactics to pursue within the ILO.¹¹ A programme of activities, including a study of the relationship of MNCs to social policy and the coordination of all ILO activities on MNCs, was adopted by the Governing Body in October-November 1972 (59EB/6; 60EB/2,6). MNCs were also an important theme of the ILO World Employment Conference in 1976 (64EB/(v)(ii)). Despite the strong opposition of some representatives of employers and Third World governments, the Governing Body adopted a *Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy* in November 1977 (second edition, 1991). The declaration was based on the report of a working group of which Casserini was workers' vice-chair, and whose members included Ford, the AFL-CIO economist Paul Barton, and Stephen Pursey (TUC), who went on to become secretary of the working party in 1981, and head of the ICFTU Economic and Social Policy department in 1983 (interview notes: Ford, Pursey). According to Ford, most of the proposals of the trade union representatives on the working group were accepted, and found their way into the final declaration, including provisions for regular follow-up within ILO procedures. While expressing satisfaction with the declaration, the EB called for pressure by the Workers' Group for further ILO action, including the adoption of a Convention and recommendation and the creation of a tripartite commission to examine complaints against MNCs. The report to the 1979 Congress stated that

¹¹ Memo from J. Major to Morris, 3 .7.1978, in CLC archives, file 1992/0195, box 50. Morris, who was a member of the Canadian delegation, argued for an 'institutionalised participatory role by the ICFTU in [the UN] Commission,' in representations to the Canadian government, which supported the proposal (letter to A. MacEachen, 8 .10.1975, in CLC archives, file 1992/0195, box 30).

‘while the Declaration is non-binding in nature, the Workers’ Group has, during the period 1977-78, sought to ensure that it is accompanied by an effective implementation machinery, including possibilities of fact-finding and dispute settlement’ (*Report on Activities, 1975-1978*, 51). But efforts to arrange further tripartite meetings on MNCs met resistance from employer members (68EB/2,5), and the declaration was not followed by international instruments; although the ILO did set up a department and carried out further research on the subject (interview notes: Ford, Pursey, Tapiola.).

In the late 1970s, the Confederation was concerned about its ability to act within the UN system as a whole. Bavin warned that ‘there had been a gradual wearing down of the status of the labour movement within UN agencies’ (67EB/2,8(a)). Matters were being taken out of ECOSOC, where the ICFTU enjoyed consultative status. It appeared to many in the ICFTU that the ILO itself, the only tripartite UN body, was losing its effectiveness through polarisation between the workers’ and employers’ groups and the politicisation of the UN system as a whole. To press forward the regulation of MNCs the ICFTU must also assert its influence within the broader UN system. One notable success was achieved at the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) (interview notes: Dehareng). A long-standing employer-backed programme, the Industry Cooperative Programme (ICP), ostensibly provided training and technical assistance to agriculture in the developing countries but – according to the ICFTU and IFPAAW – in reality promoted the products and practices of MNCs in ‘agri-business’; the issue was discussed at three meetings of the working party, and the ICFTU convened a special workshop on the problem of this sector in April 1977. Following a proposal from the ICFTU and friendly governments in 1975, the FAO carried out an inquiry at the end of which its director-general expressed ‘doubts about the value of the ICP to developing countries, the cost involved for the FAO, and the desirability of such an organisation being situated on FAO premises’ (69EB/9). The programme was removed from official FAO sponsorship in 1977

(71EB/10), as a result of the effective pressure mounted by the trade union movement, in particular through the concerted efforts of Marcelle Dehareng, responsible for work with the UN in the ICFTU secretariat (interview notes: Dehareng, Vanderveken).

The ICFTU and ITSs also pressed hard for the adoption of regulations on MNCs in other international bodies. As early as 1973, the ICFTU worked closely with the IMF to submit a proposal for a 'social clause' for inclusion in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) treaty (60EB/7, Appendix I, ESC/4; Appendix 86EB/11, ESC 8). This had no immediate effect, but set an important precedent. The most significant progress over this period was undoubtedly within the OECD. The international labour movement had two important forms of leverage. The first was TUAC; as noted above (ch. 2), while officially independent, TUAC was effectively controlled by the ICFTU. Its representatives were routinely invited to meetings of the ICFTU working party on MNCs and other meetings on economic issues. While TUAC initially set up its own working group on MNCs, it later held joint meetings with the ICFTU/ITS working party. Second, in 1953 the unions had been instrumental in creating a Social Affairs Division of the Manpower and Social Affairs Directorate of the European Productivity Agency (EPA). After the end of the EPA as a separate body, some of its programmes were taken on by the OECD (Ford 196). According to Ford, who was secretary of TUAC from 1957 to 1966, the unions 'pretty much ran the whole thing'. When the OECD was uninterested or unwilling to organise a seminar or to commission a report on a subject of interest to the trade unions, the Social Affairs Division would provide the necessary facilities, then publish the results, a 'pioneering' precedent later taken up by ETUC within the EEC institutions. Some of the earliest studies of MNCs were carried out in this way (interview notes: Ford; Tapiola).

The OECD began to consider measures to regulate MNC activities around 1973, as governments sought the support of unions to 'deal with an anarchic situation', in the words of Henri Bernard, then secretary of TUAC (60EB/2,9). After years of work by the Social Affairs Division, and pressure from TUAC and the ICFTU, in June 1976 the OECD developed a series of guidelines for the conduct of MNCs, as part of its Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises (Riddell 1976). This was the first international instrument for regulating MNCs, and was welcomed by the ICFTU as a step towards a binding code. Members of the EB expressed reservations, however; as Vanderveken put it, there were important points missing in the guidelines, particularly in respect of trade union involvement in implementation (Vanderveken, in 67EB/2,11). In fact the declaration and guidelines dealt largely with issues of little concern to the ICFTU, and only a few provisions, mainly contained in the section on employment and industrial relations, went along the lines proposed by the trade union movement. These provisions were based on good industrial relations practice in the leading industrial countries, such as union recognition, negotiations by management with employee representatives, and reasonable notice of layoffs and transfers of production (ITGLWF 1978; interview notes: ETTY, Ford, Pursey, Tapiola).

The most important drawbacks were that the guidelines applied only to MNC operations within OECD member states, and thus not to the developing countries where they were most needed; and that they were wholly voluntary. Furthermore, while regular reviews of their implementation were foreseen, with scope for comments from TUAC and the employers' body BIAC, there was no real complaints procedure since no conclusions could be made on the behaviour of individual companies. For all these reasons, the Nordic Council of Trade Unions deemed the guidelines 'unacceptable' and called on governments to undertake new negotiations (Annex I to the report of the TUAC Working Group on Multinational Enterprises, 3.5.1979, CLC archives, file 1992/0195, box 50; 67EB/2,11). But most members of the EB and TUAC

agreed with Murray, who stated that it would be a 'hollow posture' to oppose the guidelines, and recommended instead a series of practical improvements (67EB/2,11: interview notes: Tapiola). It did indeed prove possible to use the guidelines to submit complaints about the practices of individual companies; although no formal decision could be taken naming the company in question, everyone would know its identity. This was to provide trade unions with useful ammunition in their efforts to point the finger at the abuses of power and anti-union practices of many MNCs (interview notes: Etty; Ford).

