By nature wars are international and they also produce a special kind of internationalism aiming not only at organising the war itself but also at planning peace. The international organisations born in the twentieth century are a result of this wartime internationalism but, because they are meant to preserve peace, scholars have generally overlooked the role they played during the wars themselves.

The Second World War offers a good field in which to study this question. Truly global in scope, the Second World War was indeed a period of intense internationalism. In January 1942, 22 national governments, among them Latin American countries that were not fighting the war but that were crucial for the United States war effort, agreed to sign the short United Nations declaration, which launched the new post-war international system. Meanwhile, the «Old Geneva organisations» did survive the war. Under the direction of the Irishman Sean Lester, the League of Nations (LoN) was left more or less hibernating in Geneva, but two of its specialised and technical commissions managed to move to the United States where they continued to be active. The Permanent Opium Board was hosted in Washington while the Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations (EFO) settled in Princeton with the generous support of the Rockefeller Foundation. In August 1940 most of the already much reduced staff of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) moved to Montreal. While the two LoN sections disappeared as such after the war, the ILO did survive, becoming one of the first specialised agencies of the United Nations in 1946.

Nevertheless, the ILO was not present at the important international meetings in which the new world order was set up. It was invited neither to the food and agricultural conference in Hot Springs in May-June 1943 nor to Dumbarton Oaks in

3 The EFO was an ancestor of the International Monetary Fund.
August 1944 where the Economic and Social Council was created, nor officially to San Francisco in 1945 to discuss the UN Charter. The ILO as an organisation did not even have a seat in the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) Council, and its relationship with UNRRA remained very weak.

This contribution aims at explaining this paradoxical situation by focusing on the war period itself and shifting the question from why the ILO survived the war to how it did so. In so doing, it first seeks to understand how an international organisation aimed at preserving peace could function during the war and what role its various constituents could play. But beyond the story of the Organisation itself, following the ILO allows us better to understand the shifting balance of power: the vanishing influence of Europe, the declining influence of Labour, the rise of an international group of experts and, last but not least, the redefinition of the international social and economic priorities linked to this new balance of power. I will therefore look at the war not only as a period of international crisis but as a time of «peculiar internationalism» during which, faced with the emergence of a new world order, the ILO had to redefine its mission.

I will address these questions in three steps. Firstly, I will look at the material and geopolitical conditions under which the ILO was able to survive and the impact this had on the organisation itself between Europe and the Americas. Secondly, I will discuss the role that the ILO played during the war in mobilising the work force and preserving social peace in regions such as Latin America. Lastly, I will look at the war as a period during which the ILO had to adjust to a new geopolitical situation and to set new priorities, which would have a long-lasting effect on its activity in the post-war period.

1. Surviving the War in Europe and the Americas

The continuity of ILO activities was made possible by the position adopted by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office in February 1939. The government, employers’ and workers’ representatives unanimously decided that in the event of the outbreak of war, the Office should continue its task «at the highest possible level». The government officials, who remembered the First World War, anticipated that they would have to organise the wartime economic effort and that this would require international planning. 4 36 government representatives therefore gave their full support to the continuation of the ILO. They also knew that they would have to rely on the support of their population and mobilise the work force. 5

Social policies would therefore become an important tool for forging this «sacred

union». At the international level, the tripartite ILO, encompassing representatives of governments, employers and employees, was an important tool for conducting the negotiations. The employers, usually reluctant towards the organisation but fearing a wave of strikes, unanimously proposed an increase of each government’s financial contribution. As for the workers, they hoped that, through the ILO, they would be represented in the post-war negotiations. Already in 1939, during the Pan-American ILO conference in Havana, James B. Carey, the US workers’ delegate and member of the American Federation of Labor, had indicated that «[i]t is imperative that organised labor should have a determining voice in fixing the terms of the peace settlement which follows the present war. Only by giving labor such a voice can we ensure that the peace settlement, unlike that of 1919, is based upon justice for all people of all nations». Without the very firm support of Walter Citrine, general secretary of the Trade Union Congress and president of the International Federation of Trade Unions, the British government would not have accepted to raise its contribution for the ILO during the war. Trade unions, and the tripartite constitution of the ILO in general, were therefore crucial for the survival of the Organisation.

