

## REVIEW ESSAY

# A Century of International Trade Unionism

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The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. [By] Anthony Carew, Michel Dreyfus, Geert Van Goethem [and] Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick. Marcel van der Linden (Ed.) [International and Comparative Social History, vol. 3.] Peter Lang, Bern [etc.] 2000. 624 pp. S.fr. 117.00; DM 147.00; S 975.00.

In 1999 the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. In connection with the efforts of various organizations affiliated with the IALHI to find archives that went astray during the Nazi occupation and began to surface a half-century later in the former Soviet Union,<sup>1</sup> the occasion was grasped to write a history of the ICFTU and its predecessors.<sup>2</sup>

The book takes its place in a steadily growing series of studies of international trade union organizations. (A bibliography in alphabetic order – called, for reasons that are not clear to me, a “thematic bibliography” – includes the most important references.) Although a number of older monographs exists, largely devoted to the origins of the international trade-union movement and the Cold War, along with a few recent, thorough historical analyses of international trade secretariats, no historical overview of the most important trade-union umbrella had yet been published.<sup>3</sup> This gap has now been filled. Still, viewing the literature as a whole, one cannot really say that this has been a particularly popular topic for research.

1. See Jacques Lust, Evert Maréchal, Wouter Steenhaut, and Michel Vermote, *Een zoektocht naar archieven: Van NISG naar AMSAB* (Ghent, 1997).

2. On May 19–20, 2000, a conference was organized to mark this book’s publication, and the conference proceedings have recently been published: Bart De Wilde (ed.), *The Past and Future of International Trade Unionism* (Ghent, 2001).

3. Since then another overview, albeit of more limited scope, has been published: Andrea Ciampani, *La Cisl tra integrazione europea e mondializzazione: Profilo storico del ‘sindacato novo’ nelle relazioni internazionali: dalla Conferenza di Londra al Trattato di Amsterdam* (Rome, 2000).

In this respect the study of international trade-union activity shares the fate of much labour history, which has fallen out of favour since class struggle was classified as a closed chapter and the new cultural history caught people's imagination.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to national labour movements, international labour activity has, in fact, never been terribly popular with historians and social scientists. Furthermore, the study of the international trade-union movement can only benefit to a limited extent from the much more real, growing interest in international social movements and NGOs. To some extent, European labour activity constitutes an exception to this general pattern. Considerable social-scientific literature exists, for example, about the functioning of the trade-union movement in the European social space, both from the standpoint of research into international neocorporatism and from the standpoint of more recent multilevel analysis.<sup>5</sup> The union movement has also attracted attention from this last perspective, above all from economic historians of European integration.<sup>6</sup> In addition, labour action is being compared more and more with other pressure groups and integrated into a global approach to international activism, thus transcending the organizational level. This is, however, not

4. This has been noted often. See also Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss (eds), *Class and Other Identities: Gender, Religion, and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History* (Oxford [etc.], 2002).

5. This literature is fairly extensive. See e.g. Jon Erik Dølvik, *An Emerging Island? ETUC, Social Dialogue and the Europeanisation of the Trade Unions in the 1990s* (Brussels, 1999); Jelle Visser, "Learning to Play: The Europeanization of Trade Unions", in Patrick Pasture and Johan Verberckmoes (eds), *Working-Class Internationalism and the Appeal of National Identity: Historical Dilemmas and Current Debates on Western Europe* (Oxford [etc.], 1998), pp. 231–257; Andrew Martin and George Ross, "In the Line of Fire: The Europeanisation of Labor Representation", in *idem* (eds), *The Brave New World of European Labor: European Trade Unions at the Millennium* (New York [etc.], 1999), pp. 312–367; Jelle Visser and Bernhard Ebbinghaus, "Making the Most of Diversity?: European Integration and Transnational Organisation of Labour" in Justin Greenwood, Jürgen R. Grote, and Karsten Ronit (eds), *Organized Interests and the European Community* (London, 1992), pp. 206–237; Bernhard Ebbinghaus and Jelle Visser, "European Labor and Transnational Solidarity: Challenges, Pathways, and Barriers", in Jytte Klausen and Louise A. Tilly (eds), *European Integration in Social and Historical Perspective: 1850 to the Present* (Lanham, MD, 1997), pp. 195–221.