At a consultation with the OECD in March 1977, TUAC representatives presented some 20 examples of violations of the guidelines. Following this, the OECD's Committee on International Investment and Multinational Enterprise (CIME) set up an ad hoc working group, known as the 'Levy Group' (after the name of its chair), to examine these cases. The publicity and pressure this created were enough to bring a satisfactory conclusion to a number of them (interview notes: Etty; Ford; Tapiola). The most significant was probably the Badger case, in which the Belgian subsidiary of a US-based multinational shut down its operations but lacked the resources to pay the redundancy compensation required under Belgian law. Following representations by the Belgian government and the unions, the committee held that the parent company was jointly responsible with its subsidiary for the payment, which the MNC then agreed to finance.¹² Similarly, union complaints helped resolve disputes in two other cases involving US multinationals, concerning the Swiss operations of the Firestone company and Singer's operations in the UK ('Exchange of views with TUAC and BIAC held on 11.4.1978', unofficial summary record by the Secretariat, CIME, Addendum 1 to IME/M(78)1, CLC archives, file 0195/1992, box 50).

¹² The Belgian government's case was prepared by Prof. Roger Blanpain of the Katholiek Universiteit Leuven.

In 1978, Tapiola left the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations to succeed Bernard as general secretary of TUAC. He helped restore good working relations with BIAC, which had been strained since a misunderstanding over TUAC's purported advocacy of international collective bargaining. He also reformed TUAC's structures and encouraged a positive role for the AFL-CIO within it during the years that the latter was still outside the ICFTU (interview notes: Ford; Tapiola).¹³ The principle was accepted that TUAC, BIAC and national governments could seek 'clarifications' of the guidelines in the periods between the regular (three- to five-yearly) reviews, but CIME insisted on the right of MNCs concerned to state their case and reiterated that only general conclusions would be reached, as judgments on individual cases would not be 'fair' (Annex I to the report of the TUAC Working Group). This conclusion clearly reflected representations by the chair of BIAC's own committee on MNEs, G. Wagner of Shell Netherlands, who argued in a letter to the OECD secretary-general that in consideration of individual cases, 'assertions are often treated as if they are established facts [which] can be unhelpful for the settlement of differences... as well as harmful for MNEs in general' (Wagner to E. van Lennep, 16.6.1978, sent to TUAC by OECD, CLC archives, 1992/0195, box 50).

TUAC, the ICFTU, ITSs and national centres continued to use the guidelines to bring attention to individual cases of abuse of power by MNCs, and were often successful in their pressure; but despite continued demands from TUAC and a number of national governments, no further progress was made toward 'binding rules'. Sharing the view of many within the ICFTU, Morris stated his 'disappointment' with the application of the guidelines and called on governments to 'regain [the] momentum' (Morris to P. E. Trudeau, prime minister of Canada, 3.5.1978, in CLC archives, 1992/0195, box 50). In the EB, Bernard (then TUAC secretary) warned that the guidelines might become 'an application of a juridical affair' and called for

¹³ Tapiola took over as chair of TUAC's working party on MNCs after Pursey left the TUC for the ICFTU; he continued to head the working party after he returned to SAK, until 1996, when he became

national centres to 'ensure that unionists who were in direct contact with MNCs at the shop floor became conversant with the content of the Guidelines' (69EB/2,9). Despite efforts to publicise the procedures – the ICFTU launched a regular *Information Bulletin* on MNCs, and on the initiative of the working party a pamphlet *Trade Unions and the Transnationals: A Checklist for Trade Unionists* was published in 1979 (75EB/8(a)) – the OECD guidelines never became widely used by national centres and ITSs as a means of resolving disputes (interview notes: Etty). By 1983 it was reported that while 'TUAC has played a crucial role in maintaining some degree of compliance with the Guidelines... TUAC remains concerned that Governments are not sufficiently active in ensuring full observance' (*Report on Activities, 1979-1982*, 62). In the view of Ford, the guidelines 'became a talking shop'. Yet the precedent had been established, and the ICFTU moved on to action on other fronts (interview notes: Etty; Ford; Tapiola).

Following the adoption of its Multinational Charter and the publication of the *Checklist*, the ICFTU continued with research and information around the MNCs (76EB/12(b)), particularly on South Africa, and worked with the ITSs and national centres on individual campaigns, most notably that of the IUF over massive violations of human and trade union rights at Coca Cola's operations in Guatemala. The campaign achieved great success in winning over public opinion to the plight of the Guatemalan workers, demonstrating that MNCs with well-known 'brand names' could be vulnerable to public opprobrium.¹⁴ The steady work of the ICFTU and the ITSs appeared to be having some impact on public opinion and government policies, for example in the use of trade policies to promote human and trade union rights and in some national legislation. This success could be seen in the publication of the influential report of the international commission headed by the former German Chancellor, Willy Brandt, *North – South: A Programme for Survival* (Brandt 1980). Morris became a member of the

Deputy Director General of the ILO.

¹⁴ This successful campaign is well covered by Rütters 1989, 207-10.

Commission, following Kersten's intervention – one of the first trade unionists to serve on a high-level international body of this kind (Dewil, personal communication; interview notes: Ford; Pursey). The report examined in detail the policies and practices of the MNCs, pointing out that their investments tended to be concentrated in 'only a few middle-income developing countries' and 'may conflict with the development objectives and national interests of host countries'. It supported 'codes of conduct' for the MNCs, to lead to 'agreements between governments which should include... coordinated legislation in home and host countries' (paras. 22-3, quoted in appendix I; 75EB/8(c),(e); 80EB/17; Dewil, personal communication; Brandt 1980; interview notes: Ford, Pursey).

This had indeed been the goal of the ICFTU from the outset of its campaign, but turning this into reality remained a distant hope. Continued negotiations over the draft UN code, and a review of the OECD Guidelines in 1984, proved ineffectual. In the years that followed, the ICFTU/ITS working party continued to meet, but its sessions became less frequent. The ICFTU still pressed for action within the UN institutions; but the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations was closed down in 1993, and its associated Commission was renamed the Commission on International Investment and Transnational Corporations and hived off to UNCTAD. The system of expert advisors, one route for trade union influence, was ended (*Report on Activities, 1991-1994*, 70-3). The ICFTU report on these changes identified them as 'a downgrading of UN activity on MNCs' and a reversal of objectives so as 'to promote or create "enabling environments" for private investment'; the word 'disappointment' recurs in these comments. During a Congress discussion in 1975, Kok had cast doubts on the value of 'a non-committal code of conduct' and called for 'an international binding treaty to control multinational companies' with financial sanctions and the possibility of even more drastic action in cases of non-compliance (*Report of Eleventh World Congress*, 507-8). While such an outcome was never on the agenda, the scepticism concerning voluntary regulation which he

shared with some leaders of the Nordic affiliates was shown to have some foundation. After its efforts to regulate the MNCs in the 1970s, in later decades ICFTU intervention in the issues of the global economy increasingly acquired a different focus.

Workers' rights in the global economy: the 1980s and 1990s

During the 1970s, the ICFTU's response to globalisation was primarily addressed to the power and practices of MNCs. 'The ICFTU spent a lot of time and money on TNCs from about 1973 to 1985 because we thought the codes discussions provided us with an entry point and because for most unions it was the most tangible international economic issue,' as Pursey recalled (personal communication). But the outcome of this effort was disappointing: there is little evidence that codes of conduct had a significant impact on corporate behaviour, except perhaps in the case of MNC activities in South Africa. Subsequently the Confederation began to highlight issues which were already on its agenda in the 1970s but had then received less emphasis: the dire effects on developing economies of the debt burden, particularly in a climate of high interest rates; the dynamics of financial and trade liberalisation; the policies of the international economic institutions. The demand for a social clause in trade agreements, long included among ICFTU objectives, became a central campaigning issue (interview notes: Etty; Friso; Pursey; Vanderveken).

