At the end of October 1941, representatives from twenty-five states converged on New York to attend an international conference organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO). According to the American economist Carter Goodrich, also chairman of the governing body of the ILO, the 1941 conference was an act of faith and the expression of a desire to reaffirm the values of democracy and justice. At a moment when nationalisms were reaching their peak, the conference bore witness to the vitality of internationalism in wartime. The conference was motivated by the need to mobilize populations to fight together against Nazism, but it also sought to lay the foundations for a lasting peace based on global economic and social stability.1

In the eyes of many observers, the Great Depression, unemployment and poverty had been the principal causes of the rise of Nazism and the outburst of violence that it unleashed. The ‘Four Freedoms’ speech, delivered by Roosevelt in January 1941, was shaped by two concerns: while aimed first and foremost at American citizens, it also formulated global objectives. In addition to political freedoms, it promised a social policy that would ensure freedom from want. On 14 August 1941, the eight articles of the Atlantic Charter co-signed by Roosevelt and Churchill took these broad aims further, particularly Article Five which proclaimed a ‘desire to bring about the fullest cooperation between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labour standards, economic advancement and social security’. It promised, in a sense, a ‘New Deal for the world’.2

It was within this context that the extraordinary session of the ILO was convened in New York. In accordance with the tripartite rules particular to this organization, government delegates were joined by representatives of employers and workers; the conference was therefore a platform capable

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of mobilizing public opinion. When the conference came to an end in November 1941 the ILO was presented as a ‘war making and peace planning organization’.

In December 1941, the United States entered the war. On 1 January 1942, President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, the Soviet plenipotentiary Maxim Litvinov and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Tse-Ven Soong, together with representatives from twenty-two other governments, founded the United Nations. A brief founding statement defined the terms and limits of the military alliance against the Axis powers. In its preamble, it reaffirmed the validity of the principles of the Atlantic Charter, including their social dimension.

The ILO, however, was not invited to the major UN conferences which, from 1943 onwards, set about planning for peace. It was not even mentioned in the resolutions of the Dumbarton Oaks conference in August 1944, where the United Nations discussed the establishment of an economic and social council, and it was only represented informally at the conference in San Francisco in May 1945, at which the founding charter of the United Nations was discussed.

The gradual disappearance of the ILO in international post-war planning has often been interpreted as a logical consequence of the replacement of Geneva system by that of ‘New York’ and as an expression of the shifting centre of gravity of global power from Europe to the United States. However, unlike the League of Nations, the ILO survived the war. It became one specialized agency of the UN system in March 1946 and in 1969 its director general, the American David Morse, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

This article seeks to engage with this paradoxical history in order to examine the role of actors from the world of labour and the evolution of approaches to social issues in plans for the organization of the post-war world. It is based on two methodological premises. Firstly, international organizations can be ‘used’ as observatories, as sites for the exchange of ideas and expertise. The ILO thus offers a lens through which the circulation of social ideas during the war and post-war can be examined and a

3 Plesch. America, Hitler and the UN, p. 2.
means of denationalizing our understanding of social policies. Secondly, the ‘internationalist utopia’ put forward during the Second World War must also be resituated within a longer-term project and set of experiences forged in the crucible of the inter-war international organizations. The war was certainly a rupture, but it must also be seen as a moment when plans formulated during the inter-war period could be put into practice.

Based on these two premises, and through the lens of the ILO, this article examines the evolution of the relationship between political and social forces in the Allied world between 1941 and 1947 and assesses how this evolution led to a reformulation of the questions of inequality and social justice on a global level.

Post-War Planning: An International Undertaking

From 1939 onwards, the political powers hostile to Nazism had become convinced that international coordination was essential both from the conduct of the war and for the preparation of the peace. Many US politicians believed that the failure of the Versailles system was essentially the consequence of a lack of international planning and an inability to handle the global problems that resulted from the conflict. While various national governments had appointed officials to take charge of reconstruction – in May 1940, Arthur Greenwood was put in charge of coordinating reconstruction plans in Churchill’s War Cabinet – international coordination also seemed necessary. The League of Nations and the ILO, which continued to operate with reduced budgets, were able to provide the staff and expertise to this planning process. Some of the Geneva agencies, now installed on the American continent, managed to establish themselves as major players.

