

TRADE UNIONS
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

VOL.5

Liberal Workers of the World, Unite?

The ICFTU and the Defence of
Labour Liberalism in Europe and
Latin America (1949–1969)

Magaly Rodríguez García

PETER LANG

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The history of international free trade union organisations during the first two decades of the Cold War is an important but often neglected aspect of the development of post-war labour and liberalism. In this path-breaking book, Rodríguez García fills this void in the historical literature by offering a comparative analysis of two cases, the European Regional Organisation (ERO) and the Inter-American Regional Workers' Organisation (ORIT), which were created in the early 1950s as regional branches of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The author employs the term 'labour liberalism' to describe their wide variety of functions. She argues that social democratic and reformist trade unions, which made up the bulk of ICFTU members, were fundamentally shaped by liberal values, even while calling for the active participation of organised labour in the planning and implementation of projects promoting liberal democracy and socio-economic development at home and abroad. By placing international free trade unionism centre stage, this book adds significantly to our understanding of post-war labour and liberalism.

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EDITED BY CRAIG PHELAN

Volume 5



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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To Jeroen and Leo

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List of Acronyms

ABVV	Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond = FGBT
AD	Acción Democrática
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIFLD	American Institute for Free Labor Development
ALPRO	Alliance for Progress
ATLAS	Agrupación de Trabajadores Latinoamericanos Sindicalistas
CEDOC	Confederación Ecuatoriana de Obreros Católicos
CEOSL	Confederación Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Sindicales Libres
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina
CFTC	Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens
CGC	Confédération Française de l'Encadrement-Confédération Générale des Cadres
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CGT-FO	Confédération Générale du Travail-Force Ouvrière = FO
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CISC	Confédération Internationale des Syndicats Chrétiens = IFCTU
CISL	Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati Lavoratori
CIT	Confederación Interamericana de Trabajadores
CLASC	Confederación Latinoamericana de Sindicalistas Cristianos
CNT	Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores

COB	Central Obrera Boliviana
COG	Confederación Obrera del Guayás
CSU	Comité Sindical Unificado
CTAL	Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina
CTC	Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba
CTE	Confederación de Trabajadores del Ecuador
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México
CTV	Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
EB	Executive Board (ICFTU)
EC	Executive Committee (ERO, ORIT)
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
EFTA-TUC	European Free Trade Area-Trade Union Committee
ERO	European Regional Organisation
ERP	European Recovery Program
ERP-TUAC	European Recovery Program-Trade Union Advisory Committee
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
ETUS	European Trade Union Secretariat
FGTB	Fédération Général du Travail du Belgique = ABVV
FO	Force Ouvrière = CGT-FO
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IFCTU	International Federation of Christian Trade Unions = CISC
IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organisation

ISF	International Solidarity Fund
ITS	International Trade Secretariat
LAFTA	Latin American Free Trade Area
LO	Landsorganisationen i Sverige
MOSIT	Movimiento Sindical Independiente
OC	Office Committee (ERO)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
ORIT	Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores
PAFL	Pan-American Federation of Labor
STV	Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores
UIL	Unione Italiana del Lavoro
WCL	World Confederation of Labour
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions

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Explaining International Free Trade Union Organisations

This book analyses the functions of international free trade unions in the post-war period. Through a comparison of two case studies, the European Regional Organisation (ERO) and the Inter-American Regional Workers' Organisation (*Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores*, ORIT), the arguments raised by national labour leaders to create and maintain international and regional trade union organisations are disentangled and assessed. These two secretariats were created in the early 1950s as regional organisations of the non-communist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and represented more than 20 million workers each in Western Europe and the Americas. ERO was dissolved in 1969, while ORIT remains active.¹

The study focuses on the period from 1949 to 1969, both very important years in the history of the international free trade unions. The ICFTU was founded in 1949, symbolising on the one hand, a radical rupture with communist unions, and on the other, the maturation of liberal ideas and the institutionalisation of a trend within the international free labour movement developing from the 1920s onward. The 1950s were formative years for both regional organisations; ERO and ORIT faced internal and external challenges and tried to develop a coherent trade union policy to justify their existence. The end of that decade was critical for both secretariats, as

1 In March 2008, ORIT was replaced by the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA). The TUCA is the regional organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (founded in 2006) in the Americas, and has its headquarters in São Paulo, Brazil. For more information on TUCA, see <<http://www.csa-csi.org/>> accessed 28 April 2010.

parallel European trade union structures and threats to create a new Latin American labour confederation brought into question ERO's and ORIT's utility. ORIT recovered from the crisis quite successfully. ERO did not. This divergent evolution makes comparison intriguing, and understanding why one secretariat dissolved while the other succeeded sheds much light on trade unionists' expectations.