The conclusions of the Brandt report seemed to match the aspirations embraced by the ICFTU and to offer the prospect of a new international economic order based on full employment, balanced development and growth, and greater equality within and among nations. With social-democratic or centre-left governments in office in much of western Europe and the Carter administration in the USA, 'a progressive international political consensus seemed to be within reach and was the aspiration for the New Delhi conference [March 1981] called to enlarge and

push the Brandt agenda' (personal communication, Pursey). But with the election of Thatcher and Reagan, followed in 1982 by the Kohl government in Germany, the political balance shifted disastrously: increasingly the leaders of the dominant industrialised economies were committed to fiscal restraint and deflationary macroeconomic policies at home, often linked to diminished labour market protections and anti-union legislation; and externally to trade liberalisation, deregulation of financial markets and intensified competition. The ICFTU affiliates in the industrialised countries could no longer influence governments to orient their policy in favour of the developing countries (90EB/12; interview notes: Friso). At the Cancún summit of key world leaders in October 1981, the ICFTU submitted a detailed policy memorandum for an agreed framework for global economic policy, but in vain (*Report on Activities 1979-1982*, 53, 199-202). Soon the issue became not so much achieving coordinated advance as resisting a 'global race for the bottom' (Shailor 1999, 28-9).

In responding to these adverse circumstances, the ICFTU needed to develop a sophisticated approach with an articulation between different levels of engagement. On the one hand, it intensified its regional activities, developing a dialogue with union leaders and activists who were in the front line of the effects of globalisation; and adopted a more assertive campaigning approach, seeking an impact by highlighting abusive labour practices and the damaging consequences of unregulated competitive forces. On the other, it developed more systematically its work within the world financial institutions, holding regular meetings with the World Bank and the IMF, and intervening in the trade liberalisation negotiations within the framework of GATT and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which followed from it.

This work on the international economy was designed to provide a world labour response to what was now increasingly termed 'globalisation'. While there was significant continuity with the approach of the 1970s, there were also interesting contrasts. The close link in the 1970s

between the demands for regulation of MNCs and industrial democracy was all but forgotten in the changed political climate of the 1990s. The analysis of the global economy in the 1990s also appeared less radical and more defensive than that in the 1970s: there was near-universal acceptance that there was no alternative to free trade within a market system, and that the main task was to reform its worst excesses. Also notable is the shift in the locus of attention from the 'normative' world of the ILO and UN system to the financial institutions and the WTO. In 1974 Levinson, criticising the ICFTU for its excessive attention to the UN institutions, argued for direct action against the multinationals on the principle that 'power is the only thing that the MNCs understand' (Levinson, quoted in Etty and Tudyka 1974, 27; interview notes: Thorpe); in the 1990s Jordan insisted that 'money is the only thing the MNCs understand,' to support his argument in favour of regulation by the WTO (interview notes). While both statements were critical of overemphasis on the ILO and UN, they differed in their view of the alternative: the power that could control the activities of the multinationals, in the first case the combined strength of the trade union movement, was now identified with the chequebooks of the World Bank and the IMF. Governments were still key players, but social regulation would need to be imposed from outside, rather than by the internal pressure of workers and citizens.

First the People, Then the Debt

The dramatic world-wide rise in interest rates in the 1970s and 1980s entailed a crippling increase in the burden of repayments for Third World debtor countries. If they maintained repayments this was inevitably at the expense of essential social programmes. If they defaulted on any wide scale, this would threaten the collapse of an already precarious international financial system. The risk of default itself helped drive rates upwards: a vicious spiral. The deflationary conditions attached to IMF rescue packages also had damaging social consequences and made the attainment of long-term self-sufficiency the more elusive. The

ICFTU had established in 1969 a working group on international monetary questions, and the EB added trade questions to its terms of reference at the end of 1973. A major outcome of its work was the statement *The World Economy: Reform or Ruin* submitted in 1974 to the UN General Assembly and the annual meeting of the IMF and World Bank (*Report on Activities 1972-1974*, 179-83). The General Assembly in the previous year had called for a new international economic order, and the ICFTU enthusiastically endorsed this objective. At this time, the economic problems of the Third World were attributed mainly to adverse movements in terms of trade and the instability of prices for primary products. Within a few years the Confederation embraced the view that ‘the traditional concept of “indebtedness” should be abandoned in favour of a new approach which views the matter as one of international resource management’; and in a resolution at the 1979 Congress attacked ‘the unequal policies of the IMF in putting pressure on so-called deficit countries to deflate while failing to insist on expansion in surplus countries and the excessively severe conditions on loan repayment imposed by the IMF which can lead to serious internal political instability in countries where there is unemployment and poverty’ (*Report on Activities 1975-1978*, 50; *Report of the Twelfth World Congress*, 649.)

The issue assumed new urgency with the disruptive effects of the second oil crisis at the end of the 1970s and the Mexican debt crisis of 1982 which spread to the whole of Latin America (*Report on Activities 1979-1982*, 56-7). The Policy statement *Full Employment and an End to Poverty* adopted by the 1983 Congress called for a conversion of high-interest debts to long-term low-interest loans and for ‘a world-wide policy response’ to the problems of poverty and unemployment (*Report of the Thirteenth World Congress*, A/49-51). This was followed by a number of regional conferences on the world economic crisis, notably those organised jointly with ORIT in Cuernavaca in August 1984 on the theme ‘New Approaches to the Economic Crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean’ and in September 1986 in Buenos Aires on ‘Debt

and Development'. The latter approved a statement entitled *First the People and then the Debt*; this was adopted by the EB and formed the basis for pressure on the international institutions (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*, 46-51). The ICFTU shied away from radical demands for the total cancellation of Third World debts or an indefinite moratorium on repayments, but demanded a partial writing-off of debts to poorer countries and in particular 'loans contracted by illegitimate governments and their corrupt collaborators' (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*, 224-9). It outlined detailed proposals for the more general alleviation of the debt burden and for a coordinated policy of equitable international economic relations and balanced growth. While the impact was limited, the ICFTU claimed in 1988 that 'the IMF has shown some flexibility in the design of its recovery programmes.... Some steps have also been made towards the construction of a framework for closer coordination of the economic policies of the major industrial countries. The ICFTU may fairly claim to have contributed to these shifts' – which it nevertheless insisted were far from adequate (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*, 50-1). There was some debate in the EB in 1986 as to whether there was any point in pursuing dialogue with institutions that 'were identified with policies of economic repression in the developing world and seemed impermeable to change' (90EB/12).