6. Research on the European trade-union movement was encouraged in particular by Professor Michel Dumoulin of the Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve (guiding the work of Thierry Grosbois among others) – e.g. in Eric Bussière and Michel Dumoulin (eds), *Milieux économiques et intégration européenne en Europe au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Arras, 1998) – and Professor Antonio Varsori at the University of Firenze (guiding the work of Maria-Eleonora Guasconi among others). Moreover, there is a rich tradition in Italy of trade-union research that has made the connection between labour history and the history of European integration. See e.g. Andrea Ciampani (ed.), *L'altra via per l'Europa: Forze sociali e organizzazione degli interessi nell'integrazione europea (1947–1957)* (Milan, 1995); and *idem*, *La Cisl tra integrazione europea e mondializzazione*. This approach also inspired my own research on trade unions and European integration. Remarkably, at the May 2000 conference many contributions were dedicated to unions and European integration: De Wilde, *The Past and Future of International Trade Unionism*.

the case in this book, which, in any event, ignores the tradition of research relating to European integration.

The relatively limited interest in the international trade-union movement has to do first of all, in my opinion, with the minor significance that is attributed to it (quite rightly, as we will see later), although international trade-union activists will disagree, as I fear will the authors of the book under discussion (though doubtless many national and local union activists will agree with me).<sup>7</sup> Even though it has been under fire from various quarters in recent years, the myth of labour-movement internationalism is a stubborn one. While internationalism undoubtedly played a role in the formation of the socialist working class's distinct identity, the trade-union movement has worked, above all, on winning social advances within a national framework and building up national welfare states, with the support of its rank and file. In the process the unions developed a distinct national identity – indeed, national features characterize unions far more than ideological principles.<sup>8</sup> The international dimension has never been a priority for either the unions' leadership or their constituency. If there ever were such illusions, they can hardly have survived the First World War.<sup>9</sup> This does not mean, in any event, that attention should not be paid to the international trade-union movement, if only so as to understand *why* the international dimension has never been a priority. Questions of this kind are, however, scarcely discussed in this book.

The core of the book consists of chronologically delimited chapters, which together embrace the entire history of the international socialist trade-union organization. Each of the different authors of these chapters has a different approach, but this does not detract unduly from the coherence of the whole work.

#### A FALTERING START

In the first chapter, largely based on the existing literature, Michel Dreyfus, *directeur d'études* at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and on the faculty of the University of Paris 1, situates the

7. At the May 2000 colloquium (see n. 2 above), Anthony Carew made an impassioned plea against a too critical approach to international labour action, which he said does not do justice to the energy invested in international action by trade-union officials.

8. Patrick Pasture, "Reflections on the Fate of Ideologies and Trade Unions", in Patrick Pasture, Johan Verberckmoes and Hans De Witte (eds), *The Lost Perspective?: Trade Unions between Ideology and Social Action in the New Europe* (Aldershot, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 377–403 (33).

9. Peter Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms* (London [etc.], 1998); Carl Strikwerda, "Reinterpreting the History of European Integration: Business, Labor, and Social Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Europe", in Klausen and Tilly, *European Integration in Social and Historical Perspective*, pp. 51–70; Pasture and Verberckmoes, *Working-Class Internationalism and the Appeal of National Identity*.

foundation of the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC) in 1901–1902 within the process of formation of international alliances, and in particular within the history of the Second International (1889–1919).

He focuses above all on the contradictions between the French and Germans over the unions' relationship to the socialist parties. Whereas the German socialist movement gave priority to the political dimension and considered the unions "the primary school of socialism" (p. 33), the French emphasized the unions' autonomy. This was only one of the differences between the two models. The German model also placed considerable stress on a solid, centralized organization. Dreyfus, primarily a specialist on French revolutionary syndicalism, hardly bothers to conceal his aversion for the "bureaucratic" German movement (pp. 42, 68). But as Carl Strikwerda, following Weber rather than Michels, recently showed once more in an utterly fascinating comparative study of the origins of the labour movement in Ghent, Brussels, and Liege, bureaucracy is first of all a powerful tool in the service of democracy and emancipation.<sup>10</sup> It is no accident that the German union movement played a pioneering role in Europe in the development of craft unions into trade and industrial unions, as well as in building the International Trade Secretariats (ITSEs). In the book's conclusion, incidentally, Marcel van der Linden briefly considers the question of why the ITSEs did not become the basis of the international trade-union movement.