In Geneva, the ILO was under threat from an openly hostile Nazi Germany. Fearing German reprisals, the Swiss authorities, as well as a large part of Swiss public opinion, were reluctant to host an organisation which, in their view, could endanger strict Swiss neutrality. The director John Winant negotiated a move to Canada, a country that had been at war with Nazi Germany since September 1939. As a matter of fact, with a transfer of some functions to the city of Montreal, the ILO had chosen sides in the conflict even if its first open declaration against Nazi Germany was not issued until early 1941.

In August 1940, a reduced staff (around 40 people) left Geneva in private cars towards Lisbon, where they boarded a ship to Canada. Some officials had trouble finding gas and almost missed their chance to leave Europe. Others had already lost their nationality and faced great difficulties getting visas. For a number of them this

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10 On that delay see the comments of the French socialist Adrien Tixier, who in 1942 joined the France libre; in ILO-Archives see his correspondence with Phelan in May–June 1940. Tixier Papers 139, or PWR 1/01 Meeting 16–17 June 1941.
move was a condition for their survival. It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which the Office consciously played a role in the rescue of the Jews involved in the organisation, but some cases are documented. In a letter written in January 1944 after the death of the deputy director Oswald Stein, the social security expert Emil Schoenbaum stated: «I was personally deeply indebted to him for his disinterested effort in saving me and my wife from occupied Czechoslovakia and our lives.»

Finally, some officials remained trapped in Europe, including the Englishman James Nixon, head of the statistics section, who found himself in Paris when the Germans invaded France and was held in captivity for four years. All these individual stories document the difficulty of maintaining any independent international life in Nazi Europe.

And yet around twenty people stayed in Geneva under the direction of the Frenchman Marius Viple who, like all other French officials, did not get permission from the Vichy authorities to leave for Canada. They kept the ILO building, which remained the official headquarters of the Organisation throughout the Montreal period. Although reduced, the activity of the ILO in Geneva was not completely interrupted. Marius Viple, a committed ILO official who had been a close collaborator of Albert Thomas, the first socialist director of the Organisation, supervised the activity of the European correspondents and tried to maintain an ILO presence in Europe. From Geneva, Viple also managed to get information on people affiliated with the ILO who were detained or put in jail. While he did not succeed in freeing Nixon, he was able (with the support of the US Embassy) to help significantly ease the situation of the French trade unionist Léon Jouhaux, who had been a long-standing workers’ representative on the ILO Governing Body and who was imprisoned in January 1942.

The officials who moved to Montreal faced other challenges. The Office was set up in the main hall of McGill University, a temporary solution that complicated the work of the secretariat immensely. Travel, one of the very conditions of international activity, became hazardous, particularly in the case of transatlantic relations. Due to its dual location, the ILO offers a good insight into the progressive shift of the global centre of gravity and its impact regarding the role of labour at the international level.
2. Labour and the New Geopolitical Balance of Power

During the two first decades of its existence, the ILO – like the LoN – was predominantly a European organisation.\(^{16}\) Although almost half of the 51 countries represented at the International Labour Conference of 1930 were non-European, European states, and in particular those that had won the First World War, dominated the ILO. All the chief officials were either French or British; until 1934, five of the eight countries represented in the Governing Body were European. The ILO activity was mainly concerned with setting up conventions inspired by European models and aimed at solving European social problems. Nevertheless, by the early 1930s, non-Western European voices, particularly coming from Latin America and South Eastern Europe, expressed increasing scepticism towards the way the ILO was operating. They asked for more technical assistance programmes better suited to their needs than the norm-setting dimension of the ILO’s activity (based on the elaboration of conventions and recommendations).\(^{17}\) In December 1933, during the Pan-American summit in Montevideo, Latin American countries even discussed the possibility of a Pan-American ILO that would be more useful for them. The entry of the United States into the Organisation in 1934 put an end to this plan, but the needs that had been expressed did not disappear. The US entry was negotiated by the British director Harold Butler and relied on a dense network of previous collaboration with the Labor Department, as well as with other actors who had coalesced with the ILO’s Washington branch office set up in 1919.\(^{18}\) The role of John Winant, a personal friend of Roosevelt who had previously been a member of the Social Security Board, bears witness to the quickly growing influence of the United States in the ILO. John Winant, who was appointed Butler’s assistant director, became the ILO’s first American director in 1939.\(^{19}\)