This sober assessment was fully justified. The debt crisis continued into the 1990s, intensified by the Asian financial crisis. Far from adopting a more sympathetic regime, the 'structural adjustment programmes' imposed by the IMF and the World Bank intensified the problems of the developing countries; as ever, the workers were the main victims, and women most of all (David 1996). The ICFTU continued to hold regional conferences on the problem, and ensured that the situation of women was integrated into policy documents on the world economy to a far greater extent than ever before. At the same time it maintained its pressure on the international institutions – while noting that 'as there are no speaking arrangements for non-governmental organisations, the value of these statements depended on affiliates getting their governments to

take up the ICFTU proposals' (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*, 44-5). In the political climate of the 1990s this seemed unattainable; the Confederation continued to complain that the IMF and World Bank had come to 'assume a position of unparalleled importance.... They used their new-found power to promote a series of structural adjustment programmes designed to increase the role of the market through opening up to imports, reducing subsidies, privatising publicly-owned companies, and liberalising prices. These programmes resulted in high levels of poverty with little economic benefit.' (*Report on Activities 1991-1994*, 66-7). In 1994 the ICFTU, in conjunction with a number of ITSS, opened a Washington office to facilitate pressure on the two institutions. It also showed increased willingness to cooperate with NGOs seeking to achieve a more humane international economic regime (interview notes: Pursey). At the turn of the century there were signs, however ambiguous, that the climate of world opinion was beginning to change.

World Trade and the Campaign for a Social Clause

The GATT negotiations on trade liberalisation began in 1973. The ICFTU issued a statement which welcomed the initiative but insisted that 'the fundamental objectives of the negotiations should be to improve living standards, to expand employment, and to contribute to a fairer distribution of income and wealth throughout the world' (*Report on Activities 1972-1974*, 174-9). Its proposals included an outline social clause (prepared jointly with the International Metalworkers' Federation) and for a tripartite Commission on Trade and Employment linking GATT and the ILO. This was discussed with the GATT director-general in 1977 and elaborated in the following year. The idea of a social clause, and in particular the principle of linking trade to fair labour standards, assumed new prominence in subsequent decades (interview notes: Ford; Pursey).

The Confederation endorsed the decision to commence a new set of GATT negotiations (the 'Uruguay round') in 1986, and again insisted on the inclusion of a commitment to ensure 'minimum labour standards', adding that 'without a social clause the pressures for increased protection will be much harder to resist' (*Report on Activities 1983-1986*, 232-4). Two years later the EB declared that 'the level of awareness of the case for a social clause among industrialised and developing country governments [was] far greater than ever before' (94EB/10). In formulating its objectives, the ICFTU had to confront the issues, first of defining minimum standards, second of countering arguments that such standards would themselves be protectionist in outcome even if not in intent (interview notes: Delhomenie; ETTY; Friso; Pursey). The two questions were closely interconnected. Affiliates from the developing countries reported that in discussions with their own governments they 'encountered fears that any social clause might be turned to protectionist ends' (98EB/12(a)). But while earlier proposals for the social clause might have been thought to imply measures such as the harmonisation of wages and working conditions, which could indeed have worked against less developed countries, the proposal was now explicitly limited to core labour standards (interview notes: ETTY; Pursey). These had been specified in the 1986 GATT submission as freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, non-discrimination, abolition of forced labour, a minimum age for employment, occupational health and safety, and labour inspection (interview notes: Delhomenie; ETTY; Ford; Friso; Jordan; Pursey).

The content of the social clause was formalised when the UN World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995 identified seven ILO 'core conventions' that provided the minimum acceptable standard for workers' rights.¹⁵ These core labour standards could, at least in principle, be met by any country without undue cost, and they could retain any competitive advantage based for example on lower wage levels (interview notes: ETTY).

Supporters of the social clause argued that it would be 'a means of reducing pressure for protectionism by creating a fairer basis for international trade' (interview notes: Vanderveken). The protectionist issue was a real one, however, and could not be resolved easily. It continued to divide opinion among ICFTU affiliates, and entailed that the unions did not always 'speak with the same voice'.

This was to constitute a major problem. Particularly in APRO there was widespread apprehension at the whole campaign: 'some members emphasised that they wished to obtain more assurances that a Social Clause would not become a protectionist device' (*Report on Activities 1991-1994*, 244). Even if they did not finally oppose ICFTU policy within its own decision-making processes, unions like INTUC in particular were observed taking the side of their national governments against the social clause in the ILO and other bodies (interview notes: Briesch). Though the Confederation continued to press its demand, 'despite wide support for the proposal among industrialised and some developing countries, it was blocked by opposition from certain other developing country governments. Since GATT operates by consensus, this was sufficient to stop the proposal' (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*, 48-9). Regular submissions were made within GATT, and to the WTO which succeeded it in 1994; and efforts were made to coordinate pressure by national unions on their governments. Attempts were also made to achieve the objective within the ILO, but here too 'opposition from the same governments as in the GATT blocked discussions' (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*, 49).

During the 1990s, as the prospects of a social clause seemed as distant as ever, the Confederation's approach began to change. Gradually it became clear to trade union leaders that a qualitatively different economic and social situation was emerging, which required

¹⁵ They were Conventions 29 and 105 on the abolition of forced labour; 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective bargaining; 111 and 100 on discrimination in employment and equal pay

renewed vigour in the international trade union movement's efforts. Enzo Friso, who succeeded Vanderveken as general secretary in 1992, retired early from that post in 1995, in part because of his belief that the ICFTU had not handled the issue of the MNCs well and needed a fresh leadership with a new approach (interview notes: Friso; Vanderveken).¹⁶ The new general secretary, Bill Jordan, the first head of a major national union to become general secretary of the Confederation, argued that 'multilateral rules governing the behaviour of the TNCs are the most effective way of maximising the potential benefits of foreign direct investment and minimising the potential costs' (Jordan 1997), and began to make progress with governments and employers' organisations (90EB/12; interview notes: Pursey; Vanderveken). Jordan believed that work on these issues had to be the major function of the ICFTU in an increasingly integrated global economy (interview notes). This approach continued with the negotiations initiated by the OECD for a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI); the Confederation did not regard this as an issue of principle, since any agreement should be judged by its content (interview notes: Ety; Pursey). In the event, the talks foundered in 1999. According to Pursey, who was actively involved in the negotiations, the concessions achieved on the content of the MAI meant that 'we would not have lost any sleep' if it was approved; but 'we did not shed any tears' at its failure (personal communication). The same applied to the collapse of the WTO summit in Seattle at the end of the same year (although Ety, another key participant, expressed disappointment that the concessions were lost when the carefully worked out deal collapsed).

This detachment can be seen as a reflection of a growing disenchantment, within the ranks of the world's trade unions and public opinion more generally, with the whole dynamic of

for work of equal value; and 138 on the minimum age for employment (Kyloh 1998, 39).