The behaviour of umbrella trade union organisations remains obscure compared to international industrial or trade secretariats.² Whereas the latter “operate in the more pragmatic world of mutual economic [and technical] support”,³ the functions of the former remain shrouded in mystery to both academic analysts and local labour activists. Undoubtedly, as many authors emphasise, the fight against communist trade unions was very important to all ICFTU affiliates, but it does not provide a sufficient explanation for the creation and maintenance of international trade union organisations. As Gary Busch aptly states, “[i]t is not an idle question to ask just what it might be that these trade unionists are doing”.⁴ Or as Eric Hobsbawm suggests, “it is a more interesting task of research to investigate the positive appeal of working-class operational internationalism than to demonstrate, yet again, its obvious limitations”.⁵ During an informal conversation several years ago, Geert Van Goethem⁶ made a similar observation: in his view, it is more interesting and perhaps more difficult to find out the motivations of labour leaders who join an international organisation than to analyse the arguments of those who oppose affiliation.

- 2 J. Windmuller, “International Trade Union Organizations: Structure, Functions, Limitations”, in S. Barkin, W. R. Dymond & E. M. Kassalow, eds, *International Labor* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967), 89, 91.
- 3 G. K. Busch, *Political Currents in the International Trade Union Movement* (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 1980), 19.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 5 E. J. Hobsbawm, “Working-class internationalism”, in F. Van Holthoon & M. van der Linden, eds, *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830–1940* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 9.
- 6 G. Van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International: The World of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913–1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

The focus on the so-called free trade unions is justified by both their size and their blurred ideological nature. Christian-democratic and anarcho-syndicalist labour leaders also formed their own international organisations (the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, founded in 1920; and the International Working Men's Association, founded in 1922) but these were much smaller than the ICFTU and its regional organisations and until the end of the 1960s were largely confined to Europe and Latin America.⁷ Their Christian or anarcho-syndicalist orientation limited their ability to attract members from all over the world, although it did provide them the great advantage of distinctiveness.⁸ Hence the emphasis here is laid on understanding the factors that led to the foundation and maintenance of the ICFTU and its regional organisations.

The exclusion of the Christian and anarcho-syndicalist international confederations, as well as international trade federations/secretariats from this study has implications for the book's conclusions: these findings are limited to the ICFTU and its regional organisations. For this reason I avoid using the term "international labour movement", which would imply studying all forms of international labour co-operation and organisation.

Among the sources of inspiration for this book were Victor Silverman's work on the co-operation between communist and non-communist trade unions in Great Britain and the US during and immediately after the

7 For a historical account of the Christian international organisation, see: P. Pasture, *Histoire du syndicalisme Chrétien International. La difficile recherche d'une troisième voie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999). On the syndicalist IWMA, see: W. Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves": *Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913-1923* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publ., 1989); *ibid.*, "Syndicalist Internationalism before World War II", in M. van der Linden & W. Thorpe, eds, *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1990), 237-260.

8 In 1968 the Christian international dropped its confessional denomination and transformed itself into the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). In November 2006, the ICFTU and the WCL merged into the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Future research could focus on the commonalities and differences between the ICFTU and WCL discourses before the merge, and on the way they have transformed themselves in order to make the foundation of the new organisation possible.

Second World War⁹ and Antonio Martín Artiles's analysis of the European Trade Union Confederation and the construction of the European Union.¹⁰ Following their logic, I suggest revising the current theoretical approaches to the origins and development of international and regional labour organisations.

The historiography of international trade union confederations is characterised by three main interpretative currents, all of which share one important feature, namely a strong scepticism about the efficiency of international labour organisations. One approach focuses on the trade unions' economic interests, a second interpretation stresses the functional purposes of international trade union organisations and a third emphasises politics.¹¹ My argument is that these approaches offer mono-causal explanations and fail to provide a nuanced analysis of the complex internationalist thought and the relatively autonomous position of these organisations.