According to the Germans, followed by the International Secretariat, the union movement was, however, supposed to abstain from political action, which was the exclusive preserve of socialist parties and the Second International. The International Secretariat even rejected a debate over the general strike and eight-hour day as too political, a decision that led the French CGT to withdraw in 1905. In fact, the Secretariat's activities were limited to organizing a few conferences and transmitting information about economic and social developments. The Secretariat thus anticipated somewhat the later International Labour Organization (ILO). To some extent it was also able to organize international solidarity during a few major strikes.

From 1907 onwards, the German model, and even more revolutionary syndicalism, declined in strength, and the Secretariat acquired more manoeuvring room. In addition, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which joined in 1910, resisted any socialist orientation for the union movement, whether on the German, French, or British model. The AFL was the driving force behind attempts to reshape the International Secretariat into a trade-union federation that would also absorb the ITSEs.

10. Carl Strikwerda, *A House Divided: Mass Politics and the Origins of Pluralism: Catholicism, Socialism and Flemish Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Belgium* (Lanham, MD, 1997).

The International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), also known as the “Amsterdam international”, was officially established in 1913, but collapsed quickly after the outbreak of the First World War.

The war not only set the different countries’ trade unions against each other, with the neutral countries’ unions in an uneasy position in the middle, but also led to new fractures and relationships. First of all, the American, British, and French unions increased their roles at Germany’s expense. An abyss also opened up between the AFL and European unions, due to their different political orientations. Ultimately, however, it was the Russian revolution whose impact on international trade-union relations was the greatest. The “free” trade unions’ relationship with the communist unions would mark them until after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

#### THE TURBULENT INTERWAR YEARS

Geert van Goethem, who recently received his doctorate from the University of Amsterdam for his research on the difficult birth and development of the IFTU in the interwar years,<sup>11</sup> thoroughly analyses the subject on the basis of extensive, original work with primary sources. In contrast to the prewar situation, and to the AFL’s great discontent, the IFTU was conceived as a broad movement based on national union federations (not on the ITSes) and acquired an explicit socialist or social-democratic identity. There was no room in the IFTU for communist unions or minority groupings, such as Christian or anarchist unions. With the founding of the ILO and adoption of the eight-hour day in the Washington Convention, the newborn IFTU even won a first victory. The AFL, nonetheless, refused to join the new international. This decision meant that the IFTU would remain a largely European, socialist organization.

The IFTU’s first task was to bring about a consensus and reconciliation among the wartime adversaries, promote international solidarity, and work for peace in Europe. Within the organization itself its efforts were reasonably successful. But the IFTU did not have resources at its disposal to implement its broad objectives on a larger scale. The international relied instead on the League of Nations, which was just as powerless as the IFTU to reach these goals. By about 1923 the IFTU was at something of a dead end. An attempt to restructure the organization by basing it on the ITSes, as advocated by Edo Fimmen, failed. A minority, including Chairman Albert A. Purcell, pushed for more attention to non-Western countries and rapprochement with the Soviets. The majority resolutely rejected this perspective, however.

11. Geert van Goethem, “De Internationale van Amsterdam: de wereld van het Internationaal Vakverbond (IVV), 1913–1945”, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2001).

