

## Chapter 4

# The International Trade Union Movement

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### I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

#### A. To 1914

1. The international trade union movement is built on the foundations of millions of local unions. Trade unions form, develop and pursue their primary tasks of defending and improving the conditions of life and work of their members mainly within national systems of industrial relations. Yet, for well over a century, trade unions have also had international interests and commitments, many of

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which they have expressed through international trade union organizations. The purpose of this chapter is to briefly recall this history so that the emerging new features of international unionism can be seen in perspective.<sup>1</sup>

2. Two different types of international trade union organizations established themselves securely in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. One was based on an identity of interests among individual national unions for specific crafts, trades, and industries in various countries and resulted in the formation of what were known as International Trade Secretariats (known as ITSs and re-named Global Union Federations in January of 2002 by agreement of the ITS General Conference). The other type was of a broader character for its members and consisted of the central federations of trade unions, also called national centres.

3. International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) first became established in 1889 with the creation of international federations of typographers and printers, hatters, cigar makers, tobacco workers, and boot and shoe operatives. Their constituent bodies were unions of workers engaged in manufacturing in several European countries. Organizations composed of unions in other trades and industries followed the example in the next few years, including those for miners (1890), clothing workers (1893), metal workers (1890), textile workers (1894), transport workers (1896), and many others. By 1914, twenty-eight ITSs existed. While acknowledging their support of long-range socialist aims, their main efforts were devoted to such practical tasks as disseminating trade information, helping travelling journeymen, and discouraging the international transport of strike-breakers.

4. The second type of international trade union organizations, composed of central trade union federations, emerged from conferences in Copenhagen (1901), Stuttgart (1902) and Dublin (1903). First known as the International Secretariat of Trade Union Centres, the organization called itself the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) from 1913 on. Before the outbreak of war put an end to its activities, it claimed as affiliates about twenty central trade union federations with some 7.7 million individual members, mostly from Europe, but also including the American Federation of Labor (AFL).<sup>2</sup>

## B. FROM 1914 TO 1939

5. After the war the IFTU reorganized itself in 1919 under a new Constitution at a meeting held in Amsterdam, while many ITSs, too, re-established their organizations. Another important development at this time was the establishment of two new organizations: the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) and the

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1. Dreyfus Carew, Van Goethem, Gumbrell-McCormick and van der Linden, *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Peter Lang, 2000), provides a comprehensive history of both the first fifty years of the ICFTU and of its precursors from 1902.

2. See *ibid.*, and van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International* (Ashgate, 2006).

International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (French initials: CISC). The RILU came into existence in 1921 when the leaders of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union decided to create a competing worldwide trade union international, often also called the Profintern. The formation of the so-called Popular Front in 1935 put an end to the activities of the RILU. At that time communist parties and trade unions throughout the world were ordered by Moscow to cooperate with and join democratic political and trade union organizations to stem the advance of Nazi and fascist movements and build up their presence within the mainstream trade unions. The formal dissolution of the RILU, however, occurred only in 1943 when the dominant political party arm, the Communist International (Comintern) was disbanded by Stalin.

6. The creation of a separate Christian trade union international (CISC) in 1920 was the culmination of many years of organizational work among Christian workers in several European nations, particularly Germany, Italy, France, and the Low Countries. First organized at local or regional and then at national levels, the Christian trade unions offered an organizational and philosophical alternative to those believing Catholic and Protestant workers for whom membership in socialist unions, with their anti-clerical and even anti-religious sentiments, was unacceptable.

7. Of the three international federations – IFTU, RILU and CISC – the IFTU was the largest and certainly the most representative, even though its membership fluctuated from a peak of well over 20 million in the immediate post-World War I period to fewer than 10 million after the destruction of the German unions by the Nazi regime. When World War II broke out in 1939, the IFTUs affiliates claimed a total of about 14 million members, including the AFL.

#### C. AFTER 1939

8. World War II did more than merely disrupt the functioning of international trade union organizations. It also created the opportunity to reconsider fundamentally the international trade union structure. For many organizations, post-war labour unity in place of pre-war division became a key objective. A world labour conference, meeting in London in February 1945, decided to disband the IFTU and establish a new and all-encompassing world labour organization, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Its principal initiators were the British Trade Union Congress (TUC), the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU), and the American Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The founding congress was held in Paris in October 1945. The most important absentee was the AFL, which as a matter of principle refused to be associated with unions controlled by governments or political parties, specifically with unions in

communist countries and more generally with communist-dominated unions anywhere.<sup>3</sup>

9. Other organizations that declined to join the WFTU were the affiliates of the CISC. That rather small body re-established itself after the war on a scale even smaller than before 1939, due to the loss of important affiliates in Germany and Italy where post-war drives favouring labour unity had led to the formation of all-encompassing trade unions. In the ensuing decades the CISC gradually loosened its traditional ties to the church and adopted a more secular programme. In 1968 it adopted the name of the World Confederation of Labor (WCL).

10. In the WFTU the co-existence of organizations representing entirely different conceptions of the role of trade unions in society was of relatively short duration. When disagreements over the Marshall Plan and over other political and trade union issues, notably the role and independence of the sectoral internationals (ITs), became unbridgeable, most unions from Western countries severed their ties with the WFTU in 1949. Later in the same year they launched a new organization: the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In this endeavour the AFL joined the unions that disaffiliated from the WFTU. (The AFL and the CIO merged in 1955.)

11. The divisions between the CISC/WCL and the ICFTU that were not overcome in the early post-war years were maintained until November of 2006 when a new international trade union federation, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) was created. The new international brought together the ICFTU, the World Confederation of Labour, and a number of national centres without international affiliation, some of which had left the WFTU without affiliating with another international. The WFTU, although weakened by the changes beginning in 1989 with the end of the cold war, remained in existence.