(1) Economic theories are based on the assumption that the creation of trade unions at the supranational level results from macro-economic mechanisms: the globalisation of labour markets, trade and capital.¹² Indeed, the revolutionary, cosmopolitan character of the capitalist mode of production was the driving force behind socialist internationalism during the modern period. Capitalism revolutionised the mode of production by transforming the individual means of production into a social means of production.¹³

9 V. Silverman, *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labor, 1939–1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

10 A. Martín Artiles, *La Confederación Europea de Sindicatos y la construcción de la Unión Europea* (Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques I Socials, 2003).

11 G. Van Goethem, *De Internationale van Amsterdam. De Wereld van het Internationaal Vakverbond 1913–1945* (Antwerpen/Gent: Houtekiet/AMSAB, 2003), 258–262.

12 A. Howard, "Global Capital and Labor Internationalism in Comparative Historical Perspective: A Marxist Analysis", in *Sociological Inquiry* 65 (1995), 365; M. van der Linden, "Conclusion: The Past and Future of International Trade Unionism", in idem, ed., *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 521–523.

13 F. Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" (Chapter Three: Historical Materialism), in *Marx-Engels Selected Works* <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/index.htm>> accessed 25 September 2008.

This, according to Frederick Engels, led to a fundamental contradiction between “socialised production and capitalist appropriation” as “the social product is appropriated by the individual capitalist”. The revolutionary character of the capitalist mode of production led to its internationalisation: the development of production forces on the national level meant that a wider, international community would eventually evolve.¹⁴ To Marxist socialists, therefore, “the unity of the workers of all countries is a necessity arising out of the fact that the capitalist class, which rules over the workers, does not limit its rule to one country”.¹⁵ These factors explain to a great extent the establishment of the first international workers’ organisations in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In his 1973 publication, Robert Cox highlighted the expansion of multinational corporations (MNCs) and its repercussions for organised labour. In his view, the economically oriented labour response to multinational corporations in the early 1970s could lead “to the creation of new transnational industrial structures through which labour could press for increased control”.¹⁶ Only three years later, however, he expressed his doubts about the ability of organised labour “to deal equitably with the whole range of social issues raised by the changes in a world economy impelled forward by the expansion of MNCs”.¹⁷

Non-Marxist writers also emphasise economic factors when trying to explain why trade unionists engage in or disengage from international activities. Their reasoning flows from the definition of trade unions’ functions. For John Logue “trade unions are economic interest groups ... that seek

14 K. Marx & F. Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 7.

15 V. I. Lenin, “Draft and Explanation of a Programme for the Social-Democratic Party”, in *Marxism-Leninism on Proletarian Internationalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 44.

16 R. W. Cox, “Labor and Transnational Relations”, in R. O. Keohane & J. S. Nye, eds, *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 206.

17 R. W. Cox, “Labor and the Multinationals”, in *Foreign Affairs* 54 (1976), 363.

to maximize their members' standard of living"¹⁸ by undertaking action at the local and national levels, and only if necessary, at the international level. Logue's argument is that Marxist theory "failed to predict the degree to which trade unions would succeed in attaining significant control over their local, and subsequently, national environment, thus undermining the economic necessity for internationalism". He emphasises the rational self-interest of trade unionists and draws two important conclusions: first, "we should expect international activity to occur only when it is a more rational means to members' goals than national activity", and second, "the greater the degree of trade union control over its national environment, the less likely it is to undertake international activity to achieve its members' goals".

(2) Other authors use a functionalist approach to justify the existence of international trade union organisations. Ernst Haas was perhaps the first to apply a functionalist theory of international relations to industrial relations: integration in one sector of economic activity (e.g. in the coal mining sector) would spread to other sectors and stimulate integration of labour at a supranational level.¹⁹ Economic factors thus also play an important role in this approach. The difference between the economic and the functionalist approaches is that the former focuses on economic gains, whereas the latter also highlights the importance of non-material benefits and interests.

According to John Windmuller, international trade union organisations share three common functional tasks: service, missionary and representational. Service activities range from international strike support, exchange of information and research and welfare work to legal or financial assistance to migrating union members and exiled unionists.²⁰ Within this

18 This and the following quotes are taken from: J. Logue, *Toward a Theory of Trade Union Internationalism* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 1980), 17–18, 20–22.