The war contributed to accelerate a geopolitical shift that was already underway. The progressive Nazification of Europe deprived the ILO of its main European support: liberal and progressive politicians and, above all, reformist trade unionists could no longer be heard. The major Trade Union leaders involved in the ILO machinery were in hiding or imprisoned. Wilhelm Leuschner, a German workers’
delegate in the governing body, was under arrest between 1933 and 1934. After his release, he became active in the resistance and was executed in 1944.20 Léon Jouhaux, a long-standing member of the Governing Body, was placed under house arrest in the South of France in 1940 and then imprisoned in Germany between 1942 and 1945. The International Federation of Trade Unions which had been the backbone of the Organisation was deprived of any real influence.21

The ILO officials who remained in Europe experienced fear and scarcity. The Paris branch office was occupied by the Nazis; the London branch, transformed into a meeting place for Trade Union leaders in exile, was bombed. In Geneva, Marius Viple was very isolated and had to face the hostility of Swiss public opinion and officials. Nevertheless, he tried to maintain the influence of the organisation in Europe in order to counterbalance Nazi socio-political propaganda. Furthermore, both Viple and Adrien Tixier, the French assistant director who was later a committed «resistant», were concerned about the rise of Anglo-American power and saw in the continental presence of the ILO a way to counterbalance the US hegemony they feared.22 In order to maintain this ILO influence in Europe, Viple desperately tried to make those European governments that were still members of the organisation pay, and he even entered into very cumbersome negotiations with the Vichy government.23

Even if Montreal was not a substitute for Geneva,24 the move and the war did speed up a shift in the organisation’s centre of gravity to the Americas. Between 1939 and 1941, the two most important figures of the Organisation came from the United States: John Winant became director in 1939 and Carter Goodrich, professor of economics at Columbia University and representative of the United States Government, was appointed chairman of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office between 1939 and 1945. Anglo-American influence was also proportional to their financial contribution to the organisation. In 1940, compensating for all the governments which no longer contributed, two-thirds of the ILO budget came from the United States, Great Britain, India, and the Commonwealth countries. Anglo-American actors were overrepresented in the emergency committee, particularly in the second such committee, which acted until 1943 as a kind of substitute of the governing body.25 Meanwhile, the French Socialist influence, which had been very strong in the first two decades, faded away.
Symbolically, the Governing Body, which used to meet four times a year, convened only three times on Anglo-American soil: in New York in 1943, Philadelphia in 1944 and London in 1945. The annual International Labour Conference took place twice in the United States, in June 1941 in New York (as an extraordinary conference) and a second time in Philadelphia in 1944. In this context the ILO tended to become a kind of war machine on the side of the Anglo-American Allies.

3. Mobilising for War on the «Democratic» Side

«The twenty years of the I.L.O.’s existence have proven the usefulness of such an organisation in time of peace. I am confident that it can and will be of service to its members, indeed to society as a whole, in time of war», 26 the US president Roosevelt stated during the Second Pan-American ILO conference held in Havana in November 1939, as the shadow of war was already spreading over Europe. For the US administration, but also for most of the remaining ILO officials, the very nature of the Organisation and in particular its tripartite composition put it on the «democratic side». 27 In fact, «the ILO survived the outbreak of war in part because its own special function of labour policy was needed even more in war than in peace». 28 In 1940, US observers anticipated a growing role of labour in the post-war order. Labour had indeed a significant voice within the governments in exile: Jan Stanczyk for Poland and Olav Hindahl for Norway, who had often come to Geneva as workers’ delegates, participated in the 1941 New York conference as government delegates. 29

The exceptional ILO conference held in New York in October-November 1941 took place in this particular context. It followed the «Four Freedoms» speech delivered by Roosevelt in January 1941 and the Atlantic Charter in August 1941, and just anticipated the US entry into war in December the same year. This speech was aimed first and foremost at American citizens, but it had also formulated global social objectives, and in addition to political freedoms, it had promised a social policy that would ensure freedom from want. On 14 August 1941, the eight articles of the Atlantic Charter co-signed by Roosevelt and Churchill took these broad aims...
further; its Article Five, which proclaimed a «desire to bring about the fullest cooperation between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security», promising a kind of «New Deal for the world». In this context, the New York conference offered a platform to mobilise US and international opinion against the Nazi and Fascist models, stating the superiority of the social and democratic values of the Western hemisphere. While the LoN was retreating into a position of careful neutrality, other technical bodies like the International Bureau of Education or the Bank for International Settlements were collaborating with the Nazis. The ILO seemed to be the only international organisation which still embodied the democratic international spirit. Its scope and authority were by then at their peak.