## II. THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

12. By any measure the ITUC is the most representative of the two global trade union internationals. There was already a considerable growth in the ICFTU, the largest of the predecessor organizations in the 1980s and 1990s when the American AFL-CIO decided to rejoin it in 1981, after an absence of twelve years, and with a rapid growth of affiliations, particularly in Africa and in Central and Eastern Europe. The WCL also added new members, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe and Africa. The ITUC brought together the largest trade union national centres in Europe, North America, Latin American, and Asia/Pacific. In Africa, neither the ICFTU nor the WCL were very representative until recent decades, but the ITUC counts a significant majority of African national centres, including most large confederations. Essentially, the political conflicts of the cold

3. See D. MacShane, *International Labour and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford, 1992); and Carew, *supra*.

war era and the fact that many governments imposed single national centres meant that confederations that did not affiliate exclusively to the Organization of Trade Union Unity (OATUU) for many years suffered from discrimination in that organization. That weakened the internationals on the continent, but is no longer a factor of importance. In the communist countries of Eastern Europe and elsewhere (Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, and the PR of China), neither the ICFTU nor the WCL had any members at all until 1986, when the Polish Solidarnosc joined both. With the collapse of the old Soviet system, a number of trade unions emerged and several established organizations began a process of internal reform. Many joined the ICFTU (including the largest, the Russian FNPR) or, in some cases, the WCL. At the birth of the ITUC in 2006, nearly all of the confederations in Central and Eastern Europe and some in the former Soviet Union, became founding members. The ITUC Constitution was drafted in such a manner that it incorporates the standards of trade union independence it inherited from the ICFTU and the WCL, as well as taking into account the views of a group of ten national centres that were affiliated with neither, but involved in the unification process. Affiliated organizations are to be free from domination by governments, political parties, or other external forces and accept the Confederations aim of developing democratic trade unionism. The constitution specifically recognizes trade union pluralism. The ranks of the ITUC included unions from highly industrialized countries, from emerging economies and from less developed countries.

## A. AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

### 1. Overall Goals

13. The ITUC was founded in Vienna, Austria, on 1–3 November 2006. The Congress, in its constitution and its action programme, formulated its principles and programme in fairly general terms. This reflects the diversity of its membership and the different traditions from which the ITUC springs, primarily derived from the values and policies of the ICFTU and the WCL. Many, perhaps most, of the affiliates of the ICFTU came from socialist or social democratic traditions and most, but not all of the WCL affiliates were originally inspired by Christian values. Shared values include the defence of human and trade union rights, firm opposition to totalitarian regimes, support for genuine efforts to safeguard world peace, endorsement of the struggle for social justice, and demands for the fair distribution of wealth and incomes at national and international levels. In 2008 and 2009, the ITUC mobilized action in a majority of countries for its ‘World Day for Decent Work’. On economic issues, a priority is placed on full employment and on coherent action by the international community to promote the respect of workers’ rights. This includes efforts to build understanding for the links that exist between trade and workers’ rights and

use those connections to strengthen the international support for workers' rights. This takes place at the WTO as well as in the context of bilateral and regional trade and investment agreements. Efforts have also been made, with some recent success, to get core labour standards taken into consideration by the World Bank and its International Finance Corporation (IFC).

14. The financial crisis that began in 2008, which led to a broader economic crisis, might well have degenerated into a depression had there not been concerted action by several major economies to support growth and employment. However, after this initial reaction, the trade union movement has been dissatisfied with subsequent coordination and policies. The ITUC and TUAC led efforts to influence the newly created G-20 and developed a formal role as an interlocutor with governments with the creation of the L20 and the B20. The respective bodies for trade unions and employers have met together and adopted some common positions and have participated in joint consultations with labour ministers and, in 2013 (in Russia) with Labour along with Finance Ministers. Although sometimes satisfied with major elements of policy positions taken by the G20, actual government action after those meetings had not met trade union expectations. Instead, the crisis has led to severe austerity programmes and promotion of so-called flexibility in labour markets. In some cases, this has led to violations of trade union rights. However, governments have failed, in the view of Global Unions, to take the minimum measures necessary to regulate financial markets so that periodic financial crises do not recur.

## **2. Representational and Organizational Work**

15. Most ITUC activities can be divided into one of two categories: representation and organization. Representational work consists of the use of public forums, reports, statements and similar means to express concerns and protests on a wide range of issues, from restrictions on freedom of association to the plight of migrant workers. The ITUC acts as a voice of international labour, campaigning against injustices committed by governments or employers (usually, in cooperation with Global Union Federations) and appealing to the international community to exert moral authority and political and economic pressure on behalf of a particular principle, policy, cause, organization or individual, as in the case of an unjustly imprisoned trade union leader. In this representational work, the ITUC relies on its affiliates to lobby governments in support of agreed international policies that the organization itself presents to the appropriate UN or other international agency.

16. The organizational work of the ITUC is directed chiefly to the promotion and strengthening of trade unionism in areas where unions are weak and vulnerable. The object is to strengthen those organizations that share the philosophy of trade unionism represented by the ITUC. Assistance is mainly in the form of training programmes for union officials. Although the organizational work is a key activity, it is limited by available resources. A number of Solidarity

Support Organisations carry out bilateral development programmes in this area as well. Such organisations are linked with certain national trade union federations, including the American AFL-CIO, the German DGB, the Swedish LO and TCO, the Dutch FNV and CNV, the Belgian CSC, and several others. There is, however, some important cooperation and coordination among those affiliates.

17. The ITUC works closely with the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) in a number of policy areas related to multinational enterprises, 'corporate social responsibility', global social dialogue, corporate governance and sustainable development. In 2012, a memorandum of understanding was agreed between the ITUC and TUAC to formalize its cooperation. Among other things, the General Secretary of TUAC also became the Senior Economic Advisor at the ITUC. The ITUC, the Global Union Federations and TUAC agreed, as part of the unification process, to create a Council of Global Unions (CGU). It is not an organization, but rather a form of structured cooperation. The Secretary of the Council is the General Secretary of the ITUC and the Chair and Vice Chair come from the GUFs. There is a full-time coordinator. The CGU, in addition to being a forum for discussion and sharing of information, is stimulating cooperation among Global Unions in a number of areas. Among its priorities, nearly all related to organizing and recognition, are precarious work, quality public services, communications, climate change, occupational safety and health, migration, and company strategies. The CGU played a major role in coordinating the trade union input in the process of development of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and continues to play an important role in follow-up activities.

18. The ITUC engages in campaigns with its global union partners. Already, in the ICFTU and the WCL, campaigns on very specific as well as general issues have taken place. They have ranged from issues related to poverty and development to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa to support for Solidarnosc in Poland. The ICFTU, in particular, also supported campaigns involving specific companies in cooperation with the autonomous GUFs (ITSs), which were considered to be part of the 'ICFTU family'. Campaigns involve a wide variety of approaches, including interventions with governments and international organizations as well as more direct pressure on targets. They may also involve information and mobilization strategies.