19 E. B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe. Political, Social and Economic Forces: 1950–1957* (London: Stevens & Sons Limited, 1958), 355–389.

20 Windmuller, "International Trade Union Organizations", 88.

category, one can also place negative incentives, which are, according to various authors, strong motivations for trade union leaders to undertake international action: the personal interests of the leadership to acquire domestic prestige and power, or simply pleasure from subsidised trips abroad without really being concerned about international labour solidarity.²¹ The missionary task aims at the propagation of trade unionism around the world. Missionary activities are designed “to gain and hold individual affiliates whenever possible”.²² The representational task or, the “diplomat model of trade union internationalism”,²³ as Richard Hyman calls it, is meant to display and defend labour’s points of view before intergovernmental organisations.

Geert Van Goethem points out a fourth functional argument: recognition. Indeed, national trade unions strive for explicit recognition from international and regional trade union organisations. On the one hand, recognition or non-recognition as national labour representatives can facilitate or block the entrance to intergovernmental agencies; and on the other, it can serve as a certificate of trust to other non-state organisations at the national and international levels.²⁴

(3) Another interpretation of international trade unionism stresses politics. This approach also reflects the chosen definition of trade unions. Gary Bush, for example, differentiates the economic function of local trade unions from the political function of national and international workers’ organisations. In his view, “[i]nternational trade unionism is a political activity”.²⁵ The

21 J. Harrod, *Trade Union Foreign Policy. A Study of British and American Trade Union Activities in Jamaica* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 42, 53; Logue, *Toward a Theory of Trade Union Internationalism*, 13–14; Van Goethem, *De Internationale van Amsterdam*, 261.

22 Windmuller, “International Trade Union Organizations”, 91.

23 R. Hyman, *The International Labour Movement on the Threshold of Two Centuries. Agitation, Organisation, Bureaucracy, Diplomacy* (Stockholm: Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, 2002), 8 <http://www.arbark.se/pdf_wrd/Hyman_int.pdf> accessed 29 January 2008.

24 Van Goethem, *De Internationale van Amsterdam*, 260–261.

25 Busch, *Political Currents in the International Trade Union Movement*, 1.

importance of politics within the international labour movement is also acknowledged by Marcel van der Linden in the concluding remarks on the study that portrays the ICFTU's history, but he specifies that "the *substance* of the politics supported by the international trade union movement has changed".²⁶ Indeed, all international trade union organisations have always defended politically loaded programmes that stemmed from Marxist, social democratic, Christian democratic or liberal traditions.²⁷

This approach also highlights the close co-operation between national trade unions, political parties and public authorities that can lead to interaction and the participation of trade union leaders in the national politics and foreign policy of their respective governments. Robert Cox called this practice "new statecraft", a term he derived from George Liska's study on the foreign policy of the US.²⁸ Private organisations such as trade unions are, according to this view, manipulated "in the service of national foreign policies".²⁹ However these activities can enhance the prestige of labour leaders at home, and therefore raise "questions about who is manipulating whom and in what interests".³⁰

These interpretations each offer valid, albeit partial explanations for the creation and maintenance of international trade union organisations. It is perhaps possible and necessary to develop a larger hypothetical theory that covers all of the aspects identified in the current approaches. Archival research, coupled with a close reading of the scholarly literature on the history of the ICFTU and its regional organisations and on political theories of international relations, led me to characterise their functions by the term "labour liberalism".

26 van der Linden, "Conclusion", 530.

27 Harrod, *Trade Union Foreign Policy*, 48–49.

28 "New statecraft" or "total diplomacy" refers to the conscious policy of penetrating a society or societies by foreign elements. G. Liska, *The New Statecraft: Foreign Aid in American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 1, views foreign aid as "an instrument of foreign policy".