With the appointment of Walter Citrine as chairman (1928), the departure of the first generation of international trade-union leaders, and Walter Schevenels's appointment to the international secretariat in Amsterdam (1929/1931), the IFTU chose a more pragmatic course and strengthened the organization and its links to the ITSEs. But hard as the IFTU tried to find an answer to the political and economic crises – striving for a forty-hour week, economic planning, and European integration – it never got much further than ringing declarations. Departing from Van Goethem's analysis, we may observe that, while the international trade-union movement did promote the idea of a European *economic* free-trade zone and designed an abstract scheme for international *economic* planning, in practice it defined *social* progress or defence of *social* gains in a purely national way.<sup>12</sup>

Although Van Goethem's text does not really make this clear, the IFTU was, in fact, no longer capable of doing more than waging a rather virtual struggle against fascism after 1933, when the free German trade unions, its largest component organization and most important source of funds, disappeared.<sup>13</sup> During the Spanish Civil War, the IFTU sent humanitarian aid through the Matteotti Fund, but the international was divided about sending weapons and could do little more than issue calls for solidarity and for abandonment of nonintervention policies. Despite the various union federations' internationalist rhetoric, national perspectives determined their attitudes towards the dramatic problems of the time. This has, in fact, been a constant in international trade-union history.

During the Second World War, the IFTU shrank to little more than an annexe of the TUC in London. From 1943 on, preparations for the postwar period began. It soon became clear that the relationships between the TUC, AFL, and Soviet Union would be a central factor.

#### GLOBALIZATION IN THE SHADOW OF THE COLD WAR

The history of the founding of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) – which united the Soviet trade unions and American Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) with the European socialist unions but not with the AFL or Christian unions – the split in the WFTU, and formation of the ICFTU under the Marshall Plan's influence is widely known. Anthony Carew, author of a seminal book on labour and the Marshall Plan, writes the history up sketchily once more in his

12. See on this point my analysis in Patrick Pasture, "The Interwar Origins of International Labour's European Commitment (1919–1934)", *Contemporary European History*, 10 (2001), pp. 221–237.

13. Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s* (New York [etc.], 1996).

contribution.<sup>14</sup> Carew also covers the ICFTU's history from 1949 to 1972, during the Cold War, basing his work on extensive archival research in the US, Britain, and the IISH in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the author, referring above all to correspondence, places too much emphasis on personal relationships among leading figures of the ICFTU, TUC, and AFL-CIO. Relations with other countries and organizations are brought only dimly into relief, which results in a fairly one-sided and moreover a quite Anglo-Saxon portrayal.

From the time of its founding, the ICFTU, in which the British TUC was initially the driving force, was distinguished from the prewar IFTU by its global character. The new organization chose as a matter of principle to focus on expanding regional organizations such as the Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores (CIT), which was born at the AFL's initiative a year earlier than the ICFTU itself. The ICFTU also achieved a *modus vivendi* with the ITSes, which accepted the confederation's political line but in other respects preserved their autonomy (Milan agreement, 1951).

The ICFTU's activities in the 1950s and 1960s took place largely in the shadow of the Cold War, in which the international sided firmly with the West. Its activities under the European Marshall Plan promoting increased productivity fit into this framework, for example. The resources diverted to the anticommunist struggle exceeded the Confederation's regular budget many times over. The source of these funds can be considered doubtful from a trade-union point of view, to say the least. This is, however, less odd than it seems from a contemporary perspective, given the ICFTU's origins, though it remains a curious business.

The ICFTU's decision to side unconditionally with the West inspired its global activities, but also hindered them. Its call to boycott weapon shipments to North Korea, for example, caused the withdrawal from the confederation of the largest Japanese union federation, Sohyo. It also gave the WFTU an opportunity to promote the idea of Afro-Asian solidarity, which Carew sees as a strategy to undermine the ICFTU and reinforce communist influence in the unions (p. 219). The ICFTU seemed very European to African eyes, which similarly was hardly conducive to its expansion. A triangular conflict emerged between Africans, who were fighting for autonomy, independence, and Africanization; Europeans, who were only able with great difficulty to shed their paternalistic, colonial approach; and the US, which on the one hand rejected European colonialism but on the other hand saw Africa as a Cold-War arena.

14. Anthony Carew, *Labour under the Marshall Plan* (Manchester, 1987). In addition to Carew's two chapters, one can usefully consult the following historiographical essay (as well as other chapters in this collective volume): Federico Romero, "Guerra fredda e scissione sindacali: stato e prospettive della storiografia", in M. Antonioli *et al.* (eds), *Le scissioni sindacali. Italia e Europa* (Milan [etc.], 1999), pp. 1–15.