## B. STRUCTURE AND GOVERNMENT

### 1. Membership and Finances

19. The ITUC is mainly composed of national trade union centres. In some instances, two or more national centres of similar scope, but separated by political, philosophical or other differences, have been accepted into membership. Italy (CGIL, CISL and UIL), India (INTUC, HMS and SEWA), France (CGT-FO, CFDT, CGT and CFTC), Brazil (CGT, Força Sindical, CUT and UGT), and South Africa (COSATU; NACTU; FEDUSA and CONSAWU) are examples. In other

instances, dual affiliation stems from the existence of separate organizations for blue and white-collar workers, as in the case of Sweden (LO, SACO, and TCO) and Denmark (LO, FTF, and AKAVA). Individual unions are not generally eligible for membership, but some exceptions have been made.

20. As of 2013, the ITUC indicated that it had 315 affiliated member organizations in 156 countries and territories, with a total membership of 175 million workers. In addition to the added 'reach' of international trade unionism into the former communist countries and expansion in Africa, there has been growth in the Arab region where most governments discourage or prohibit independent unions; the ITUC has members in Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, and Yemen. The changes referred to as the 'Arab Spring' have changed the context in the region and have generated a great deal of activity, particularly through the ITUC Office in Jordan, but had not led to any significant new membership. The major gaps in membership at the global level are most of the CIS countries and China where free-trade unionism is not yet allowed (although some Hong Kong and Taiwanese unions are members).

21. To support its core activities, the ITUC depends essentially on two sources of income: regular affiliation fees from all members and voluntary contributions from the more affluent ones. Regular affiliation fees make up at least 90% of the total. For 2007, affiliation fees are set at EUR 182.20 per one thousand members. However, affiliation fees differ based on a schedule adopted by the General Council that is related to the level of development in the different countries.

22. In addition, the ITUC receives development cooperation support from extra-budgetary sources, primarily for trade union education. Such resources, which grew considerably in the first years of the existence of the ITUC, allow the Confederation to assist affiliates and regions beyond what would be possible with income only from affiliation fees. The GUFs and TUAC also receive extra-budgetary funds.

## **2. Governing Bodies and Secretariat**

23. Policy-making responsibilities in the ITUC are divided among several bodies. Supreme authority is vested in a Congress that meets not less than every four years. Because of their relatively large size and the long intervals between meetings, the congresses set overall policy guidelines. The highest body between congresses is the General Council that normally meets once a year and is composed of seventy-eight members with substitutes. Representation is determined largely on a geographical basis, but there are also dedicated seats for women and young people based on candidates proposed by the Women's and Youth Committees, respectively. In addition, there is an Executive Bureau composed of twenty-five titular members, which normally meets twice a year. The General Secretary is a General Council member *ex officio*, and the Global Union

Federations and TUAC are all entitled to be represented as non-voting members. Urgent matters arising between Council sessions are placed before the Executive Bureau, which is primarily responsible for overseeing finances and making recommendations in those areas to the General Council.

24. Day-to-day ITUC activities are the responsibility of a secretariat headed by a General Secretary, who is elected by the Congress. He/she is assisted by two Deputy General Secretaries. The first General Secretary of the ITUC was Guy Ryder (who became Director-General of the ILO). Sharan Burrow, former President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) was elected at the ITUC Congress in Vancouver in 2010. She is the first woman General Secretary in the ITUC, or of its predecessor organizations.

### **3. Regional Organizations**

25. The ITUC has established regional organizations that grew out of the respective structures of the ICFTU and the WCL. They are the African Regional Organization (ITUC – AF), American Regional Organization (TUCA), and the Asia-Pacific Regional Organization (ITUC-AP).

26. Neither the ICFTU nor the WCL had regional organizations in Europe after the establishment of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in 1973. However, the ITUC has established a regional structure for Europe, the ITUC Pan-European Regional Council (PERC) with a small secretariat. The General Secretary of the ETUC also serves as the General Secretary of PERC. The geographic coverage of the PERC, however, goes beyond that of the ETUC, including some national centres from the independent republics of the former Soviet Union.

## **III. THE WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

27. From 1949 until 1989, a substantial portion of the WFTU's principal constituents was the labour organizations in countries that were governed by communist parties. In addition, the WFTU contained a substantial number of labour organizations from non-communist countries, although most of these groups are of only secondary importance on their home grounds. One could, therefore, characterize the WFTU as being largely the international trade union arm of the Soviet Bloc. With the collapse of Soviet-model communism, first in Central and Eastern Europe and then in the USSR itself, the WFTU was brought to the verge of collapse. Although successor national organizations to former WFTU affiliates continue to exist in most of the former Soviet bloc countries, all left the WFTU between 1989 and 1992. Its only remaining significant affiliates in Europe, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) of France and the All Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ), withdrew in 1995 and 1997, respectively. Both have become members of the ITUC. The Syrian General Federation of Trade Unions and a few Arab country organizations together with the Central de

Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC) of Cuba, the Vietnam Federation of Trade Unions (VFTU), the All India Trades Union Congress (AITUC), and a few other members are left struggling to keep the organization afloat. Its headquarters, formerly in Prague, are now in Athens, Greece.

#### A. AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

28. Under the terms of its constitution, the WFTU's overall aim was and is 'to improve the living and working conditions of the people of all lands'. This is to be achieved by the organization and unity of the world's working class, assistance to unions in less-developed countries, opposition to war, and an unremitting struggle against fascism. Despite this very broad mandate, the inability of trade unions in communist countries to play an adversary role in domestic affairs severely circumscribed the field of action of the WFTU inside the old Soviet Bloc. With the collapse of Soviet power its affiliates rapidly left what was the symbolic apex of a system of party control over labour activities. Many of these organizations have passed through extensive internal reforms to adapt to a new role in a more democratic society and a market-oriented economy. Others are still in a changing situation or not adapting. Those that do successfully change will no doubt survive; others will probably decline into insignificance. However, it seems rather unlikely that the WFTU in anything like its previous form will recover, in large part because organizations that really reform have no interest in remaining affiliated.

29. A foremost but not admitted WFTU objective had always been firm support for the foreign policy goals of the Soviet Union. The lone and almost inexplicable exception was the WFTU secretariat's rebuke of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact powers, but that singular deviation was quickly redressed and those responsible for it removed from their official positions. More characteristic were the uniformly optimistic accounts in WFTU publications of working conditions and trade union activities in the Soviet Union and other communist countries, together with exposures of violations of trade union freedoms and human rights in Western countries and a carefully selected group of Third World countries. An important WFTU activity, conducted in cooperation with certain affiliates, consisted of training programmes for trade union leaders and activists from less developed countries. Considerable importance was also attached to the WFTU presence at United Nations headquarters and in the specialized UN agencies, especially the International Labour Organization (ILO).