29 Cox, "Labor and Transnational Relations", 205.

30 Ibid.

The present study is thus not only an attempt to revise the current theoretical views to the origin and development of the international trade union organisations, but also to test a new hypothesis with regard to the free labour movement. I argue that because of the hybrid nature of their affiliates, the ICFTU and its regional organisations go beyond the traditional party-related non-communist ideologies (social democracy, Christian democracy and liberalism) and aspire to defend liberal principles in the philosophical sense. Indeed, I believe that social democratic and reformist trade unions, which made up the bulk of ICFTU members, were fundamentally shaped by liberalism. Commenting on an article dealing with Marxist and liberal views on internationalism,³¹ Carl Strikwerda argued: “Liberalism is a huge influence on the labor movement, although too many historians treat it only as the enemy of labor.”³²

A precise definition of “liberalism” does not exist. Nonetheless, those we tend to call “liberal” share certain characteristics that could be considered typical of liberals: the defence of “individual freedom, political participation, private property, and equality of opportunity.”³³ My argument is that free trade unionists strongly defended these principles but added one very important aspect that differentiated them from *laissez-faire*, radical and social liberals, namely a call for organised labour’s active and well-defined participation in the planning and execution of projects aimed at the defence of liberal democracy and socio-economic development at home and abroad. Hence, I use the term “labour liberalism”.

The hypothesis is thus: free trade union leaders behave as transnational non-state actors in the international arena. They are neither purely economic pressure groups nor service agencies or political instruments of the liberal-capitalist world, but rather relatively independent actors attempting

31 M. Rodríguez García, “Early Views on Internationalism: Marxist Socialists vs Liberals”, in idem, ed., *Labour Internationalism: Different Times, Different Faces* – Special issue in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis/Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 84 (2006), 1049–1073.

32 Electronic correspondence with the author, 13 July 2006.

33 M. W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 206–207.

to influence national and international policy-makers. They do not attempt to undermine the world of states and diplomats but rather to create a space where the liberal-democratic principles of organised labour are reflected in the implementation of international arrangements. They aim at increased interaction between state actors and non-state actors (labour and capital) and toward the creation of a corporative world in which violent conflict can be avoided. They defend a liberal vision of the world where “planned free trade”,³⁴ economic integration and tripartite co-operation within a system of collective bargaining can contribute to social justice and peace.

Study Cases and Research Method

The original purpose of this research was a modest endeavour. I intended simply to analyse the commonalities and differences of the free trade union movement in Western Europe and the Americas, with regard to priorities, structures and methods. I also wanted to find out whether there were contacts (and if so, the purposes of these contacts) between the labour leaders of both regions, and to analyse the arguments of trade unionists that refused to join the free labour movement.

However, after almost one year of archival research, careful reading of empirical and theoretical studies on the international labour movement and fruitful discussions with my PhD supervisors and other colleagues, I realised there was a more interesting question about international trade unionism that had not yet been addressed: why are labour leaders who have become relatively successfully integrated in their respective domestic environments interested in international action? This leads to the inevitable corollary question, why have these organisations been maintained if the general assessment of both scholars and activists of international trade union

34 This term refers to Karl Polanyi's phrase “*Laissez-faire* was planned”, in *The Great Transformation* (Beacon Hill: Beacon Press, 1964), 141.

organisations can be summed up in a few words: bureaucratic, inefficient, “virtually parasitic”.³⁵ The “why questions” (explanatory analysis) became, therefore, more important than the “what” and “how questions” (descriptive analysis). As noted below, this shift reflects itself in the thematic approach and structure of the book.

The reasons for the mono-causality within the current theoretical approaches to the development of international trade union organisations can be found in the selection of research objects. Because of the availability of primary sources and secondary literature, many studies pay almost exclusive attention to the points of view of large and powerful trade unions such as the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC). Admittedly, no study of the international labour movement could be made without reference to these organisations, yet focusing too narrowly on them distorts the analysis. I follow George Haupt’s approach and examine the international free labour movement from the perspective of the international and regional secretariats themselves, as well as from the point of view of the individual member-parties or would-be parties, regardless of their size and power.³⁶

Time and space limits do not permit a thorough analysis of every ERO and ORIT affiliate, so I too, am compelled to be selective. Special (although not exclusive) attention is paid to: the British and US unions, because of their political and financial significance to the free labour movement; the Belgian, Mexican and Swedish unions, because of their active participation within their respective regional organisations; and the Ecuadorian, French, Italian, Spanish and Venezuelan unions, because of their political and organisational interest in the free trade union movement.