The ILO conference assembled 35 government delegates and was strongly supported by the US administration. The conference was chaired by Frances Perkins, US Secretary of Labour, while its final speech was given by President Roosevelt himself and clearly aimed at mobilising US public opinion in favour of the democracy and the war against Nazism. For European actors the conference was the place where forces that still resisted Nazism could meet and be heard. Although it was extremely difficult at the time to cross the Atlantic, governments in exile were strongly represented. They used the conference as a platform to claim their political legitimacy and make a plea to the world. The French case is particularly revealing about what was at stake. The Vichy government, still a member of the Organisation, had sent François de Panafieu, Counsellor of the US Embassy, as a delegate while La France libre (Free France) was represented by Henry Hauck, a French socialist appointed by De Gaulle as Director of Labour. While de Panafieu did not take the floor, Henry Hauck clearly reclaimed the legitimacy of the French Republic in his public speech:

The reason why Free France is so deeply interested in your discussions and in the whole activity of the International Labour Organisation is that it is faithful to what has been the social policy of the French Republic for twenty years […] The organisation of the workers in free associations, their increasing participation in

the administration of national and international economic affairs, there is the only solid basis on which to build the economic and social reconstruction of the world of tomorrow.\textsuperscript{36}

With this speech Free France reclaimed the legitimacy of the French Republic and marked the end of the twisted Vichy collaboration with the ILO. Eastern European governments in exile used the conference as an arena to call for help: the Czech president Masaryk read a joint declaration by the delegates of Czechoslovakia, Greece, Poland, and Yugoslavia to inform the world of the «innumerable and unprecedented atrocities that are being daily committed by the invaders» to «encourage the spirit of resistance of the working masses through adopting unity of all the enslaved peoples», «pay tribute to the great and valiant peoples of the British Empire, of the Soviet Union, and the great American nation» and to «reaffirm their profound devotion to the democratic principle, and express their solidarity with the great democracies».\textsuperscript{37}

The conference was also crucial in mobilising Latin American countries whose involvement on the side of the Allies was essential for winning the war. Since the 1930s, these countries had been exposed to economic penetration and political propaganda on the part of the fascist states.\textsuperscript{38} Even if this threat was overestimated by the US administration, the Argentine government, which did not join the Allies until 1944, had sympathised with the Axis. The choice of José Domenech, the Argentine workers’ delegate as vice-president of the conference was an important symbol in that context.

4. Fighting the War on Two Fronts

In addition to offering an international public platform to the Allies, the ILO proved to be a useful tool for fighting the war. Since its foundation in 1919, the ILO had played the role of an international «clearing house» on labour related topics. Information was collected through national offices (branch offices) and a network of local correspondents; it was then processed in the Office and disseminated through a wide range of publications. This know-how in collecting information proved precious. The number of national correspondents increased during the war period to 24. Until 1943, the Geneva headquarters continued to receive very long reports from Eastern European correspondents, which were sent on to Montreal and eventually

\begin{footnotes}
\item[37] ILO, Conference, 1941, 131.
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arrived in Washington.\textsuperscript{39} Besides being a «world centre of information on labour questions», as Carter Goodrich put it in 1941,\textsuperscript{40} the ILO tended to turn into a kind of annex of the US intelligence service.

The Office also fought an ideological war against the Nazis who tried to use the alleged superiority of German social policy to gain support among the population of the Southern and the Northern parts of Europe as well as in Latin America. After the Office had moved to Montreal in 1940, the German Labour Front officials took steps along with the Swiss authorities in order to occupy the former Geneva headquarters. At the end of the same year, Robert Ley, head of the German Labour Front, intended to transform the «Central Office for Joy and Labour», founded in 1933, into a sort of international office for labour (\textit{Zentralamt für internationale Sozialgestaltung}).\textsuperscript{41}

This new office published a periodical called the \textit{Neue internationale Rundschau der Arbeit}, intened by the Labour Front’s officials as a substitute for ILO’s \textit{Internationale Rundschau der Arbeit}. Many of the review’s collaborators were former ILO staff members who had been dismissed in 1939, including the social democrat Willi Donau, a former head of the Berlin branch office.\textsuperscript{42} The articles published in the new review sought to present an alternative to the international labour politics promoted by the ILO. The Nazi international policy did not aim to propose universal labour standards, which were criticised by the Nazis as «utopian», but proposed instead to organise an international geographical redistribution of working populations and to mobilise the European work force to the benefit of Germany. In an article published in February 1941, two ILO officials clearly denounced this policy, aimed at consolidating a single national state, as «totalitarian».\textsuperscript{43} All these plans were indeed closely followed by the ILO staff, particularly in Geneva, and Marius Viple urged his colleagues to continue disseminating ILO publications in Europe in order to offer counter-propaganda against the Nazis and to prepare for the post-war period.