¹⁶ Friso also stated in retrospect that the AFL-CIO, in particular the economist Paul Barton, had shown the way forward on the multinationals, and that the ICFTU had been slow to respond (interview notes; Friso 1998, 99-104). Friso's own candid admission is confirmed by other reports of clashes at meetings of the Executive Board (11.1994) between Friso and Lane Kirkland (interview notes: Baker; Walsh).

globalisation. For many leaders of affiliates in the industrialised countries, globalisation stemmed from a deliberate series of actions by the multinationals and conservative government policy-makers, a logical consequence of the neo-liberal ideas that had taken hold in the 1980s. It was a phenomenon that the labour movement must combat, not adapt to (interview notes: Riche). Some national centres, most notably the CLC, but also many within the American, Australian and New Zealand unions, saw world trade agreements as so irredeemably hostile to the interests of trade unionists – mainly because of the danger that MAI and other proposals posed to employment, particularly in the public sector – that they also opposed the ICFTU granting such agreements any legitimacy by tacking on what appeared a largely ineffectual social clause. Addressing the TUC, Nancy Riche, CLC and ICFTU vice-president, insisted that ‘the new world order was no accident’. It was not simply a ‘trend’, as a senator in Canada had suggested to her. ‘I said, “no, hoola hoop was a trend”’ (TUC, *Report of Congress 1998*, 63). (interview notes: Benedict, Bickerton; Matheson, Riche).¹⁷

The cautious lobbying within the international institutions which was central to ICFTU action in the 1990s contrasted with the uncompromising opposition to trade liberalisation by many NGOs, which partly inspired the opposition of the French government to the MAI and resulted in its collapse; and seemed also to contribute to the *débat* of the Seattle summit. Yet did this mean merely leaving the world economy an open field for the MNCs? (interview notes: Etty). What was the alternative? One response, reflecting the more critical attitude to globalisation which began to take hold in the 1990s, was provided by some ITSs such as ICEM (formed through the merger of ICEF and Miners’ International Federation) which criticised the continued efforts to seek regulation through the international institutions – the ILO, UN, WTO and OECD – as an unrealistic approach requiring enormous resources but unlikely to yield significant results because of the poor record of implementation of even the most

¹⁷ See also Haworth and Hughes 1997; and the statement by a major affiliate of LO Denmark, SiD 1997, prepared for an international conference in Copenhagen that involved many ICFTU affiliates.

uncontroversial and widely accepted core labour standards (interview notes: Catterson; Thorpe). A more aggressive response to the MNCs, with greater coordination among the ITSs and between them and the ICFTU, and appealing directly to public (and consumer) opinion, was seen as potentially a better option (Gallin 1994, 126-30).

Campaigning against globalisation, challenging the multinationals

The previous efforts to regulate MNCs through international codes of conduct had achieved little success; the multinationals had demonstrated that economic power could buy political influence at both national and supranational level. This message was reinforced within the EC in the early 1980s, when primarily US-based MNCs were successful in killing the modest proposals for Europe-wide employee information and consultation proposed in the draft Vredeling directive (interview notes: ETTY; Pursey). Yet in some respects multinationals were vulnerable. The Bhopal disaster in 1984, caused by the lax cost-cutting practices of the US multinational Union Carbide which then did its utmost to escape any legal liability, caused an immense public outcry. It provoked active concern within the ICFTU with environmental issues – much reinforced by Chernobyl two years later – and helped encourage cautious cooperation with environmental NGOs. Companies producing directly for the consumer market could not afford such opprobrium. This was demonstrated in the case of Nestlé, which suffered from a consumer boycott following exposure of its damaging efforts to sell infant formula milk in Third World countries. Many ITSs, and the ICFTU itself, were able to learn from such examples (interview notes: Ford; Pursey; Royer).

In the mid-1980s the IUF proposed to the ITS general conference that cooperation among the ITSs be increased, perhaps leading to the creation of an ITS liaison office and newsletter (85EB/10). In the late 1980s and 1990s it worked closely with the ICEF and other like-minded

ITSs, jointly organising the Global Conference on Labour Solidarity for action against the multinationals in Washington in 1999 and continuing common work around MNCs like Unilever (interview notes: ETTY; 25 MNC-WP/8, 1990). The ITSs and ICFTU worked together on a number of international solidarity actions, for example the US-based Pittston dispute in 1989 (96EB/6(c)(v)); and the Rio Tinto dispute in Australia and South Africa in 1997-98 (interview notes: Thorpe). To achieve closer collaboration, the ICFTU and ITSs discussed changing the policy on formal representation of ITSs in the ICFTU's governing bodies and decided that from 1990 all ITSs would be invited to meetings instead of the previous four official representatives (interview notes: Ford; Nedzynski; 97EB/11; *Report on Activities 1983-1986*, 58-9).

Within the secretariat, the ICFTU began more active campaigns around specific issues, and lent support to organising campaigns by individual affiliates (interview notes: Baker; Jordan). The campaign on child labour which had started in the early 1980s now adopted such tactics as the 'boycott' (boycott of toys produced by child labour) which received considerable support from NGOs, and carried out extensive publicity on the subject, for example with the world-wide tour of a Pakistani child worker, Iqbal Masih, who was subsequently murdered on his return to his native country (interview notes: Matheson; Pursey). The ICFTU also negotiated an agreement with the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA) on a ban of child labour in the sporting goods produced for international athletic events (TUC, *General Council Report 1996*, 113-5). This more aggressive 'campaigning' style owed much to the revival of 'social movement unionism' as well as the tactics of NGOs, for example in the Nestlé campaign.¹⁸ In the absence of a major breakthrough in the adoption of a social clause by the WTO or UN system, direct campaigning by the ICFTU and ITSs provided a way for the international labour movement to sustain the initiative on the multinationals. Another

¹⁸ On social movement unionism see Johnston 1994 and Waterman 1999.

significant campaign was the response to the fire at the Kader toy factory in Thailand in 1993, which killed over 180 workers and injured over 400 more; the ICFTU launched a world-wide campaign denouncing the dangerous conditions typical of many unregulated workplaces and published a report, *From the Ashes*, examining the causes of the disaster and how it might have been prevented. This was followed by instituting an annual day of mourning for victims of such reckless treatment of workers' lives (interview notes: Pursey; Royer; *Report on Activities 1991-1994*, 269-270).

The ICFTU/ITS working party and the Economic and Social Committee also began to devote much greater attention to the negative social effects of the MNCs in the Third World, in particular the exploitation of women workers in the FTZs and the use of child labour. The EB ordered a study of child labour in November 1982 and called for a major campaign by the Confederation and its affiliates a year later, stating that 'the campaign should aim at the eventual elimination of child labour, but in the short term should also focus on practical means of reducing exploitation, protecting and assisting children and their families caught in the poverty trap that causes child labour' (84EB/8). Several affiliates initiated small-scale practical projects aimed at assisting the families of child workers to escape the 'cycle of poverty' that lay at the root of child labour. One of the most successful was the programme organised by INTUC in Bombay with the assistance of the ICFTU. The involvement of the MNCs was naturally an important focus of the research and publicity on the problem of child labour, and affiliates in the host countries were urged to address the issue in collective bargaining and in representations to management (interview notes: Izumi; Pursey; Ramos).

Trade union rights assumed increasing importance as an issue in response to the spread of 'union-busting' tactics by MNCs, most notably those based in the USA (86EB/11). The ITSs expressed a particular interest in this subject, pressing for action at the 1983 ITS General

Conference (82EB/10). The ICFTU carried out a study of the issue on the basis of a questionnaire sent to all affiliates, which revealed the anti-union practices of American MNCs in their North American operations and also in the Caribbean, the Philippines and to a lesser extent in Europe. The increase in sub-contracting, privatisation and 'flexible' working was seen as facilitating the spread of such practices (86EB/11, ESC 8). Union-busting was the theme of a special chapter in the 1985 Survey on the Violation of Trade Union Rights. The ITSs also warned of the greater penetration of the MNCs in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), where compliant governments and the absence of effective trade unions created an ideal environment for their expansion. A major test case in the heart of the industrialised world was the dispute between the UMWA and the Pittston mining company in 1989; together with its affiliates and the ICEF, the ICFTU helped mobilise consumer pressure and the outcome was an acceptable compromise (97EB/11).