I concentrate on the ICFTU regional organisations in Western Europe and the Americas (ERO and ORIT respectively) even though the composition of both secretariats was very different. Both of them consisted of

35 Logue, *Toward a Theory of Trade Union Internationalism*, 29.

36 E. Hobsbawm, “Preface”, in G. Haupt, *Aspects of International Socialism: 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), x.

national trade union confederations³⁷ (the units of comparison are therefore of the same level)³⁸ but they varied greatly in terms of the financial independence, structure and organisational strength of their affiliates. Most ERO affiliates had a long tradition of trade union organisation, relied on well-established networks with political-party leaders and did not depend on external financial aid for their functioning. In the Americas, the opposite was true: with the exception of the Canadian, US and a few Latin American unions, most ORIT affiliates were small, young and financially weak. The majority of ERO and ORIT affiliates also developed in very different political and socio-economic contexts.

Such differences do not mean the two cases cannot be compared. To the contrary, it is this heterogeneity that makes comparison intriguing. According to Marc Bloch, there are two conditions for comparison: first, there must be a certain resemblance between the observed instances; and second, there must be certain dissimilarity among them and between the contexts in which they developed.³⁹ Moreover, as Marcel van der Linden argues, the question in comparative history “is never ‘Are two items comparable?’ but ‘*In which respects* are they comparable?’. And that question is related to the question of whether it is meaningful to compare attributes”.⁴⁰ In this case, it seems meaningful to study the (disbanded) ERO and the (preserved) ORIT because comparing the two can help us to understand the free trade unionists’ expectations with regard to international and regional trade union organisations.

The comparative method is used here as an analytical tool to establish – and if possible to explain – the similarities and differences between

37 There were a few exceptions to this rule, for example the Basque Workers’ Organisation (*Sindicatos de Trabajadores Vascos*, STV). However, its applicability depends on whether or not one considers the Basque country to be a nation.

38 M. van der Linden, “Doing Comparative Labour History: Some Preliminaries”, in idem, *Transnational Labour History – Explorations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 175.

39 M. Bloch, “Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes”, in idem, *Mélanges historiques* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963), 17.

40 van der Linden, “Doing Comparative Labour History”, 174.

ERO and ORIT, to raise new questions and to make generalisations that can be applied to other cases. As Heinz-Gerhard Haupt argued, the comparative method can be “used as a laboratory to test theories and to produce hypotheses”.⁴¹ I believe that this method will contribute more to the knowledge of international trade union organisations than the study of individual cases would. The analysis of one case, say ERO, would result in a very detailed account of the organisation’s history, structure, finances and activities, but would not permit us to draw general conclusions on the free trade union movement as a whole.

Comparison allows, in other words, for the posing of big questions. Lex Heerma van Voss, another practitioner of comparative labour history, presented his views with regard to “large” and “small” questions during a lecture on global history of dock and textile workers. He recognises two types of historical research: the most common one aims at the realisation of a detailed and almost complete accounting of a very specific and “small” topic; the other one aims at the opposite, namely at finding a small answer to a very “large” question. Heerma van Voss and his colleagues from the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam) have been carrying out the latter type of research since the mid-1980s.⁴² I follow their tradition, because I believe it stimulates general knowledge and opens doors for future research.

The comparative method, however, also has its disadvantages. As Marc Bloch put it: “*La méthode comparative peut beaucoup ... Mais elle ne peut pas tout: en science, pas de talisman*”.⁴³ Indeed, “[c]omparison poses meth-

41 (Author’s notes) Opening address given by B. Yun-Casalilla & H-G. Haupt, “Comparative History and Transnational History: State of the Art, Main Problematics, Perspectives of Research”, Summer School on *Comparative and Transnational History: New Approaches to the History of Europe*, Florence, European University Institute, 26–30 August 2005.

42 (Author’s notes) L. Heerma van Voss, “De globale geschiedenis van arbeid in havens en textiel (1700–2000)”, Brussels, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 6 November 2007; van der Linden, “Doing Comparative Labour History”, 173.

43 Bloch, “Pour une histoire comparée”, 16.

odological and theoretical problems for the science of history".⁴⁴ One of the main preoccupations of the researcher is the availability of primary sources and the interpretation of the concepts and descriptions found in the various sources.⁴⁵ For this reason, comparative history depends heavily on secondary literature, which is already an interpretation; so the information found in these works needs to be carefully controlled. The heuristic and interpretative problems of this research as well as the way in which I try to solve them will be discussed later in this introductory chapter.