#### B. STRUCTURE AND GOVERNMENT

##### 1. Membership and Finances

30. In 1986 the WFTU's approximately ninety affiliates contained a total of somewhere between 200 and 250 million members. Whatever the precise figure

might have been, the Soviet labour federation (AUCCTU) alone accounted for over half of the total. It should be noted, of course, that union membership in communist countries was usually close to the total non-agricultural labour force, if only because social benefits and various entitlements (access to vacation resorts, social insurance, etc.) were often administered by the unions. In other words, union membership conferred such important advantages and non-membership such serious dangers of discrimination, that the price of not belonging was too high to be countenanced by all but the most committed dissidents. More recent figures are not available but are certainly considerably reduced, and if counted in terms of paid-up membership may be negligible.

31. Not all communist-led countries were represented in the WFTU. Yugoslavia's unions were expelled in 1950 after Tito rejected Soviet hegemony. They were later invited to return but declined, although they had sent observers to WFTU congresses and exchanged trade union delegations with Soviet Bloc countries for many years. The break-up of Yugoslavia has now also led to a multiplicity of centres in each newly independent State, some of which are newly established while others are the successors to the republic-level bodies of the old Confederation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia. The Albania Union Federation left in the mid-1960s. After the democratic revolution in that country it changed its name and constitution and new independent unions were also established. The All China Federation of Trade Unions exited in the mid-1960s, after the Chinese government's break with the USSR became irreparable.

32. Very little is known about the WFTU's finances. Some years ago, a budget figure of USD 1.6 million for 1976 was very exceptionally made public. This would have been considerably higher by 1989. However, at the present time its income from members is probably very little and investment income and grants from friendly governments are probably its main means of survival. The WFTU claims to have obtained additional member organisations, including from South Africa, in the period since its 2011 Congress.

## **2. Governing Bodies and Secretariat**

33. Supreme authority is vested in a Congress convened most recently in Athens, Greece, in April of 2011. Previous Congresses were in Havana in December 2005, in New Delhi in March 2000, and in Damascus in 1994. The WFTU does not publish membership figures. The Athens council voted for the election (picked by the General Council) on an expanded Presidential Council of forty. The current president is Mohamad Shaban Assouz of the GFTU of Syria. The General Secretary is George Mavrikos of PAME, Greece.

## **3. Trade Union Internationals**

34. The WFTU established Trade Union Internationals (TUI) for individual economic sectors such as mining, metals and transport. Whether the TUIs actually

performed conventional industrial functions is uncertain, for in countries governed by communist parties, the main tasks assigned to trade unions at least until very recently were production oriented. Only secondarily were the unions concerned with protective and claims-making activities.

35. TUI policies and activities were controlled, at least in a general sense, by the WFTU, for the TUIs are not autonomous bodies. They report to the WFTU and are financed by allocations from the WFTU rather than by dues collected directly from their own member unions. Like the WFTU itself, the TUIs have lost many of their affiliates since 1989 and show few signs of activity. There have been some changes in the number and jurisdictions of TUIs, but there are no indications of any growing influence or effectiveness.

#### IV. OTHER INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL OR SUB-REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

##### A. THE TRADE UNION ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO THE OECD (TUAC-OECD)

36. When the Marshall Plan for European economic recovery from the ravages of World War II neared completion in the early 1960s, the participating governments in Europe and North America decided to maintain certain supranational structures that had played a key role in the administration of the programme. From its inception in 1948 trade unions had been closely associated with this work in an advisory capacity, and when the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) came into existence in 1960, the TUAC and the Business and Industrial Advisory Committee (BIAC) were formed and accorded consultative privileges that remain an exceptional example among inter-governmental organizations of openness to the views of social partners.<sup>4</sup> More recently, a grouping of NGOs, OECD Watch, was also given consultative status.

37. TUAC's affiliates consist of fifty-nine national trade union centres in the thirty-four OECD industrialized countries which together represent some 60 million workers. TUAC also has associate members in a majority of the non-OECD G-20. Virtually all TUAC members are also affiliates of the ITUC, but no affiliates of the WFTU have ever been admitted to membership. Its affiliates meet twice a year in plenary sessions. The current General Secretary is John Evans, a former official of the European Trade Union Institute, FIET (now UNI), and the TUC of the UK.

38. Because the OECD itself is basically a research-oriented, idea-producing, and consensus-seeking organization in key areas of economic policies, a major TUAC objective is to ensure that adequate consideration is given to trade union

4. See P. Gaskell, *TUAC Marks 50 Years: TUAC 1948–1998: Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Symposium* (TUAC, 1998).

viewpoints in the preparation of OECD reports, studies and policy recommendations to member governments. In recent years, OECD agenda items of chief interest to TUAC have included employment creation, corporate governance, education, trade issues, tax havens, corruption, and the development and supervision of international guidelines for the conduct of multinational companies, an area in which the OECD has done pioneering work. TUAC plays the central role in preparing trade union submissions to and organizing meetings with the annual summits of the Group of Eight, the OECD Ministerial Council, and in preparatory work on a number of other issues. Increasingly, TUAC is serving as a resource as well as leading activities in the economic and social area beyond the countries of the OECD, including on the social responsibilities of business and governance issues in close cooperation with the ITUC, the ETUC and the GUFs. TUAC plays a major role, in cooperation with the ITUC, in the preparation of Global Unions' statements for the G-20 and is involved in meetings in connection with the G-20.

#### B. THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

39. By far the most important trade union body at the European regional level is the ETUC. It came into being in 1973, but had several forerunners that cannot be reviewed here.<sup>5</sup> The ETUC currently comprises eighty-five member organizations, from a total of thirty-six countries in Western, Central and Eastern Europe, and ten industry federations. All in all, the ETUC represents the interests of 60 million trade unionists at the European level. Headquarters are in the International Trade Union House, the same building as the ITUC in Brussels, where most European agencies of concern to the ETUC have their central offices. Congresses are held every four years. The current General Secretary is Bernadette Segol, the former General Secretary of UNI Europa.