The renewed interest in the issue of MNCs was marked by the ICFTU/ITS conference on trade unions and the transnationals in 1990. The preparatory document concluded with a call for new tactics in response to the lack of progress within the international institutions. It recognised the 'pivotal role' played by the ITSs in international solidarity actions, and pointed to the success of recent campaigns where unions in the MNC home countries had exerted pressure on top management to resolve disputes involving unions in host countries. It recommended the adoption at the international level of the sort of 'comprehensive corporate campaigns' then being carried out with some success in North America, where unions carried out extensive research on the investments and activities of target companies, and sought links with investors, consumers and others affected by the company in union recognition campaigns or disputes (interview notes: Baker, Justice). Following the example of the ICEF, which had begun experimental work with new information technologies as an aid to research and solidarity activities, the report called for a greatly-expanded research capacity and use of information

technology to further its own work on the multinationals. The conference recommended a more central role for the working party, which had lost some of its impact because of the lack of progress in implementing the international instruments. Pointing out the changing nature of companies, which were less confined to individual industrial sectors, and the increased importance of publicity and solidarity campaigns that required the involvement of entire labour movements, the conference called for the working party, and the ICFTU itself, to strengthen the coordination of the work of the ITSs and national centres. One consequence was the creation of a new department on MNCs, headed by the former AFL-CIO European representative, Jim Baker. (*Report on Activities 1987-1990*, 24 MNC-WP/8, 1989; 25 MNC-WP/8, 1990).

In the late 1990s, hopes were raised for a renewed dynamism within the UN system, or at least the ILO, with the appointment of Juan Somavía as director-general in March 1999. Previously chair of the Copenhagen Summit, he supported a greater role for the Organisation in setting the world economic and social policy agenda (interview notes: Pursey). This appeared to justify the long-running work of the ICFTU within the ILO, and made its displacement in favour of the Bretton Woods institutions or the WTO appear premature. The ILO was after all the only tripartite international institution, and the trade unions also enjoyed a consultative role within the ILO and UN that they lacked in the WTO. At the same time, changes in the governments of leading industrial countries indicated a possible end to the paralysis of policy-making which had marked the 1980s. These developments encouraged renewed efforts by national affiliates to push their own governments to adopt a coordinated policy for control of the international economy, with the goal of restoring democratic accountability. As Debonne put it, there was 'a need for political power to regain its role, and for trade unions to renew their struggle, in order to restore political, economic and social democracy' (interview notes). This same process was anticipated at European level, where the internationalisation of the economy led to fresh approaches by the ETUC and its affiliates for greater economic democracy and transparency.

Conclusion

In its efforts to promote the interests of its members around the world, the ICFTU has gone through a number of phases and used a variety of instruments of action. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the economic interests of its members are any trade union's central concern, but as should be evident by now, the ICFTU and other labour internationals are not trade unions in the usual sense. They are federations of unions – of national centres in the ICFTU; of individual unions in the ITSs – from countries with widely varying economic, political and social circumstances. The ITSs have a distinct advantage over the ICFTU in representing single industries, some with a greater sense of common interests and identity than others, and they are much better suited to carrying out strictly industrial action than the ICFTU. This explains the leading role played by the ITSs in the initial development of the campaign against the multinationals. Yet the ITSs also launched the idea of the 'social clause'; formulated the most perceptive critiques of the rising power of the multinationals; and popularised the issue within world public opinion through the work of Levinson, Gallin and others. The 'mobilisation coalition' that they formed in the 1960s did not involve all of the ITSs, and had a great deal to do with the qualities of a few individual leaders. The structural ability of the ITSs to carry out effective industrial action was limited, and lost much of its 'surprise value' after initial actions at Ford and other companies. The creation of WCCs and similar bodies, however, paved the way for the introduction of consultative mechanisms at European level, and did lead to some – very limited – international collective agreements.

While the ITSs address the particular interests of members in a given industry, the ICFTU has the task of furthering their general interests. It is not suited to the same types of industrial

action, and depends much more on representation within intergovernmental bodies; lobbying and pressure on individual governments and companies; and support to the campaigns of affiliates. Instead of asking why it has not engaged in international collective bargaining, we should ask how well it has succeeded in the forms of action it has pursued. Its work within the ILO, the UN, the OECD, GATT and WTO has had mixed results: the few international instruments adopted by some of these institutions are claimed by the ICFTU as successes. Indeed, initiatives within some international institutions, notably opposition to the domination of agri-business in the FAO, have been particularly successful; this could also be said of the work of the ICFTU and the ITSs in the ILO Industry Committees. However, as some leaders of the ITSs have asked, is the work within all these institutions worth all the effort and expenditure over so many years? (interview notes: Thorpe). For an organisation with limited resources, the massive devotion of staff time to work within the intergovernmental institutions means that other tasks receive less emphasis. Further, the more resources that are devoted to this work, the more important it becomes, for the individuals involved as much as (or even more than) the Confederation, to defend it. Yet how could the ICFTU do otherwise than work within these institutions?

The answer does not depend on the ICFTU alone, but must be seen in the context of the international system as a whole. The best international instruments, like national laws, depend for their success on implementation. The conventions and recommendations of the ILO have the force of international law, but the Organisation has few means to assure their implementation beyond the pressure of international public opinion on individual governments. This has sometimes been effective, particularly in cases of violations of trade union rights in dictatorship countries. But the ILO's place within the UN system is not secure, and its prominence on labour issues has increasingly come under threat with the greater influence of the Bretton Woods institutions and the rise of the WTO. Another important consideration is the

international political climate, more favourable to the trade union movement in the 1960s and 70s than in the 1980s and 90s. Over these years, the balance of power shifted against the unions at national level under the influence of neo-liberalism and deregulation, leading to a 'vicious circle' in which the weakness of national unions contributed to the weakness of their international organisations.

In some areas, the ICFTU, its affiliates and the ITSs have shown they can use international instruments to their advantage, most importantly in the case of the OECD guidelines. For a few years, individual unions and the labour internationals were able to exploit this otherwise vague and inadequate instrument to support trade union struggles on the ground. While the momentum did not continue, this experience shows how under certain circumstances, the combination of local industrial action, national intervention and international support can work. In the 1990s, the ICFTU began to develop more innovative forms of action, following the examples of affiliates and NGOs to develop campaigns around specific companies or on issues such as child labour and health and safety. Whether it will succeed will depend on how well it develops the articulation between the local, national and international levels of trade union action. Most importantly, it will have to work out, together with the ITSs and as equal partners, a more critical and focused approach to the challenge of globalisation.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: The ICFTU's Capacity to Act

This thesis has addressed the capacity to act of the ICFTU and the international trade union movement more generally, and has examined various aspects of its organisation and structure as revealed through action. By now, it should be evident just how limited its capacity to act has been, hemmed in as it is by internal and external constraints. Internally, it must balance the interests of affiliates with sometimes contradictory political orientations and economic interests. on the basis of an ideology left deliberately vague on most points in order to preserve the unity of its disparate elements, but inflexible on the single issue of anti-communism to the extent that other policies are affected by it. The Confederation has almost no independent sanctions against members for breach of its policies, as has been seen in the case of détente and relations with communist-controlled organisations; very few powers have been delegated by the membership, that is to say, the national centres. Its financial resources are limited by the ability and willingness of affiliates to pay their affiliation fees, and by its reluctance to exclude or refuse to affiliate any union unable to meet its financial obligations (unless advisable to do so for political reasons, as in the case of several Latin American unions in the 1970s and 80s). As a result, it is directly dependent on the voluntary financial contributions of a small number of (comparatively) rich affiliates, and indirectly on the use of government development funds from these same countries.