A second problem is the danger of normative framework. Comparison can place one case as a model for other(s). For instance, trans-cultural comparison can place either Western or non-Western culture as a model for the other if a certain phenomenon occurred in either one of them prior to the other.⁴⁶ For this study, danger could exist if European or US unions were treated as models for Latin American unionism. This can be avoided by using sufficient empirical material from both areas in order to provide a context that would help us understand why an event occurred in one instance and not in the other, or why a certain method is used in one region and not in the other. In this way, the two (or more) cases can be placed at the same level of analysis.

A third problem is related to the size of the research question. Because many comparisons deal with vast geographical areas, long periods of time and very diverse topics, the narrative is sometimes scanty. The present study, which compresses the history of the free trade union movement on two continents into one short volume, will undoubtedly leave important issues unanswered. Important lacunae in this research are the views on internationalism among the lower ranks of the trade union apparatus, as well as the participation of women in international labour activities.⁴⁷ Indeed, this is

44 H-G. Haupt, "Comparative History", in N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes, eds, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 2402.

45 van der Linden, "Doing Comparative Labour History", 174.

46 Yun-Casalilla & Haupt, "Comparative History and Transnational History".

47 Three interesting studies on international women's organising in the period prior to the Second World War are: L. J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International*

not only a history of elites, but also a male elite history. As Eric Hobsbawm described George Haupt's history of international socialism, this too is a history of "ideologically motivated minorities".⁴⁸ Perhaps the most important information lacking in this research is the impact of international and regional trade union organisations on the working of national affiliates. Whether and to what extent international labour leaders were able to influence their national counterparts is an issue that cannot be answered by the archival material used for this research. These lacunae can and must be filled in the future, but in my view do not present an insurmountable obstacle to the present study.

Primary Sources

The bulk of information for this research comes from the ICFTU archive, kept at the International Institute of Social History.⁴⁹ This gigantic archive (214 m) contains all the documents relating to the ICFTU and its regional organisations since their inception.⁵⁰ For this study, all documents relating

Women's Movement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); P. Jonsson, S. Neunsinger & J. Sangster, eds, *Crossing Boundaries: Women's Organizing in Europe and the Americas, 1880s–1940s* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2007); G. Van Goethem, "An International Experiment of Women Workers: The International Federation of Working Women", in Rodríguez García, *Labour Internationalism*, 1025–1047.

48 Hobsbawm, "Preface", x.

49 All primary source material in Dutch, French and Spanish has been translated into English by the author.

50 Documents relating to ERO consist of correspondence, minutes, agenda and reports on the meetings of the European Regional Council, ERO Executive Committee, various specialised committees, regional conferences, and summer schools and seminars. Documents relating to ORIT consist of correspondence, reports and minutes concerning the regional congresses, meetings of the Executive Committee, meetings of the Administrative Committee, ORIT finances and trade union education. The archive also contains specific information on the relationship between the ICFTU

to ERO and ORIT have been consulted. The focus of the research were the arguments used by Western European and (North, Central and South) American labour leaders to create and maintain or dissolve trade union structures in their respective regions. The ICFTU/ERO archival material (the minutes and reports of ERO meetings and conferences in particular) is impressively rich in information on ERO affiliates' expectations and views on European political and socio-economic issues. Its completeness was confirmed by means of comparison of the information found in this archive and in the national archives of ERO affiliates in Belgium (*Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond / Fédération Général du Travail de Belgique*) and Sweden (*Landsorganisationen i Sverige*).⁵¹

The ICFTU/ORIT archival material is less detailed. Unlike the ERO documents, the evidence found in the ICFTU/ORIT archive is very scanty in terms of qualitative information. This asymmetry has been solved by using another source found in the ICFTU archive: correspondence with the confederation's individual affiliates. If ORIT members harboured grievances against the regional or international leaderships, or against other ORIT affiliates, these were seldom exposed publicly during meetings and conferences but more often than not revealed in confidential documents.