8 Borgwardt, A New Deal for the World, pp. 14-44.
9 The Geneva organizations faced a reduction in their budget. Under the leadership of its acting director, the Irishman Sean Lester, the budget of the League of Nations fell to one-third of the previous level, and it employed only 100 staff compared to 700. The ILO retained 63 staff of the 316 it had employed in 1939. The United States, Great Britain and the Commonwealth countries contributed two-thirds of the budget of the ILO during the war. Victor-Yves Ghebali, Organisation internationale et guerre mondiale: le cas de la Société des Nations et de l’Organisation Internationale du Travail pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (Grenoble: Institut d’études politiques, 1975).
This was the case of the ILO. Its new director, the American John Winant, a personal friend of Roosevelt and former member of the Social Security Board, managed to negotiate with the Canadian government for the provisional installation of the organization’s secretariat (International Labour Office), reduced to around forty staff, on the campus of McGill University in Montreal. Some officials, under the direction of Marius Viple, stayed in Geneva, which remained the official seat of the organization. The League of Nations’ Headquarter also stayed in Geneva but two of its technical sections found refuge in the United States: the Opium Board (responsible for regulating the drug trade) moved to Washington and its Economic and Financial Organisation (EFO) was hosted by Princeton University, where its work was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. However because it failed to negotiate its move to the United States, the dynamic health section (League of Nations Health Organization, LNHO) dwindled during the war.

The logistical and financial support offered to the Geneva organizations by Britain, the United States and the Commonwealth during the war stemmed from a series of motivations. The technical expertise that these organizations were able to offer the warring states undoubtedly played an important role. Since 1919 the International Labour Office, as well as the League of Nations through its various technical sections (especially the EFO and LNHO), had accumulated considerable expertise, from which American actors had themselves greatly benefited. For this reason, the US government declared its strong support for the development of the technical dimension of the Geneva organizations. The accession of the United States to the ILO in 1934 bore witness to that interest. In 1939 the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, had supported the guidelines of the Bruce Report (named after the Australian politician Stanley Bruce) which provided for the further development and institutionalization of the economic, social and humanitarian

activities of the League.\textsuperscript{13} In 1940, the various international agencies of the Geneva system therefore had considerable technical expertise in the field of international planning, accumulated since the 1920s, and were therefore valuable assistants in the preparations for peace.\textsuperscript{14}

In this respect, the ILO had a double advantage: its mission was in harmony with the objectives of the American New Deal, in which its director John Winant, had been a key figure. On 6 November 1941, speaking to the assembled delegates of the labour conference, President Roosevelt underlined this fact: ‘In the planning of such international action, the International Labour Organization, with its representation of labour and management, its technical knowledge and experience, will be an invaluable instrument for peace. Your organization will have an essential part to play in building up a stable international system of social justice for all peoples everywhere.’\textsuperscript{15}

The specific role assigned to the ILO in planning for the post-war period can thus be explained by the support of the Roosevelt administration, though this was also an outcome of the role attributed to trade unions for war mobilization. Since its foundation in 1919, the ILO had gradually established itself as a kind of international parliament of labour and a forum for the trade unions. In 1939 its survival had greatly depended on their unconditional support. The increase in funding for the ILO by the British authorities, crucial to the survival of the organization, was secured by Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC).\textsuperscript{16} Union leaders believed that, through the ILO, they would be able to participate in peace negotiations and bring about the triumph of their long-standing social demands.\textsuperscript{17} In 1939, at the Inter-American Conference in Havana, the US workers’ representative James B. Carey underlined that ‘It is imperative that organized labour should have a determining voice in fixing the terms of


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Proceedings of the International Labour Conference} (1941) (henceforth ILC 1941), p. 158.