Anticommunism and anticolonialism were, however, difficult to reconcile in practice.

The first ICFTU congress outside Europe and the establishment of an international solidarity fund (Tunis, 1957) drastically accelerated the ICFTU's globalization and heightened its attention to development problems. But the international continued to be divided about the strategy it should follow. In addition, the new independent regimes especially tried to neutralize "foreign interference" as much as possible and place the union movement under state control. The AFL-CIO also chose to funnel its aid to low-income countries through programmes sponsored by the American government, like the American Institute for Free Labor Development (1961) and the African-American Labor Center (1964). The German DGB followed the American example via the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, actually a creation of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and largely funded by the German government. This development undermined the role of the ICFTU and its international solidarity fund. In particular the ORIT, which was very dependent on the AIFLD, acquired an unsavoury reputation. Due in part to this reality, a conflict arose between the ORIT and CLASC (the Latin-American umbrella organization of Christian-inspired unions), which assumed the mantle of protector of the powerless from American interference in Latin America. While much weaker numerically, CLASC challenged the ORIT's moral authority and legitimacy.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning in the 1960s, the European unions quietly began to go their own way. In the early 1970s they maintained contacts with certain communist organizations and countries, even with the WFTU, despite the ICFTU's official anticommunist line. The desire for unity, the advance of European integration, disillusionment with the ICFTU and disagreements over the world confederation's authority led the European socialist unions to found the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), independently of the ICFTU, in 1973. The ETUC first united the "free" unions of the six EC member countries and the seven countries "outside" the EC, further enlarging its ranks with Christian (1974) and even communist unions (CGIL, 1974).<sup>16</sup> This inward turn by the Western unions was not to

15. See on this topic Gerhard Wahlers, *CLAT: Geschichte einer lateinamerikanischen Gewerkschaftsinternationale*, Beiträge zu Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften 12 (Witterschlick [etc.], 1990) and Patrick Pasture, *Histoire du syndicalisme chrétien international: La difficile recherche d'une troisième voie* (Paris, 1999). This bitter conflict goes unmentioned in Carew's chapter. It is discussed, however, in the following chapter, by Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, and in Marcel van der Linden's conclusion.

16. On the history of the ETUC, see Corinne Gobin, "Consultation et concertation sociales à l'échelle de la Communauté Européenne Economique: Etude des positions et stratégies de la CES 1958-1991" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis in political science, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1996) and the literature cited in note 4 above. On its (pre)history see De Wilde, *The Past and*



the Third-World organizations' taste. They made this abundantly clear in 1972 by promoting a candidate of their own for the post of Secretary-General against the candidate of the powerful European organizations. The European candidate, (East) German Otto Kersten, was victorious nonetheless.

#### WORLDWIDE TRADE-UNION ACTIVITIES

The ICFTU's recent history since Kersten's election in 1972 (and thus since the founding of the ETUC) is dealt with thematically in the book by Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick. This author has not only gone through archival material but also interviewed many prominent and not-so-prominent union leaders, sixty-five of them in all. Although she sometimes seems a bit overawed by her interviewees, and her account appears to be coloured by the short-term perceptions and personal experiences and sympathies of the people concerned, these interviews nevertheless provide a unique glimpse behind the scenes.

Rebecca Gumbrell has more of an eye than the other contributors for less politically oriented trade-union activities, such as the ITSES' efforts to exert some control over multinational corporations through international works councils, the ICFTU's efforts to impose international labour standards and legislation on multinationals, and the struggle for women's rights. The struggle for women's rights, incidentally, has been far from easy even inside the ICFTU, despite the support of Chairman Narayanan. Nevertheless, a high proportion of the ICFTU's activities continues as in the past to focus on more political themes, such as the fight against apartheid in South Africa and for peace in the Middle East. A policy focused only on collective negotiation turned out in fact to be not very relevant for many low-income countries where trade-union freedom is far from assured. In Africa, anti-Western pan-Africanism has been an additional complicating factor, which hindered the ICFTU's efforts to get involved in Africa for a considerable time. In the 1960s, the ICFTU's regional activities virtually ground to a halt. The African regional organization (AFRO) was only hesitantly relaunched after the ICFTU's Addis Ababa conference in May 1972 and the founding of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) alongside the AFRO(!) the following year. In any event, African activities remained at a far lower level than in the Asian Regional Organization (ARO), which itself did not cover the entire Asian continent. Countries like China and the Soviet Union were beyond the ARO's reach, while major organizations like

*Future of International Trade Unionism*; E.B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economical Forces 1950-1959* (London, 1958); and R.C. Beever, *European Unity and the Trade Union Movements* (Leyde, 1960).