40. The ETUC is an independent body, organizationally and financially. Its membership includes almost all trade union national centres in Western European countries (with a few exceptions noted below) and an increasing number of union centres in Central and Eastern Europe, and most of its activities are centred on the promotion and defence of joint trade union interests in the EU and other European-wide bodies. Nearly all ETUC affiliates belong to the ITUC. There is close cooperation between the ETUC and the ITUC and they have formed together a regional structure of the ITUC, the PERC.

41. ETUC policies and activities reflect the primary concerns of its members. Insofar as the EU has developed its policies on a Single Market and Economic and Monetary Union leading to an increased coordination of economic and social policies, the ETUC seeks to ensure that labour's priorities are taken into account. The ETUC thus largely acts as a lobby in the context of a supranational agency, supplementing and – to a certain extent – harmonizing the separate national efforts

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5. See J.P. Windmuller, *European Regionalism: A New Factor in International Labour*, 7 *Indus. Rel. J.* 35–48 (1976).

of its member organizations. It also bargains with its counterpart employers' organization, principally Business Europe (formerly UNICE), and in some cases has concluded agreements on issues such as part-time work, fixed-term contracts, and private employment agencies. Areas of concern to the ETUC have included unemployment and the need for more employment-oriented economic policies, the Social Charter and the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty, the social aspects of European summits, the defence of the public service and the liberalization of services, the extension of industrial democracy throughout the Single Market and the creation of European Works Councils in large multinational companies, the adoption of integrated energy policies, proposals to improve the work environment, and efforts to eliminate discriminatory treatment of the weaker segments of the labour force (women, young workers, migrants, the handicapped, etc.). The ETUC has received funding from the Commission for some of its activities and has established the European Trade Union Institute for Research, Education and Health and Safety<sup>6</sup> covering research, occupational health and safety, and training. The Commission also funds trade union participation in a wide range of consultative meetings.

42. Political issues have generally been of secondary importance in ETUC activities, although the organization regularly adopts formal resolutions expressing its support of political freedom, democratic forms of government, and strict observance of human and trade union rights. If differences on some of these issues exist, they tend to be matters of emphasis rather than principle and can usually be overcome by judicious formulations. The financial/economic crisis that began in 2008 had posed a major challenge to the ETUC, which has opposed severe conditions imposed on some countries with negative consequences for working conditions, living standards, and workers' rights.

43. One long-running but now largely resolved controversy involved the eligibility for ETUC membership of Communist-led trade union organizations in Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal. Here the views of key ETUC affiliates diverged quite sharply. One group, led by the British TUC, considered all-inclusiveness to be more important than ideological compatibility and favoured their admission, while another group, headed by the German DGB, opposed admission on grounds of principle, that is, that the ETUC's doors should not be open to trade unions whose commitment to democracy is less than wholehearted. However, as the European communist parties broke away from their historic ties to Moscow, a parallel process of internal reform in the unions occurred. The Italian CGIL was taken in at an early date in the 1970s, and CCOO of Spain and CGT of Portugal in the early 1990s. The CGT of France was admitted into membership in 1998.

44. To round out its structure, the ETUC has promoted the establishment of individual industry committees to represent the European-wide interests of workers and their unions in particular economic sectors, as for example, in manufacturing/mining, agriculture and communications. The industry committees

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6. The ETUC's many publications are an invaluable resource on the policies and structure of the European trade unions and the ETUC.

currently act as lobbies and pressure groups vis-à-vis European institutions but are gradually playing a larger industrial relations role, although comprehensive collective bargaining by sector has yet to emerge in spite of the existence of a large number of European Works Councils. The industry committees are recognized as members of the Confederation.

45. The relationship of the ETUC's European industry committees to the Global Union Federations, which cover the same sectors, has raised certain jurisdictional problems. Some industry committees operate with a high degree of autonomy, while others are linked more closely to the GUFs in their particular economic sectors, and in fact even depend on them for vital services. The conflicting pulls and the competitive channels of authority as between the ETUC and the GUFs, created by the ETUC's decision to have both national centres and international sectoral organizations as affiliates, have, at times, been a source of tension.

### C. THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN TRADE UNION UNITY

46. Trade unionism in most African countries began during the colonial era and was often closely linked to the independence movement. Several regional organizations for Africa have already appeared and then disappeared, some oriented toward Western conceptions of trade unionism, and others more compatible with the WFTU trade union model. During the era of one-party states and dictatorship most African governments showed little tolerance for trade union pluralism or for trade unions independent of government control, and with their support, the intergovernmental Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1973 established a regional trade union organization – the OATUU – that was intended to be an all-inclusive and unitary regional trade union body for Africa. But in recent years the OATUU's claim to exercise a regional monopoly has received several setbacks, and an increasing number of African trade unions have affiliated with the ITUC. The OATUU claims a membership of seventy-four affiliates in fifty-two African countries with about 25 million individual union members. The General Secretary is the Nigerian Owei Lakemfa.

47. The OATUU maintains working relations with the ITUC and the WFTU and cooperates with them in various activities such as labour education programmes. But prior to the democratization wave in Africa in the 1990s, it also followed closely the political and ideological positions adopted by the OAU, which has now become the African Union (AU) and still reflects to a certain extent pan-Africanist ideas and a deference to control by undemocratic governments of trade unions. The ITUC-AF has obtained a recognized status with the AU. The OATUU has adopted a position of so-called 'positive neutrality' in world affairs and proclaimed itself to be an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, and anti-Zionist organization. The major targets of its criticism were forces external to the region, in particular multinational corporations, their governments in Western countries and the international financial institutions. By

contrast, African governments and their sometimes very harsh labour and social policies were treated with much circumspection. Of the obscure financial arrangements in the OATUU it can be said with confidence that income from affiliation fees is insignificant. It relies on government subsidies from Sudan, Nigeria, and perhaps elsewhere. The OATUU did not accept invitations to participate in the African trade union unity process related to the establishment of the ITUC and subsequent efforts to build unity have failed.

D. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF ARAB TRADE UNIONS

48. The International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU) was founded in Damascus, the capital of the Syrian Arab Republic, on 24 March 1956 as a result of the meeting held by the leaders of seven Arab trade union organizations. For many years, it was close to the WFTU and responded to trade union confederations in the region that were most often controlled by ruling parties and/or States.