Other rich sources of information on ORIT are kept in US libraries and archives. The Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives at Cornell University (Ithaca, New York), keep the papers of the US labour leader Serafino Romualdi, who was responsible for contacts

and its individual affiliates worldwide. E. Tuskan, *Inventory of the Archives of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) 1949–1993* (Amsterdam: IISG, 1997), xx–xxiii <<http://www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/i/10751819.php>> accessed 25 January 2008.

51 The ABVV archive was studied in parallel with the ICFTU/ERO archive. I visited the LO archive in May 2006 with a travel grant provided by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO). Thanks to the kind assistance of Klaus Misgeld (senior research fellow in history at Uppsala University and attached to the Labour Movement Archives and Library in Stockholm) and of Per-Johan Jönsson (a Swedish student at Vesalius College of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel who helped me with translations) I was able to confirm the richness of the ICFTU/ERO archive.

with Latin American unions since the mid-1940s.⁵² The George Meany Memorial Archives, where the AFL-CIO records are kept, contain not only valuable information on the US unions' foreign policy, but are also rich in information about trade unions all over the world. This information can be found in the files of the International Affairs Department.⁵³ Another very useful source found in the Meany archives is the collection of interviews with US labour attachés.⁵⁴ The "Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project" – under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (Arlington, Virginia)⁵⁵ – consists of a series of interviews with former

52 The "Romualdi Papers" consist of correspondence with Latin American and Caribbean political and labour leaders, as well as with ICFTU leaders and US scholars; manuscripts, speeches, conference minutes, clippings and articles on the neighbours to the south of the US. Because of the qualitative nature of its information, particular attention was paid to the correspondence Romualdi maintained with dozens of leaders from Europe and the Americas. A major advantage of this research institution is that it offers copying services for foreign researchers. The files on Ecuador, Mexico and Venezuela as well as Romualdi's correspondence with ICFTU and ORIT leaders were photocopied and posted to me in the summer of 2005. *Guide to the Serafino Romualdi Papers, 1936–1967 [bulk 1946–1966]*, Ithaca, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library <<http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/KCL05459.html>> accessed 2 February 2008.

53 In March 2007 I travelled with a FWO grant to Silver Spring, Maryland to conduct research in this archive. The country files with regard to Latin America contain virtually the same information as the Romualdi Papers, so I focused on Romualdi's correspondence with Latino ORIT leaders and with the US Latin Americanist Robert Alexander, professor at Rutgers University. National archives in Europe and the US were not used for the study of international influences on the national social policies of ERO or ORIT affiliates, but for the analysis of the arguments of national labour leaders for the creation and maintenance of international and regional trade union organisations. *The George Meany Memorial Archives*, Silver Spring, National Labor College <<http://www.georgemeany.org/archives/home.html>> accessed 2 February 2008.

54 I am indebted to Bob Reynolds, retired national labour leader and Professor Emeritus, National Labor College (Silver Spring), for suggesting this oral history collection to me.

55 <<http://www.adst.org>> accessed 2 February 2008.

US officers attached to American embassies in the five continents. The collection provides valuable information on the formal contacts between US labour attachés and foreign trade union leaders, as well as personal accounts on the personality and influence of these leaders.

Interviews with ERO and ORIT leaders would have added to the value of this research. Unfortunately, most of them have either passed away, are unable to give interviews because of ill health, or could not be located. The sole exception was Luis Alberto Monge, ORIT general secretary from 1952 to 1958. Monge was president of Costa Rica between 1982 and 1986, so staff members from the Costa Rican embassy in Brussels were kind enough to put me in contact with him. He provided valuable information and clarified many issues that were unclear or incomplete in the written research material.

Additional information on ERO and ORIT was found in the archives of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC, founded in 1973) and of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL⁵⁶). The ETUC archives are kept at the International Institute of Social History, and those of the WCL at the Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society (KADOC), Leuven.⁵⁷ Because of their vastness, these archives were used only to fill gaps in information on European and Latin American trade unions and their relationship with Christian labour organisations.

Secondary Literature

The archival material used for this study is complemented with four types of scholarly studies: first, theoretical studies on international relations; second, theoretical studies on the international labour movement; third,

56 Former International Federation of Christian Trade Unions. See note 8.

57 *Plaatsingslijst van het archief ICV-WVA*, Leuven, Kadoc <<http://kadoc.kuleuven.be>> accessed 8 February 2008.