Externally, its capacity to act has been affected by rivalry with WFTU and WCL, and at times even more by the resistance of many unions to international affiliation of any kind. Its policy of anti-communism has prevented it from establishing relations with organisations or movements that might otherwise have been friendly, and its instinct for self-promotion within international

institutions has hindered cooperation with others. Moreover, it is limited by the relative underdevelopment of an international industrial relations system, and by the lack of trade union power and recognition at international as well as national level. Fundamentally, the Confederation depends on the capacities and willingness to act of its affiliates, and in an era of neo-liberalism and trade union decline in many parts of the world, its capacity has thereby been further curtailed, leading to a vicious circle in which the affiliates lose members and cut back on international programmes, so that the internationals lose resources and become even less able to represent their members and act effectively in defence of their interests.

Have the ICFTU's weaknesses also served as strengths? The very vagueness of its ideology, the lack of effective sanctions against members, and the coexistence of affiliates with varying ideologies and circumstances within a 'broad church' have been significant advantages in achieving representation in all parts of the world, in contrast to the much less representative WCL or WFTU. Yet anti-communism was a negative basis for its identity, making it difficult to define the Confederation's purpose in positive terms; and the end of the cold war has forced it to re-invent a role in order to survive. The place of the ICFTU within a complex international network, together with its regional organisations, its affiliates, the ITSs, and other friendly organisations has allowed it to act with flexibility and subtlety while maintaining its autonomy and making the optimal use of its resources. However, there are dangers in flexibility and in broad representation: they require a high degree of coordination in order to avoid conflict and indecision; while the broader the constituency, the harder it becomes to retain a clear identity and develop the necessary consensus for action.

Despite all the constraints, when the Confederation has mustered the willingness to act and the resources of enough of its affiliates (and has not been blocked by any of them), it has been able to formulate policies and act effectively as their 'voice' – as is evident in its intervention and

coordination of the actions of the international labour movement as a whole against apartheid in South Africa. A similar point could be made regarding many other 'firefighting' operations in defence of human and trade union rights around the world, or, in a different sense, the promotion of women's equality. However, throughout the ICFTU's history, no other idea or policy has provided as clear a basis for identity and guide for action as anti-communism, and actions to control or combat what its leaders perceived as communist or pro-communist organisations have always found the necessary consensus for action much more quickly than any others. In this respect, I would agree with Wedin, whose analysis of the ICFTU's attempts at developing a truly international solidarity policy in the 1950s and 1960s concludes that the main factor behind its failure to maintain and develop multi-lateralism in its assistance to third world affiliates was the attitude of the AFL-CIO (Wedin 1970). Indeed, it may have been the absence of the US national centre throughout the 1970s that enabled the Confederation's more progressive affiliates to develop that period's most successful initiatives, on détente, multinational corporations and the world economy, and opposition to apartheid and human and trade union rights abuses. During this period, it was perhaps easier to reach a consensus on action, but at the same time the absence of the AFL-CIO meant that the resources available for action, and the representativity and weight of the Confederation, were diminished. Recent changes within the US national centre, in terms of its political orientation, the attitudes of its membership, and its international policies, may point to an eventual resolution of this long-standing conundrum for the international labour movement.

In a critique of the research on which this thesis is based, Waterman (personal communication) writes: 'assuming this to be true [the effectiveness of the ICFTU's defence of human and trade union rights], it still suggests a body more akin to the International Committee of the Red Cross than to an international SMO (social movement organisation)'. To some extent I would agree, for the ICFTU and the Red Cross are both international NGOs with many common

characteristics. There are important differences between the membership, organisation and objectives of these two organisations, but their means of action are not so very different. They are both involved in lobbying, representations to national governments and inter-governmental institutions, publicity, information, research.

In what ways does the ICFTU act as a trade union, distinct from other types of membership organisations? The difference lies in the nature of trade unionism as a social movement. Trade unionism is based on a concept of solidarity that unites the interests of the individual worker and the collectivity; underlying it is a vision of social transformation, however muted this has become. Historically, workers, organised in trade unions and socialist parties, have been the leading advocates of democracy, equality and solidarity. Despite its weaknesses, trade unionism remains the world's largest mass movement, and probably still one of the most democratic. It is in principle representative of its members, and its organisations have proved durable (although this has also made them resistant to change). Its capacity to mobilise its membership is therefore greater than that of most other types of organisation. Herein lies the rub: an organisation like the ICFTU will only look and act like a trade union organisation if it has these characteristics: as long as it seeks to be democratic, represents its members, has a vision of social change, and mobilises its membership on that basis. If it does not do so, it might as well be the Red Cross (not that there is anything wrong with the Red Cross), a danger that is ever present in an organisation that carries out its work in an international social environment peopled by professional attenders of meetings as opposed to trade unionists.

What has the ICFTU done that it alone could do, and what has it done that others could not have done more effectively? In another response to my published work, Stefan Nedzynski criticises the choice of a quotation in the conclusion from Len Murray, in a speech to the 1975 Congress, in which he feels Murray overplayed the 'workerist' touch:

We have to convince our own national centres that the ICFTU can spend the members' money... more effectively than the national centres can do so. If we are to get resources out of the national centres, they will insist on that test being passed, and they will be quite right.... The aim of the trade union movement... is always to take decisions as near to the grass roots as possible, and not to take them further and further and further away.... And... let us face it: the ICFTU is a very long way away from our members (*Report of the 11th Congress, 568*).

On the contrary, Nedzynski replies:

surely the criterion he advanced cannot apply to a wide range of activities which simply cannot be conducted without international trade union bodies.... As to the argument about decisions moving away from members, I would say that indeed they have been doing so for a long time... when new challenges are perceived and the existing union structures cannot effectively cope with them, new structures – inevitably further away from members – must be created.... The criterion or test of how many members know of international trade union organisations is pure demagogy. The important test is the effectiveness in the defence of the workers' interests (personal communication).

In this perspective, the ICFTU has a crucial task that no other organisation can fulfil in speaking for the trade union movement as a whole, within the inter-governmental institutions of the ILO and the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions and other international fora. While some of its activities can be better carried out by the ITSs – international collective bargaining or campaigns around specific companies – and others have in fact been taken over by individual

affiliates – trade union development programmes – only the ICFTU is capable of coordinating a global network of the labour movement and acting as a ‘voice’ for world labour.

Only a truly global organisation like the ICFTU can have the weight and prestige to become a major player within an international industrial relations system. But as we saw in the last chapter, this international IR system is still weak and underdeveloped, and depends on the action of the ICFTU and its affiliates, acting within their national settings and the global institutions, to endow it with greater powers so that workers’ rights can be protected at the international level. As Jordan has suggested, it is money that talks, but the ICFTU’s work can take the form of strengthening the role of the ILO rather than focusing narrowly on the WTO, which has been less responsive to workers’ interests. Further, the ICFTU can work from its own past strengths by building on the international labour network it has helped to set in place and extending it to other social movement organisations. It can strive to improve the articulation between different levels of action, from the local through the national to the international, and it must find a way around the delay and even inertia in its current form of decision making. This may require a fresh look at the basis of its organisation, together with the ITSs, the national affiliates and all the trade union regional organisations, to find a better basis for cooperation. It is a great challenge, but if the ICFTU no longer has the capacity to change with the times and emerge from the self-imposed constraints of the Cold War, it will indeed have outlived its usefulness. If however the international labour movement can move forward and develop a new form of association of equals, then the vicious circle of trade union weakness and national insularity can perhaps be turned into a virtuous circle of focused, articulated international action building on past successes in a new era.