The ILO’s activism on the issue of social security during the war and the shift from social insurance inspired by the German model to social security supported by the American and the British authorities was part of the same war effort. It was also a means of protecting the influence of the Organisation at a time when the very aggressive Pan-American policy of the US administration was endangering the role of the ILO in this part of the world.\textsuperscript{44} Trying to fulfil the promises made in the «Four


\textsuperscript{41} Ghebali, \textit{Organisation internationale}, 213–215, and ILO-Archives Z1/1/11 Correspondence Viple-Phelan.

\textsuperscript{42} ILO-Archives Z1/1/11, Geneva May 13, 1941 Viple to Phelan.


\textsuperscript{44} ILO-Archives MI-3–0. Letter Tixier to Stein May 22 1941.
Freedoms» speech, the Atlantic Charter and the UN declaration, the ILO worked hard to internationalise the social security model by offering the Allied countries its expertise in this field.\textsuperscript{45} In this respect, ILO officials could build on a long-standing collaboration with American partners.\textsuperscript{46} During the early years of the Second World War, these ties intensified. Oswald Stein, director of the social security section and deputy director of the ILO in 1942 and 1943, played an essential role in this process.\textsuperscript{47} In an article published in September 1941, but probably written before the Atlantic Charter, he sketched out the broad lines of this new social security system.\textsuperscript{48} This article was the short version of a long report published in 1942 which set out the details for a new era of planning a comprehensive social security system.\textsuperscript{49} In June 1943 Stein, with a touch of humour, argued in a letter to one of his aides that «just like the Catholic Church, social security should be universal, and [it is] therefore necessary for all nations to get social security into their heads».\textsuperscript{50} It was precisely this question of universality that he worked on during the war. He regularly went to Washington where he provided very effective technical assistance on social security to various members of the Department of Labor.\textsuperscript{51} Given his international knowledge, he was also invited to participate in the work of the Beveridge committee in the spring of 1942. In 1943 Stein insisted that a conference of experts be organised around Beveridge.\textsuperscript{52} He wanted to make the most of Beveridge's visit to the American continent and with the support of Carter Goodrich he intended to continue publicising the Beveridge Report around the United States.\textsuperscript{53} The meeting in Montreal in July 1943 was clearly intended as a means of internationalising the social security model as a gift to the population mobilised in the war effort.\textsuperscript{54}

Alongside the provision of expertise to developed countries, the war years also saw an increase in technical missions to Latin American countries, which had explicitly requested such assistance at the conferences in Havana in 1939 and New


\textsuperscript{47} On Oswald Stein, see his personal file in ILO-Archives P 1289 and «Oswald Stein» in: International Labour Review 46 (1944) 2, 139–144.


\textsuperscript{49} ILO, Approaches to Social Security. Studies and Reports, M, 18, Montreal 1942. This report formed the basis of a 76-page memorandum written in April 1942 that Stein submitted to the Beveridge Committee. ILO-Archives, SI 2/0/25/2.

\textsuperscript{50} ILO-Archives, SI 23/3.


\textsuperscript{52} See the following correspondence in the ILO-Archives SI 23/0.

\textsuperscript{53} ILO-Archives, SI 23/0 cable from Stein to Phelan, 21 May 1943. The visit of Beveridge to the United States was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation and was a great triumph.