49. Many of the affiliates of ICATU are now also members of the ITUC. Originally, there were only a few national centres affiliated with the ICFTU coming from North Africa, where the ICFTU was associated with the independence struggle. With the evolution of the region, democratic forces have grown stronger and positions have increasingly been taken in favour of freedom of association and trade union independence. The General Secretary, Rajab Maatoug of Libya, was elected at the Congress held in Sudan in February of 2010. That election and other action at the Congress seem to have halted the slow progress towards support for trade union independence by ICATU.

50. ICATU has extensive trade union education activities, mostly carried out through its Arab Institute for Labour Studies. There have also been some activities carried out with funding from Solidarity Support Organizations. The ITUC created a forum for Arab trade union organizations and was considering the establishment of a more formal sub-regional structure.

E. SUB-REGIONAL BODIES

51. Regional coalitions of countries often lead, sooner or later, to the emergence of parallel coalitions of trade unions. That tendency applies not only to genuine regional alliances, as in the case of the EU, but also to interregional and sub-regional groupings. A sub-regional organization in Asia was created covering the ASEAN countries. Other groupings have been set up, most often without or with small secretariats, to correspond to various inter-governmental organizations. Such bodies have been created in Mercosur, for example, and in the countries of Southern Africa (and, more recently, in West and East Africa).

52. Another group of this kind is the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS), a sub-regional association of trade union federations in the five Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, Iceland), founded in 1972, whose membership was expressly limited to organizations affiliated both with the ICFTU (now ITUC) and ETUC. The NFS includes federations representing the particular interests of professional and managerial employees, all of which have also become members of the ITUC, ETUC, and TUAC. The Nordic Council coordinates the policies of its member organizations on socio-economic and labour market issues pending before the Nordic governments, such as labour mobility, social welfare, social insurance, and international trade; prepares research papers and policy positions on these matters; and serves as a device for reaching an identity of views among Nordic trade unions participating in international labour bodies. By acting as a unified bloc in the ITUC, ETUC, TUAC, ILO, and similar organizations, the unions of the Nordic countries increase their weight and impact. Moreover, their joint views carry great force in bilateral contacts with sister organizations elsewhere, such as the British, German, and American national centres.

## V. GLOBAL UNION FEDERATIONS

53. The organizations to be reviewed in this section, the GUFs, differ from those in the preceding sections in that they are composed of individual national unions grouped according to major sectors of industry or occupation. Their mandate is primarily economic or industrial, and their focus is on developments and problems in particular economic or industrial sectors. Consequently, they are sometimes referred to as industrial internationals. They maintain close ties with the ITUC and are non-voting members of its General Council.

### A. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

#### 1. Relations with Global Internationals

54. The GUFs are autonomous and self-governing organizations. Collectively, their relationship to the ICFTU was based on the so-called Milan Agreement of 1951, which was modified over the years. With the creation of the ITUC, a new agreement was negotiated for structured cooperation among the GUFs, the ITUC and TUAC. Like the Milan Agreement, it acknowledges the sectoral coverage of each of the GUFs. The CGU, created by the Agreement, meets at least once a year and replaces the General Conference of the Global Union Federations. In addition, at least one meeting a year is held of the General Secretaries.

55. The principle of autonomy determines not only the relations between the GUFs, the ITUC and TUAC, but also among the GUFs themselves. Most

cooperation among the GUFs takes place on an informal basis. They consider themselves to be parts of the same international trade union movement, sharing similar values and conceptions with regard to the position of trade unions in society.

## 2. Membership and Finances

56. There are eight GUFs. The number has reduced in recent years as the result of mergers, but their total membership has increased substantially in the last couple of decades, although many are suffering membership losses more recently, particularly in developed countries, largely due to the effects of economic restructuring. Although Western Europe and North America account for the bulk of GUF membership payments, GUFs include affiliates from all continents (Table 4.1).

57. Each GUF has its own sources of income. Each GUF has a dues structure of its own. For those GUFs that are engaged in particularly extensive activities in Third World countries, special levies and supplemental outside funding constitute important sources of extra income. Special grants for educational and union-building programmes have been made available by the ILO and through the respective national centres and unions from the foreign aid agencies of European and North American governments.

*Table 4.1 The Global Union Federations (2009)*

	<i>Total Members (Millions)</i>	<i>Affiliates</i>	<i>Countries</i>
IndustriALL	50	670	140
Education International (EI)	30	401	172
Public Services International (PSI)	20	650	148
Union Network International (UNI)	20	900	150
Building and Wood Workers International (BWI)	12	328	130
International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)	4.5	700	150
International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF)	12	388	124
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)	0.6	152	100

### **3. Governing Bodies and Sector Groups**

58. Although each GUF operates under its own system of internal governance, a fairly common pattern prevails which usually includes a general assembly or Congress, an executive board, and the elected officers and staff. The congresses set the broad policy guidelines and are useful occasions to cement the ties between the GUF and its affiliated organizations, particularly those affiliates that are not sufficiently large to hold a seat on the executive board. A key role in each GUF is played by its top full-time official, the general secretary.

59. When the ITSs (original name of the GUFs) were first established toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, many covered only a single occupation or a limited industrial sector. That is no longer the case. Mergers and the rise of new industries, coupled with the effect of union mergers aimed at financial consolidation and the improvement of services, have transformed most GUFs into multi-industrial or multi-occupational bodies whose component sub-units sometimes face quite different challenges in their spheres of activity. To cope with this internal diversification, several GUFs have established special industrial sectors. Many have also created national councils that bring together national affiliates. In 1995, the International Chemical, Energy, and General Workers Federation (ICEF) merged with the Miners' International Federation (MIF) to form the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mining and General Workers (ICEM). In 2012, the ICEM joined with the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) and the International Textile, Leather, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) to form IndustriALL. In addition, in some sectors, the historical reasons for the existence of competing internationals have become of diminished importance. For example, the International Federation of Free Teachers Union (IFFTU) and the World Confederation of Organizations in the Teaching Profession merged in February 1993 to form a new GUF, the Education International, which was part of the 'ICFTU family'. More recently, the World Confederation of Teachers (a sectoral body of the WCL) joined EI. In 2000, the Union Network International was formed from the white-collar ITS (FIET), Communication International (CI), the International Graphical Workers' Federation (IGF), and the International Committee of Media and Entertainment Unions (MEI). It has twelve sectors and three inter-professional groups. In different ways, WCL organizations have come together with the GUFs in the formation of Building and Wood Workers International, through affiliations to the ICEM (now IndustriALL), and the joining of the ITF, in addition to EI.