the peace settlement which follows the present war. Only by giving labour such a voice can we ensure that the peace settlement, unlike that of 1919, is based upon justice for all people of all nations.' The president of the conference, the Argentinian union leader Jorge José Domenech, recalled meanwhile that ‘we agree with the statement that “it is imperative that organized labour should have a determining voice in fixing the terms of the peace settlement which follows the present war”, and we are trying to do our share in preparing the way for the transition from wartime to peace-time economy’.18

In preparation for the New York conference, the heads of section of the International Labour Office met several times between April and May to try to establish the core framework for a social programme of post-war planning. Beyond their differences, they agreed on the need to hear the voices of workers (i.e. the unions) when planning for the post-war period. They saw this, moreover, as a political signal, directed particularly towards public opinion in Latin America, and as a way of reaffirming the democratic vitality of the Allied countries.19

During the New York conference in 1941, the workers’ representatives managed to secure recognition of the need for tripartite representation, which was put in place by the ILO in the institutions for post-war planning and peace negotiations.20 The ILO was also responsible for organizing reconstruction policies and ensuring ‘the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field’.21 Its mandate was therefore clearly extended to the economic sphere. This expansion of its field of expertise was founded on two main arguments. Fundamentally, as Jaromír Necas, former president of the administrative council and delegate of the Czechoslovak government, stated, all these social questions were ‘closely linked to economic life’. Social policy, without which there would be no lasting peace, required international economic cooperation.22

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19 ILO-Archives, PWR 1/01, The ILO and Post-War Policy and Reorganization.
20 See the speeches by trade unionists, particularly those from Britain and the United States, in ILC 1941.
21 ‘Resolution on Post-War Emergency and Reconstruction Measures’, ILC 1941, p. 163.
22 See in this respect the resolution submitted by Mr Jan Masaryk and Mr Jaromír Necas, government delegates, Mr Richard Morawetz, employers’ delegate and Mr Joseph Kosina, worker’s delegate, Czechoslovakia, ILC 1941, p. 167, and Necas’s speech, p. 27. On the importance of this issue for the ILO, see the minutes of the 1941 conference. ‘The Social Objective in Wartime and World Reconstruction: The New York Conference of the International Labour Organisation’, International Labour Review (January 1942), pp. 1-24.
also necessitated by reconstruction itself. Governments in exile accepted economic planning all the more readily for the fact that they were in urgent need of international assistance. They were also the first to send reports to the Office in which they outlined their needs in the course of 1942.\textsuperscript{23} Closely tied to longer-term planning, and thought of as a ‘New Deal for the world’, this type of reconstruction project would also gain the support of the US Secretary of Labour Frances Perkins.\textsuperscript{24}

**Social Security for All**

In 1941 in New York, Edward Phelan, the newly designated acting director of the organization, stressed the importance of ensuring ‘economic and social security’ for everyone in the world after the war.\textsuperscript{25} In so doing, he was explicitly echoing the Atlantic Charter and the statements of US and British governments, as well as those of the two powerful British and American trade union confederations.

The ILO was already able to offer Allied countries its expertise in the field of social security.\textsuperscript{26} In this respect, ILO officials continued to act in the framework of a long-standing collaboration with American partners.\textsuperscript{27} The Office had been responding to requests from the country since the 1920s, but relations took a more formal turn with the launch of the New Deal in 1933. They were further strengthened by the entry of the United States into the ILO in August 1934, the implementation of the Social Security Plan and the establishment of the Social Security Board (SSB) which, under the leadership of John Winant, brought officials with a strong international outlook.\textsuperscript{28} During the early years of the Second World War, these ties intensified. Oswald Stein, director of the social security section and deputy director

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} ILO-Archives, PWR 1/17, PWR 1/31
  \item \textsuperscript{24} ILO-Archives, Zi/61/1/3, Correspondence between Phelan and Perkins in December 1941.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} ILC 1941, pp. 88-95.
\end{itemize}
of the ILO in 1942 and 1943, played an essential role in this process.\(^{29}\) In an article published in September 1941, probably written before the Atlantic Charter, he sketched out the broad lines of this new social security system.\(^{30}\) This article was the short version of the long report published in 1942 which set out the details for a new era of planning a comprehensive social security system.\(^{31}\) In June 1943 Oswald Stein argued, with a touch of humour, in a letter to one of his aides that ‘just like the Catholic Church, social security should be universal, and [it is] therefore necessary for all nations to get social security into their heads’.\(^{32}\) It was precisely on this question of universality that he worked during the war.