Japan's Sohyo continued to keep their distance. In 1975 the ARO nonetheless supplied, in the person of the extremely competent Indian Malaysian P.P. Narayanan, the ICFTU's first non-Western General Chairman. Also in Asia, from Sri Lanka to Turkey and South Korea to the Philippines, the struggle for the most elementary human and trade-union rights took centre stage, even if it proved none too easy when unions were closely tied to governments.

The ORIT became even more of a special case in the ICFTU after the AFL-CIO left the world confederation in 1969 but stayed in the ORIT, which it continued to see as an instrument of its own rabidly anti-communist policy. The financially and organizationally weak ORIT's leadership proved unable to resist American interference, as shown in its very cautious reaction after the military coup in Chile in 1973. The ICFTU itself intervened to organize trade-union resistance to the dictatorship, while the International Transport Workers Union organized a forty-eight-hour transport boycott of Chile. From 1977 on, not so accidentally perhaps the year that Jimmy Carter took office as US president and Venezuelan Juan José del Pino as the ORIT's new Secretary-General, it shifted gears and joined the fight for freedom and democracy in Latin America. But it never considered a divorce between its Latin- and North-American components, which might have seemed logical in light of the economic, political, and cultural differences between the two. In the trade-union movement as elsewhere, Latin America remained the US's backyard.

In the 1980s, the ICFTU began to reconsider its position in the "Western" camp in the Cold War and took a tentative stand for disarmament under pressure from its membership. But the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the triumph of neoliberalism and a new, unprecedented wave of economic globalization on the other hand had a far greater impact. In reaction to globalization, the international union movement generally tried to find ways to regulate the international economy through the WTO, or even IMF, instead of through the ILO or national politics. Its attempts, however, can hardly be called successful. As in NGOs, there is consequently growing scepticism, particularly among the ITSEs, about the possibility of making any progress whatever through international institutions. The idea is gaining ground that a different strategy needs to be developed.

## PERSPECTIVES AND CONCLUSIONS

In a stimulating closing chapter, Marcel van der Linden reviews the history of the international trade-union movement on the basis of several key questions concerning the underlying causes and motives behind international labour activity, the relationship between the more politically

oriented confederations and the ITSES, the significance of political ideologies as opposed to trade-union autonomy, the relationship between unions in the core capitalist countries and those in the low-income 'periphery', and in connection with this the IFTU and ICFTU's relationship to the communist and Christian union movement. This chapter gives the book a more overarching dimension.

Van der Linden gives a remarkably high estimate here of the international trade-union movement's future potential. I find it difficult to agree with him on this point. The international union movement's future cannot, after all, be evaluated without reference to its past. The book (like Van der Linden) evades questions about the effectiveness of international labour action, though this might go beyond the historian's task. (I did not answer this question in my own book about the international Christian trade-union movement, admittedly, at least not in so many words.) In any event, when the international union movement's campaigns are compared with those of other pressure groups, as Catherine Hoskyns did with the old demand of "Equal Pay for Equal Work" in Europe, the comparison does not work out particularly to the unions' advantage.<sup>17</sup> The resources that unions were and are prepared to invest in international union activity were and are, in fact, ludicrously small compared with either the needs or the resources mustered by other pressure groups. Peter Waterman made, in this respect, a sobering comparison with the resources of modern worldwide pressure groups like Amnesty International, which lays bare the pettiness of the ICFTU – and ITSES – in a painful way.<sup>18</sup> The international union movement is still far from linking up with new social movements and forms of action, if one leaves aside a bit of joint banner waving at international summits.