#### **B. AIMS AND ACTIVITIES**

60. Advancing the joint interests of their constituents, and particularly their economic interests, remains the principal aim of the GUFs. They do, of course, also declare their support of the search for a more just social order, the protection

of human and trade union rights, the extension of democratic forms of government, and the maintenance of peace with freedom. But their traditional orientation and their structural make-up leads them to stress practical trade union work, and this they perform in a variety of ways.<sup>7</sup>

## **1. Solidarity and Organizational Work**

61. Mobilizing international support on behalf of an affiliated organization involved in a major domestic conflict is one such activity. Support may be expressed in various forms: moral encouragement, appeals to member organizations to extend financial assistance, coordination of international actions against employers, or public condemnation of a government for particularly harsh anti-union measures.

62. A major portion of GUF activities since the early 1950s has been organizational work in Third World countries. The aim is the establishment or reinforcement of individual unions to the point where they can effectively represent the interests of their members and at the same time contribute to the development and modernization of their societies.

## **2. Information and Research**

63. Disseminating information about economic conditions and terms of employment in particular industrial sectors has long been one of the most useful services that the GUFs provide to their members.

64. As long as collective bargaining remains primarily a national rather than an international activity, the influence that the GUFs can exert on the outcome will be a relatively modest one. However, the expansion of multinational companies during the past few decades, the adoption by the OECD, ILO and other international bodies of international codes of conduct for employers, and the extension of the Single European Market in 1993 all helped open the door to the possibility for a greater international bargaining role for GUFs. Some initial steps in that direction have already been taken. In fact, global social dialogue has exploded in recent years. In addition to informal contacts and what is, in effect, international trade union recognition by many companies, a limited, but important, form of industrial relations is emerging. There are around 100 international framework agreements (or global framework agreements) signed between multinational enterprises and GUFs. This has profoundly changed the role of GUFs and brought them closer to their affiliates in terms of industrial relations. In addition, the ITF has negotiated with the International Maritime Employers Committee a collective bargaining agreement on employment conditions on IMEC ships registered in flag of convenience states.

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7. For a GUF engaged in a broad range of activities on behalf of employee interests, see H.R. Northrup and R.L. Rowan, *The International Transport Workers and Flag of Convenience Shipping* (The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1983).

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

65. Although trade unions must generally operate within national economic, social, political, and legal contexts, they have nevertheless established a complex even if somewhat fragmented network of international organizations. To some extent, the differences are caused by the functional distinctions between the broad political concerns of national trade union centres and the more specific industrial concerns of individual national unions. But that is only a partial explanation. Political commitments and regional attachments have been important determinants of international union structures. Following the major changes in the political map of the world in the late 1980s and 1990s, and the far-reaching challenges posed by the process of continuing technological change coupled with trade and investment liberalization and privatization, often termed globalization, international union structures are evolving rapidly.

66. In retrospect, the turning point in international trade union affairs was the emergence of the free Polish trade union *Solidarnosc* in 1980. It will be recalled that the strikes of August 1980 were resolved by the Gdansk agreements that accorded recognition to *Solidarnosc* as a trade union independent of control by the ruling Polish Communist Party. This was anathema to the Leninist conception of the role of trade unions as a transition belt for the Party to the workers. When, in 1981, the Polish government was replaced by that of General Jaruzelski, who imposed martial law, the failure of the communist model of the workers' state became apparent to nearly everybody. Martial law did not restore the old system nor end the challenge of *Solidarnosc*, which re-emerged forcefully in the strikes of 1988. The crisis was only resolved by the creation of a Round Table through which *Solidarnosc* effectively negotiated a new Constitution, breaking the control of the Party/military monopoly on government.

67. It is important to note that the starting point for the Round Table discussions in Poland was the implementation of the 1984 ILO Commission of Enquiry report on Freedom of Association in Poland that originated from a complaint lodged by representatives from ICFTU affiliates based on the dissolution of *Solidarnosc* in December 1981. The confrontation within the international trade union movement between the Leninist conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the vanguard role of the Party and the social democratic/liberal view that 'workers ... have the right to establish and join organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization' (Article 2 of ILO Convention 87), which was enshrined in the creation of the ILO in 1919 and was the ideological frontline in the division of Europe in the post-war period, was decisively resolved in favour of the ICFTU. The consequence of this breakthrough sent shockwaves not just through the Soviet-dominated countries of Central and Eastern Europe but throughout the world. In many developing countries, governments had adapted the communist ideas of Party control of unions using nationalism as a form of self-legitimation. The cooperation between the ICFTU and the WCL in support of their common affiliate, *Solidarnosc*, also helped to show a fundamental alignment of thinking when it came to free-trade unionism and democracy between the two

organizations; something that also helped lead to the unification of the independent trade union movement in 2006 with the establishment of the ITUC. Solidarnosc, the only double affiliate of the ICFTU and WCL other than the ELA-STV from the Basque Country in Spain, made unification a priority and helped put it on the international trade union agenda. Possibilities for strengthening international trade union cooperation on the basis of a shared belief in freedom of association have enlarged considerably in terms both of the relations between national centres and also between industrial or occupational unions.

68. While the ITUC and its predecessor organizations, the ICFTU and the WCL, the GUFs and their member organizations have always regarded freedom of association as a fundamental right for workers generally, a strand of liberal philosophy often considers that individual contracts should take precedence over collective organization and agreements. This has undermined the rights of workers to bargain collectively in several countries. These legal changes have made it more difficult for trade unions to create or maintain the counterbalance to the power of employers which lay at the heart of the welfare state and the social market economy. Coupled with the challenge to national industrial relations and social security systems posed by the emergence of powerful international market forces, financial concentration, and large corporations, this political trend is obliging unions to work out new approaches to organization and to the means for achieving their social and economic goals. In addition, with the financial/economic crisis of that began in 2008, pressure increased on the livelihoods and rights of public employees in many countries. That requires building a new consensus around the contribution and value of public services.

69. There have also been far-reaching changes in the organization of work in recent years with consequences for the effective right to organize and bargain collectively. The existence of an employment relationship is often necessary to trigger the right to organize. Bargaining relations can become complicated when work is contracted out or outsourced, or when agency labour is used or services are privatized or other changes are made. When such changes increase the precariousness of employment, they may also increase the fear of workers based on their insecure situations, making it more difficult to take the risk of forming or joining a trade union.