Just as the ICFTU itself needs to look more deeply into its past and reassess its internal structures and relations with other organisations within the international industrial relations

system, so will future research into the ICFTU need to take a broader view, geographically as well as analytically, at the Confederation and its place within a world system. As mentioned at the beginning, this thesis has been shaped by the resources available and the closeness to the present time of many of the questions asked and events covered. This has been unavoidable, but it does point the way to further research on the subject. Much more work is needed on the activities and policies of the ICFTU outside Europe, particularly the long and problematic history of its involvement in Latin America, and the views of its affiliates in Asia on its policies and programmes on the world economy. As more archival materials, secondary sources, and memoirs and reflections of individuals become available, a much more critical and balanced view of the subject will become possible. I sincerely hope that this thesis will provide a significant starting point for other researchers working in this area, and will make a contribution to the understanding of the ICFTU and its place within the international labour movement.

List of Interviews

ICFTU

Current staff

Luis Anderson, Secretary ORIT, 25.3.99

Jim Baker, Multinationals Department (former European representative, AFL-CIO),
18.3.98, 1.4.98, 14.4.99, (16.4.99)

Mamounata Cissé, Equality Department, 23.2.99 and other dates

Luc Demaret, Head of Publications, 4.6.97

André Dewil, head of Finance Department, (16.4.99), 28.10.99, other dates

T. Izumi, Secretary, APRO, 24.3.99

Bo Jonsson, Social and Economic Policy, 19.3.98, 25.3.99

Bill Jordan, General Secretary, 14.5.99

Dwight Justice, Multinationals, 28.10.99 and other dates

Andrew Kailembo, Secretary AFRO, 20.11.98

Anna Oulatar, Central and Eastern Europe, 28.10.99

Renate Pelzer, Head of Projects Department, 4.6.97, 17.3.98, 28.10.99

Elsa Ramos, Head of Equality Department (from 7.98), 3.6.97, 17.3.98, other dates

Former staff

Sarah Ashwin, formerly Central and Eastern Europe, various dates

Marcelle Dehareng, former Head, Equality Department, 3.4.98

Pieter De Jonge, 18.3.98

Enzo Friso, former General Secretary, 20.3.98

Edi Horii, Administration and Finance, former head of Tokyo office, 2.4.98

Stephen Pursey, Head of Social Policy Department, 4.6.97, 16.3.98, (16.4.99), 12.12.99.
(19.5.2000)

Lois Stewart, Head of Equality Department (until 7.98), 3.6.97, 20.3.98

John Vanderveken, former General Secretary, 3.6.97, 30.3.98, 1.4.98, 18.11.98, 23.2.99,
(16.4.99), (19.5.2000) and other dates

ITSs

ICEM

Jim Catterson, Head of Research, 19.3.98

Peter Colley, CFMEU, seconded to ICEM secretariat, 29.11.97

Victor Thorpe, General Secretary, 17.3.98

ITF

Harold Lewis, former General Secretary, 16.2.99, 9.3.99 and other dates

ITGLWF

Charles Ford, former General Secretary, 12.4.99

PTTI

Stefan Nedzynski, former General Secretary, 13.12.99

ILO

Kari Tapiola, Deputy Director General, 13.12.99

Sven-Erik Sterner, Workers' Representative in Budapest (former ICFTU official), 19.6.97

[Stephen Pursey: see ICFTU]

ETUC

Willy Buschak, Confederal Secretary, 18.3.98, (20.5.2000)

Gérard Fonteneau, relations with Lomé countries, (20.5.2000)

Peter Seideneck, relations with CEE countries, formerly International Department, DGB,
24.3.99

TUAC

Lucien Royer, joint environmental project with ICFTU, 20.3.98

Individual countries

Australia

Sharon Burrow, President, Australian Education Union, 28.11.97

Prof Jim Hagan, University of Wollongong, 11.97

Tim Harcourt, Research Department, ACTU, 25.11.97

Rt Hon R. J. Hawke, former President ACTU, 1.12.97

Alan Mathieson, International Secretary, ACTU, 24.11.97, 26.11.97, 28.11.97

Bill Mansfield, ACTU, 26.11.97

Max Ogden, ACTU, 27.11.97

Austria

Prof Dr Walter Göhring, *Arbeiterkammer*, 10.7.98

Karl-Heinz Nachtnebel, international secretary, ÖGB, 9.7.98

Dr Walter Sauer, international department, ÖGB, 15.7.98

Alfred Ströer, former *leitender Sekretär*, ÖGB, 14.7.98

Belgium

Georges Debunne, former President, ABVV-FGTB, 31.3.98, 16.4.99, (20.5.2000)

Dr. Corinne Gobin, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 15.4.99 and other dates

Canada

Steven Benedict, International Secretary, CLC, 24.10.97 and other dates

Geoff Bickerton, Head of Research, CPWU

Gil Levine, former Head of Research, CUPE, 16.10.97

Nancy Riche, Vice-President, CLC, and Vice-President, ICFTU, 28.7.98

France

André Bergeron, former General Secretary, CGT-FO, 8.11.99

Roger Briesch, former International Secretary, CFDT, currently chair of group II, EcoSoc.

23.2.99

Jean-Pierre Delhomenie, International Department, CFDT, 28.9.98

[Gérard Fonteneau, see ETUC]

André Laval, former International Secretary, CGT-FO, 11.10.9, 8.11.99

Bernard Mourgues, former International Secretary, CGT-FO, 11.10.99, 8.11.99

Jacques Pé, International Secretary, CGT-FO, 28.9.98

Germany

[Willy Buschak, Peter Seideneck, see ETUC]

Hungary

Suzanne Suhart, International Secretary, LIGA, 20.6.97

Netherlands

Tom Etty, International Secretary, FNV, 8.1.98, 27.3.98, (16.4.9), 19.5.99, 21.6.99, 29.7.99.

20.8.99, 9.9.99, 28.9.99

Dr Peter Waterman, former official WFTU, formerly at Institute for Social Studies, The

Hague, various dates

New Zealand

Prof. Nigel Haworth, University of Auckland, 8.12.97

Lindsey Rea, FINZEC, member of ICFTU-APRO Women's Committee, 8.12.97

UK

Dr Robert Fine, information on South Africa, various dates 1999

Jack Jones, former General Secretary, TGWU, and chair of TUC International Committee,

11.3.98

Rt. Hon. Lord Murray, former General Secretary, TUC, 13.4.99

Michael Walsh, International Secretary, TUC, 27.2.98, 17.12.98, (16.4.99), 18.5.99,

22.6.99, 1.9.99, 9.9.99, 25.10.99 and other dates

Tony Shaw, former International Department, TUC, 22.6.99

USA

[Jim Baker, see ICFTU]

(Dates in parentheses: participation in meetings and/or seminars)

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