\textsuperscript{54} ILO-Archives SI 23/3 Note from Stein to Stack, 19.6.1943.
York in 1941. Once again, the ILO officials could mobilise expertise accumulated in the 1930s. Adrien Tixier, former head of the social insurance section, led technical assistance missions during the war for the Mexican and Peruvian governments on social security and the labour code. The Czech expert Emil Schönbaum, who had conducted various missions in the Balkans on behalf of the ILO in the 1930s, wrote a social security code for Ecuador and helped the Mexican and Chilean governments establish systems of social insurance. He was also active in Paraguay and Venezuela and set up a miners’ pension scheme in Bolivia. Important institutional developments in this field included the creation of an Inter-American Committee on Social Security, founded in 1940 as a replica of the European committee founded in 1924, and the organisation of the Santiago conference on the war effort, aimed at promoting the ILO’s democratic model of tripartite social insurance. This was clearly a way of supporting social democratic sympathies in Latin American countries and fighting against anti-US and anti-capitalist feelings that might have rendered Latin Americans more receptive toward Nazi propaganda.

Since the US war effort was dependent on the mining resources of Latin American countries, and in particular Bolivia, it was crucial to win over Latin American actors to the Allied cause. The ILO was thus associated with a sanitary project in Bolivia, aiming at developing hospitals for miners. And clearly the ILO had to «make certain that the help provided [was] being as fully as possible used for the exclusive benefit of workers engaged in activities essential for the war effort». In December 1942, ILO officials were invited to the US Board of Economic Warfare (BEW) to solve a very serious industrial dispute in the Bolivian tin mines, whose production was essential for the US war effort. In response to the strike, the Bolivian government had sent in the army, worsening the situation. The US expectation was that the ILO could quickly initiate negotiations and, by promising social benefits (better housing, control of company stores, health provisions), convince the workers to go back to work. Oswald Stein, who was negotiating on behalf of the ILO, saw this situation as an opportunity to bring about a real improvement of the working conditions and living standards in the Latin American mining industry.

Nevertheless, as soon as the United States entered the war, the role of the State Department and the military authorities expanded at the expense of the influence of the Department of Labor. The role of trade unionism in the war was institutionalised through the War Labor Board, but it increasingly came under the control of a...

55 ILO-Archives Z 1/1/1/9 Correspondence between Phelan and Tixier 1940–1944.
56 ILO-Archives P 3926.
57 ILO-Archives MI 30 Stein’s Missions to Washington.
state bureaucracy and lost its autonomy. Most importantly, the war was a moment when the power of both military and private interests within the state apparatus and American society were reinforced at the expense of the New Deal planners and trade unions. As early as 1942 Stein expressed concern about the policy of the State Department, which was reluctant to include social clauses in commercial contracts signed with Latin American countries. Although a useful actor in the war, the influence of the ILO as an agency for setting social norms was in fact waning, as was its influence on post-war planning.


In October 1941, the ILO had proposed the first sketch for an international plan for reconstruction, in which the importance of social policy was stated and ten priorities were listed, such as the elimination of unemployment, the establishment of machinery for work placements, vocational training and retraining, the improvement of social insurance in all its fields, a minimum living wage for those too weak to secure it for themselves, and an international public works policy for the development of the world’s resources. In the special context of the New York conference, the ILO and Labour had received a mandate from the assembly to organise reconstruction internationally and had been guaranteed representation in peace and reconstruction conferences. However, the ILO was rather absent from post-war planning conferences, and its involvement in post-war plans was almost non-existent. The real significance of the international conference held in Philadelphia from 20 April to 12 May 1944, often interpreted by scholars and the ILO itself as marking the second birth of the Organisation, has to be reinterpreted in the context of this marginalisation.

The marginalisation of the ILO as a post-war actor resulted from a wide array of causes. The desire to turn the page on the Geneva system, which was remembered in association with the crisis of the 1930s and the failure of the Versailles system, clearly played a role, but more fundamentally, the disappearance of the

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64 The ILO and Reconstruction, 88–108. Some of these propositions (like full employment) were taken up by the Economic and Financial Section of the League of Nations. League of Nations, The Transition from War to Peace Economy, Geneva 1943. Clavin, Securing, 285–294.
65 See in particular the PWR series of the ILO-Archives. Most of the undertakings were frozen as early as 1943.
ILO reflects the transformation of social power relations both globally and within different nation states, as well as the declining role of the labour movement at international level.