70. The effects of the integration of the global economy helped to focus the attention by national trade unions on forces that were beyond their purely national control. There were mobilizations on issues like the need for workers rights to be strengthened rather than weakened by trade and investment agreements. A clear sign of the growing importance of this issue was the demonstrations, in which, by far, the largest contingents were trade unionists, at the meeting of the WTO ministerial in Seattle in 1999. The trade union movement remains very concerned by some of the effects of tendencies in the world economy. These include the emergence, for the first time since the 1980s, of leveraged buy-outs based on debt with a real and often devastating impact on specific firms and dangers for the overall economy. What has become known as financialization, often involving private equity firms with access to huge resources, stands traditional notions of

productivity and even profitability on their heads. This is also increasing pressure for the globalization of solidarity. In addition to the campaigns to try to influence the direction of the WTO, attention was given to the role of the international financial institutions. Within the World Bank, greater sensitivity has grown to the importance of core labour standards, including freedom of association and collective bargaining, although the support is universal neither in headquarters nor in field offices. The ILO is considered by trade unions to be the 'social pillar' of a more coherent multilateral system. Its Declaration on Principles on Fundamental Rights at Work adopted in 1998 became the widely accepted definition of workers' human rights in the international community.

71. The 1998 Declaration became an element in global industrial relations. The Declaration rights became an inescapable part of 'corporate social responsibility' even if they were often empty words when unilaterally declared rather than negotiated based on a balance of power. In 2008, the International Labour Conference adopted the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization. This provides a wider range of principles derived from international labour standards that helps to build a more comprehensive social policy framework, influence national government priorities, and focus the work of the International Labour Office.

72. The historic unification of the democratic trade union movement in 2006 in Vienna was not just a new international organization. It was also the recognition of the development of a new international trade unionism. The national agendas and the international and regional agendas had become much closer, in part due to the impact of the internationalization of the economy. There was a growing consensus that more and more of the solutions to the problems of workers and to the injustices in the world would not be found exclusively at the national level and in the national context. This also required a closer cooperation among the GUFs and the ITUC and TUAC. This began in the ICFTU with the partnership that came out of the 1996 ICFTU Congress in Brussels and progressed to the establishment of the CGU in January of 2007.

73. Regionalization is not always seen as part of globalization and some trade union organizations focus on the regions while not clearly seeing the global dimension. Some of this is inevitable because of the sheer volume of changes at the regional level, particularly in Europe. At both sectoral and national centre levels, this can lead to tensions and even barriers to solidarity.

74. By comparison with the decades of ideological confrontation, which were often fought most fiercely within the international trade union movement, global labour policy is less a specialist activity of small, rather separate international departments of unions but more an added dimension of the broad union agenda with the overlapping of international, regional and national agendas driven by the pressing needs of members. The union internationals themselves are changing to meet the new priorities of affiliates and are increasingly adept in the use of the new

information technologies and the public presentation of their activities and policies to the media, a process which is itself forcing change.<sup>8</sup>

75. Both the supporters and critics of international trade unionism sometimes exaggerate its importance, but the debates within the movement about policies and activities have often proved to be a significant bellwether of trends in the role of trade unions. Freedom of association remains central to the existence of trade unions. Combined with struggles to defend unions under attack from hostile regimes or employers is the effort to seek support in furthering the wider social and economic aims in developing countries. In addition, long established unions in Europe and North America now call for support from other regions in their efforts to obtain recognition and collective agreements with multinational companies. Modern international trade unionism is increasingly multifaceted and multidimensional. Yet it is often faced with the difficult task of mobilizing significant resources to address new issues of considerable importance to the future of unions from national organizations that themselves are undergoing difficult and costly internal reforms. The 1990s have seen a major turning point in the way unions look at their international relations and the structures they developed in the past. The new century is already resulting in further changes, but they take place on a canvas that has many layers of experience that should not be neglected. The purpose of this brief review is to provide some perspective to those who will study the new patterns of international trade unionism by explaining at least some of its rich history.

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8. See [www.global-unions.org](http://www.global-unions.org), a joint website of the GUFs, ITUC and TUAC.

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#### LIST OF INTERNATIONAL UNION WEBSITES

- BWI [www.bwint.org](http://www.bwint.org).  
EI [www.ei-ie.org](http://www.ei-ie.org).  
Global Unions (ITUC, GUF, TUAC) [www.global-unions.org](http://www.global-unions.org).  
ICEM [www.icem.org](http://www.icem.org).  
IFJ [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org).  
IMF [www.imfmetal.org](http://www.imfmetal.org).  
ITF [www.itf.org.uk](http://www.itf.org.uk).  
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International Viewpoint is published under the responsibility of the Bureau of the Fourth International. Signed articles do not necessarily reflect editorial policy. Articles can be reprinted with acknowledgement, and a live link if possible. The neo-liberal policies of the last twenty years have had important consequences for the trade union movement. We have, however, to make a distinction between the objective effects, those that are so to speak interiorised, of these policies on the trade union movement as a result of the transformation of work and of the forms of employment, and the measures taken by the ruling class and its representatives in the parliaments by means of changes in legislation that are explicitly. Trade union, also called labor union, an association of workers in a particular trade, industry, or company created for the purpose of securing improvements in pay, benefits, working conditions, or social and political status through collective bargaining. Read more about trade unions in this article. In many countries trade unionism is synonymous with the term labour movement . Smaller associations of workers started appearing in Britain in the 18th century, but they remained sporadic and short-lived through most of the 19th century, in part because of the hostility they encountered from employers and government groups that resented this new form of political and economic activism. 3 The international trade-union movement is characterised by a lack of inner cohesion, by the steady rate at which quite important sections of the proletariat are leaving the unions, and by the policy, stubbornly held to by the reformists, of class collaboration with the aim of using capital in the interests of labour. The recent period has seen the existence of extremely close links between the bourgeois governments and the reformist leaders and an even greater subordination of the interests of the working masses to the interests of the ruling classes. II. The Amsterdam International's Attack on the Revolutionary Trade Unions. 4 The reformist leaders, yielding to bourgeois pressure all along the line, have also begun an attack on the revolutionary workers. Over the course of World War I, the international labour movement proposed a comprehensive programme of protection for the working classes, which, conceived as compensation for its support of the war, was supposed to become an international agreement after the war. In 1919, politicians took up this programme in order to give social stability to the postwar order. Despite open disappointment and sharp critique, however, the revived International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) very quickly adapted itself to this mechanism. The IFTU now increasingly oriented its international activities around the lobby work of the ILO. Discover the world's research.