

**THE INTERNATIONAL  
LABOUR MOVEMENT**

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THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
LABOUR MOVEMENT

*by*

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*Issued under the auspices of the  
Royal Institute of International Affairs*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON      NEW YORK      TORONTO

1945

**OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS**  
**AMEN HOUSE, E.C.4**  
**London Edinburgh Glasgow New York**  
**Toronto Melbourne Capetown Bombay**  
**Calcutta Madras**  
**HUMPHREY MILFORD**  
**PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY**

## PREFACE

**T**HIS book is not a history of the international labour movement. It is mainly concerned with the situation of the movement during the period between the two wars and with its outlook for the future.

International organisation in the labour movement began with the formation of the International Working Men's Association (the First International) in 1864. In course of time the international movement developed a political wing and an industrial wing. The British Labour Party, for example, has been associated internationally with Socialists and Social-Democrats in other countries, while the British Trades Union Congress has formed part of an international organisation with other 'trade union national centres'. Connected with these two main bodies have been a number of international associations and secretariats for special purposes. It is with this network of organisations that the present study is occupied.

Throughout its existence the international labour movement has been an object of hopes and of fears. Both have often been exaggerated. In some countries and at some periods the workers have had an almost romantic belief in 'The International' as an instrument of universal emancipation. But others have feared it as a possible agent of world-wide revolution. In fact it has been neither. Many hoped after the slaughter of 1914-1918 that the international solidarity of labour would prevent the outbreak of another war—that the workers would take their lead from the International and refuse to follow their own Governments. This hope, too, was disappointed. But the failure of the international labour movement to unite the workers of the world, to achieve their complete emancipation, and to avoid the calamity of war, has not resulted in its death. The international idea is as much alive and as vigorous as ever. In spite of disappointments the task of building up an international labour movement will be continued with renewed enthusiasm.

Critics of the International, both within the labour movement and outside it, have seized upon the obvious failures, but they were not always clear as to what they were criticising. Was it the international organisations or their constituent parts in the different countries? Were the leaders at fault or was it the rank and file? Sometimes the policy was wrong, sometimes the action was

feeble; but there were also occasions when the explanation lay in the external circumstances. Many of the disappointments—and some of the fears—were due to misunderstandings as to what the international organisations were attempting to do and what they were in fact capable of doing.

Any attempt to judge the past record of the international labour movement or to assess its future possibilities must be based on a wider knowledge of the facts. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to throw light on the position of the international labour movement by bringing together some of the essential facts and examining some of the most important problems. Of what does the international labour movement consist? What are its strong points and its weaknesses? What has been the extent of its influence? How has it been regarded? Were its activities on the whole beneficial or harmful? Should the movement be fostered or discouraged?

In the first chapter there is a brief outline of the international labour movement and of the way in which it arose. A full history has yet to be written. There have, of course, been histories, particularly of the earlier period, but there is as yet no comprehensive account covering both the political and industrial sides of the movement and bringing the story down to the outbreak of war in 1939. The first chapter of the present study is merely intended to show the present stage of development of the international labour movement and to give the main facts of the story as a background.

Then follows a description of the structure of the movement as it was built up between the two wars. The information given includes particulars of the aims and objects of the various organisations, of their membership at different periods and of the countries in which they had affiliations. The study is restricted to those international bodies with which the free trade unions and the Labour and Socialist parties are connected. These bodies are similar in their general outlook and they are more or less closely associated. The International Co-operative Alliance has been omitted, partly because the co-operative societies work in a field of their own—even though they form one of the three main branches of the labour movement—and partly because a good deal of literature on the international co-operative movement is already available. No account is given of the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, as the Christian or Catholic unions of which it was composed were outside the main stream of the labour movement. In some countries, however, these unions were of great importance. It is worthy of note that under the German occupation the Christian

and 'free' trade unions were frequently able to sink their differences and to co-operate intimately in the resistance movement. The Communist International and its subsidiaries have been excluded from the study, as they form an entirely separate subject. The problem of their relations with the international labour movement is, however, examined.

Two chapters are devoted to an account of the work of the principal international bodies during the period between the two wars. Writers on international Socialism and trade unionism have tended to concentrate on the spectacular questions. Much has been written about the attitude adopted by the international organisations in moments of international crisis but relatively little concerning their other activities. Many misleading judgments have been formed because too little attention was paid to what the organisations were actually trying to do.

In the last two chapters an attempt is made to examine the problems with which the international labour movement has been surrounded. It will be found that many of these problems have been met with in international work generally, e.g., in the work of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation. And they will continue to cause concern in the new international bodies which are now growing up.<sup>1</sup> Prominent among them are the problems of organisation. The importance of these has often been overlooked, yet their solution is vital to the success of international co-operation. It may be more attractive to consider questions of policy, but policies are of little use unless the organisation exists to carry them out. And the policies must have regard both to the possibilities of international action and to its limitations.

Other problems arise in connection with functions and methods. What purposes have the international organisations of the labour movement existed to fulfil and what changes of direction are possible or desirable? What methods have they pursued and what others are open to them? These problems are considered against a general background. The activities of the international labour movement must be seen in relation to the wider problem of promoting co-operation among the nations of the world. International action can be, on the one hand, general and political, aiming at the promotion of peace, or, on the other hand, it can be technical and special, dealing with particular

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, *The International Secretariat of the Future: Lessons from Experience by a Group of Former Officials of the League of Nations*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1944; and *Problems of International Organisation: An Outline for Study Circles*, by R. J. P. Mortished, Workers' Educational Organisation, London, 1944.

problems and interests. Does the work of the international labour movement belong to the first or the second, or to both? And is the movement to function in a world of its own, or is it to occupy a place in the general structure of international organisation?

I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me with this study. My thanks are due to the members of the Chatham House Publications Committee, who discussed the plan of the work with me and read the manuscript, and to a number of friends in the international labour movement who made many valuable comments and suggestions. I am also indebted to my former colleagues in the Research Department of the Transport and General Workers' Union who helped with the research work and the preparation of the index.

In view of the fact that I am now serving on the staff of the International Labour Office I must make it clear that the book was almost completed before I took up my appointment.

J.P.

*February 1945*



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## LIST OF ORGANISATIONS

L.S.I.	Labour and Socialist International
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party
I.F.T.U.	International Federation of Trade Unions
A.F. of L.	American Federation of Labour
C.I.O.	Congress of Industrial Organisations
C.G.T.	Confédération générale du Travail
C.G.T.U.	Confédération générale du Travail unitaire
I.L.O.	International Labour Organisation
I.T.F.	International Transportworkers' Federation
I.C.W.F.	International Clothing Workers' Federation
I.L.F.	International Land Workers' Federation
T.U.C.	Trades Union Congress
I.B.W.W.	International Federation of Building and Wood Workers
I.F.T.W.A.	International Federation of Textile Workers' Asso- ciations
M.I.F.	Miners' International Federation
I.M.F.	International Metal Workers' Federation

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**THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY  
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**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY EBENEZER BAYLIS AND SON, LTD.,  
THE TRINITY PRESS, WORCESTER, AND LONDON**