From a strictly diplomatic point of view, the ILO gradually lost the privileged support that it had previously enjoyed from the great powers. The acting director, the Irishman Edward Phelan who succeeded John Winant in February 1941, did not enjoy a good relationship with the British administration, and coming from a neutral state he never had direct links with the Roosevelt administration. Moreover, the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 and the United Nations Declaration in January 1942 led to a triple rupture. First, the need to conduct war operations gave back a preponderant influence to national policy makers and global leadership clearly passed to the United States and the Soviet Union, further reducing the role of international organisations. Second, the United Nations Declaration ushered the Soviet Union into world diplomacy, from which it had been excluded (with the exception of its brief admittance to the LoN between 1934 and 1939) since 1917. Soviet officials had always been suspicious of the League; in the case of the ILO, a fundamental ideological antagonism added to this hostility. Third, within the state apparatus of the United States, the role of the State Department and the military authorities in the organisation of production and the setting of labour standards increased at the expense of the influence of the Department of Labor.

The division of the US labour movement contributed to its marginalisation. Domestically, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which monopolised the US workers’ representation at the ILO, fought against the development of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which was growing quickly. The CIO was more open to communist influences and closer to most of the Latin American trade unions. Internationally, the AFL opposed all projects for rapprochement with the Soviet Union which, supported by the British trade unionist Walter Citrine, eventually led to the founding of the World Federation of Trade Unions in February 1945, of which Citrine became president. The AFL, which did not join the new global trade union federation, was preparing with the assistance of the Office of Strategic Services for the global trade union scission that would occur in 1949.

67 Van Goethem, «Phelan’s War», 315–317. The mysterious death of Oswald Stein, deputy director of the ILO in 1943 and very close to the American administration, constituted a significant loss for the organisation in this respect.
68 Hughes / Haworth, «A Shift in the Centre of Gravity», 294.
69 The Soviet Union first joined the ILO in 1934 as an automatic result of its admittance to the LoN, but it was barely active within the organisation. In 1939 the USSR withdrew from the League and the ILO. It entered the UN from the moment of its foundation but did not re-join the ILO. Meanwhile, Czechoslovak actors in particular, as well as some Poles, were very active in the ILO from 1919 onwards. H.-K. Jacobson, «The USSR and ILO», in: International Organization 14 (1960) 3, 402–428.
71 On this issue, see ibid., 663–680. On the neces-
union «cold war», launched in 1943 by the AFL, clearly weakened the position of organised labour and of the ILO in post-war projects.

Meanwhile, discussions of post-war plans within the ILO itself exposed ideological and geopolitical rifts. Between April and May 1941, during meetings organised at the International Labour Office in Montreal between heads of section, two visions were put forward. Some like the French Socialist Adrien Tixier (a specialist in social insurance) or the Belgian Pierre Waelbroeck (responsible for questions of unemployment) supported large coordinated economic projects and social protective measures to reduce unemployment. They drew on the idea, developed by Albert Thomas in the early 1930s, of implementing international plans for major construction projects financed by the Bank for International Settlements.72 Advocates of this trend stressed the need to invent a democratic form of planning in response to the models implemented by fascist and communist states. However, Anglo-American actors in the ILO, including the head of the Governing body Carter Goodrich, felt that any long-term economic planning should be avoided. Frederick Leggett, British government delegate to the ILO, shared this position as did the employers group, increasingly reticent towards any form of interventionism from 1943 onwards. This view prevailed in both the global arena and the United States at the very moment that economic planning and the organisation of social dialogue were gaining ground in national resistance movements in Europe. In August 1943, the US Congress decided by a narrow majority not to renew funding for the National Resources Planning Board, thereby excluding the pro-planning New Dealers from the US administration.73 In November 1943, the launch of the UNRRA made reconstruction a priority over long-term economic planning. The year 1943 therefore seems to mark a shift away from international economic and social regulation in favour of organising trade and economic growth as a motor for global welfare.74

The 1944 Philadelphia conference witnessed the triumph of this trend of thought. The delegates unanimously adopted a recommendation on national public works, which were seen as one possible means to fight against unemployment and to increase productivity.75 However, in its final declaration, following the international trend since 1943, the conference also praised the promotion of «a high and

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72 On this point see the file dedicated to this policy in ILO-Archives CAT 6B-7-4 and Li/14/3.
74 As Jill Jensen pointed out to me, the New Dealers also saw free trade as an important means of ensuring social welfare to all. On this issue, see S. M. Nystrom, Free Trade and the New Deal: The United States and the International Economy of the 1930s, 2010. This work, which focuses on the achievement of Cordell Hull, is accessible online http://lib_dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2864&context=etd, accessed May 2012.
steady volume of international trade», «recognising the great contribution which the international exchange of goods and services can make to higher living standards and to high levels of employment.»