This book also makes clear that the international trade-union movement has worked mainly along two tracks. First, it has tried to play a representative role in international forums. Along this track, it has consistently set its sights on the major international institutions, without paying much attention to the question of how effective these institutions are, let alone to the construction of a genuine trade-union countervailing power.<sup>19</sup> The union movement has definitely not managed to make itself indispensable with this tactic. On the contrary, where it did manage to

17. Catherine Hoskyns, *Integrating Gender: Women, Law and Politics in the European Union* (London [etc.], 1996).

18. Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements, and the New Internationalisms*, p. 113.

19. For a discussion of the unions' "yearning for recognition" in the process of European integration, see Patrick Pasture, "In de buitenbaan: Essay over internationale syndicale culturen en structuren bij de oprichting van de EGKS", in Peter van Kemseke (ed.), *Diplomatieke cultuur, Alfred Cauchie Reeks* (Leuven, 2000), pp. 223–241, and also "The Flight of the Robins: European Trade Unionism at the Beginnings of the European Integration Process", in De Wilde, *The Past and Future of International Trade Unionism*.

have some political significance, it faded away completely in the course of the 1960s (including from the media) and became as good as redundant.<sup>20</sup> The number of results that it achieved, such as certain international labour standards, turn out to exist largely on paper.

Second, the international union movement has attempted in the past mainly to support national union organizations, admittedly often from a definite Cold-War perspective in the 1950s and 1960s, but seriously nonetheless. In this respect, as well, its results have been limited, although it undoubtedly has had an impact on the ground in this way. We should note that the ICFTU often played a primarily intermediary role in this field. But this activity does illustrate to what extent the union movement consistently sees trade-union activity as an essentially national task.

The international union movement's future seems to depend above all, along with its financial input and strategic choices, on its capacity to free itself from its Western patterns of thought and ideal types. But this book is full of examples of "institutional inertia", which, as Van der Linden comments (not without reason), may well help ensure its continued existence but is not any more conducive to the needed strategic shifts. My conclusion after reading this book is that the international union movement has given few signs in the past of possessing just this sort of flexibility. A very Western perspective has always predominated right up to the present day. For example, the most important position in the ICFTU, the Secretary-General's, is still in the year 2001 in the hands of a European, British citizen Bill Jordan. The ICFTU's membership did admittedly increase substantially in the 1990s (though one must always ask what these figures mean concretely) despite the worldwide crisis of trade unionism, but in the last analysis only 5 to 10 per cent of the world's employees belong to a free trade union.

These considerations must, however, not prevent us from judging this book on its merits. Despite the occasion that led it to be written, it has not become an old-style hagiography. It is the product of thorough research (though some contributions are less original than others) and critical analysis, and the less flattering sides of the ICFTU's history have not been shunted aside, even though there is sometimes a certain lack of critical distance, in particular because the contributors have worked almost exclusively with internal sources.

Above all for the period from the 1950s on, when the ICFTU really flourished, this study examines the situation in the entire world; the European side of things is even a bit neglected. While organizational and financial issues are also considered and considerable attention is paid to the movement's political programmes for labour, the book is nonetheless to a large extent a chronicle of facts and people. All sorts of personal conflicts

20. See Pasture, "The Flight of the Robins", for the example of European integration.

and feuds, magnified by the national unions (and sometimes by some of this book's authors as well), apparently dominate the life of the international trade-union movement. This, plus the fact that specific individuals and in particular the Secretary-Generals have been able to play such a determinant role, illustrate in my opinion the relative fruitlessness and limited representativeness of international trade-union activity. Nevertheless, this book contains an undeniable wealth of information and provides a solid overview of the international free trade-union movement's development in the twentieth century. No doubt it will remain an indispensable reference work for decades to come, not only for labour historians but also for scholars of international organizations and politics.

A number of interesting appendices – including biographical notes on a number of protagonists, general membership figures (unfortunately – and this may not be merely an oversight! – not divided by region or affiliated organization), the dates and places of confederal and regional congresses, the names of the elected presidents and general secretaries, and income and expenditure figures – complete the work, although a couple of acronyms are missing from the list of abbreviations as well as from the index.