Clearly, Philadelphia marked a turning point for the ILO. Protective and redistributive measures, which had formed the backbone of the ILO policy up to the 1930s, lost their priority in favour of productive measures aiming at increasing global wealth, whose redistribution would ensure prosperity for all. Nonetheless, the ways and means of achieving this redistribution were not resolved internationally. The Havana Charter discussed in 1947 envisioned a regulation of free trade in favour of developing countries, but its dismissal by the US Congress in 1950 put an end to the discussion of the regulation of free trade and closed debate on possible ways of channelling this global redistribution.

The discussions surrounding the Charter, as well as the US development programme launched during the war by the Inter-American Office and largely funded by Nelson Rockefeller, indicated nevertheless that the US authorities grew concerned with global inequality. Underdevelopment, which was made more acute by the trend towards decolonisation, was increasingly seen as a new threat to global peace. Meanwhile, undeveloped countries could also present an opportunity for new markets. This opened the way for new development programmes. The universalist and human rights discourse of Philadelphia has to be understood in this context. This discourse also marked a decline in the influence of organised labour in favour of economic experts on development, many of them coming from the former New Deal administration.

6. Conclusion

I would like to go back to the questions raised in my introduction: to what extent can the Second World War be studied as a time of peculiar internationalism? What role did the various ILO actors and bodies play in this internationalism? How does a study of the ILO’s perspective contribute to a better understanding of the shifting global balance of geopolitical power which occurred during this period?

Undoubtedly, during the war the ILO stood for an alternative, democratic internationalism in response to Nazi international/European plans. The Organisation as such succeeded (if not always) in protecting some of its own people – officials,

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77 For the full text of the Havana Charter: http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/prewto_legal_e.htm


experts and delegates – and was able to provide and publish information on what was really happening in Europe. More broadly, the ILO was able to serve as an international platform until 1942; its tripartite structure facilitated the mobilisation of large segments of international public opinion on «the democratic side». But the Organisation was also involved in the international war effort through various channels and actors. A web of international correspondents was able to provide important and reliable information. Trained and recognised experts could to support alternative social political measures aimed at fighting against Nazi propaganda. Further research would most probably reveal the role that several ILO officials played in the secret services on the side of the Allies.

Beyond this direct participation in war, following the ILO makes it possible to better understand the multi-layered processes leading to the new balance of power emerging from the war. The dual location of the ILO mirrored the geopolitical shift of gravity: the vanishing influence of continental Europe and the rise of the US global power. This geographical shift was closely linked to a global social change. The loss of influence of the ILO after 1942 reveals how, in Europe as well as in the USA, labour had to give ground in favour of a new group of economic experts. Between the 1941 conference in New York and the 1944 conference in Philadelphia, the social priorities shifted from the protection of the working population and the distribution of wealth towards development and free trade as a promise for a better life globally. Nevertheless, the role of the labour movement and of influential communist parties in European countries as well as fears of revolution in a Cold War context prompted competition.80 This fostered a kind of emulation that can explain the rapid growth of social expenditure during the Cold War period. But on the global level, the liberal agenda was already well on its way in 1945.

Fighting the War or Preparing for Peace?  The ILO during the Second World War

During the Second World War the ILO stood for an alternative, democratic internationalism in response to Nazi international/European plans. The ILO was able to serve as an international platform and was directly involved in the Allied war effort. Moreover, examining the ILO allows us to better understand the multi-layered processes and rationales that brought about a shift in the political and social balance of power during the Second World War. After the ILO moved to Montreal in May 1940, the handful of French functionaries guarding the organisation’s deserted headquarters in Geneva could only look on helplessly as the reformist labour movement, together with the vision of a social Europe that it promoted, was defeated. Meanwhile, on the campus of McGill University in Montreal, the ILO underwent a twofold transformation in exile. Dependent on British and North American funding and staff, it became the champion of the pragmatic solutions to social issues implemented in those countries. Through its work for the United Nations alliance it expanded its activities in the fields of expertise and technical assistance, to the detriment of its work in setting international labour standards. While it had been founded in 1919 to protect workers and to provide an international platform for the reformist workers movement, the ILO emerged from the war as an organisation focusing increasingly on providing economic and social expertise.

Krieg führen oder den Frieden vorbereiten?  Die ILO während des Zweiten Weltkrieges


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