He regularly went to Washington where he provided very effective technical assistance on social security to various members of the Department of Labour.\(^{33}\) Given his international knowledge, he was also invited to participate in the spring of 1942 in the work of the Beveridge committee. In 1943, while the report was causing controversy in Britain, Oswald Stein insisted, in opposition to Edward Phelan the acting Director General, that a conference of experts be organized around Beveridge.\(^{34}\) He wanted to make the most of Beveridge’s visit to the American continent and, with the support of Carter Goodrich\(^{35}\), intended to continue publicizing the report around the United States.\(^{36}\) The meeting in Montreal in July 1943 was clearly

\(^{29}\) On Oswald Stein, see his personnel file in ILO-Archives, P 1289, and ‘Osvald Stein’, International Labour Review (February 1944), pp. 139-144.


\(^{31}\) ILO, Approaches to Social Security, Studies and Reports, M. 18, Montreal, 1942. This report formed the basis of a 76-page memorandum written in April 1942 which Stein submitted to the Beveridge Committee. ILO-Archives, SI 2/0/25/2.

\(^{32}\) ILO-Archives, SI 23/3.


\(^{34}\) See the following correspondence in the ILO-Archives, SI 23/0; Phelan’s cable of 23 May 1943: ‘Essential meeting should not be built around individual but convene on basis independent technical agenda’; and Stein’s letter to Rogers, 25/5/1943: ‘The London Offices won over a far superior authority in Washington and at the same time won over Beveridge, whose reputation today is global, rightly or wrongly (I believe rightly). Various correspondence in the ILO-Archives, SI 23/3, reveal that Phelan wanted to avoid all publicity around the Montreal meeting, fearing difficulties with the British authorities.

\(^{35}\) ILO-Archives, SI 23/0. Cable from Stein to Phelan, 21 May 1943.

\(^{36}\) The visit of Beveridge to the United States was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation and was a great triumph.
intended as a means of internationalizing the social security model.\textsuperscript{37} He invited representatives of the American continent to the meeting, and would have liked to have added experts from the Commonwealth states of South Africa and Australia, ‘countries engaged in the comprehensive reform of social security’.\textsuperscript{38}

Alongside the provision of expertise to developed countries, war years also saw an increase in technical missions to the countries of Latin America; which had explicitly requested such assistance at the conferences in Havana in 1939 and New York in 1941. Once again, the ILO officials could mobilize expertise expressed in the 1930s. Adrien Tixier, former head of the social insurance section, led specialist missions during the war for the Mexican and Peruvian governments on social security and the labour code.\textsuperscript{39} The Czechoslovak expert Emil Schönbaum, who had conducted numerous missions in the Balkans on behalf of the ILO in the 1930s, wrote a social security code for Ecuador and helped the Mexican and Chilean governments establish systems of social insurance. He was also active in Paraguay and Venezuela and set up a miners’ pension scheme in Bolivia.\textsuperscript{40}

The dissemination of social security, the centrepiece of the Atlantic Charter and the foundation on which to construct a stable world, formed the heart of the work of the International Labour Office during the Second World War. However, despite the resolutions that had been enthusiastically passed at the conference in 1941, its activity in the field of economic planning remained extremely modest and almost seems to have been suspended from the middle of 1943, at the very moment that plans for peacetime were given a new boost by the foundation of the United Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.

A Peace without Workers

From 1943 onwards, the role of the international organizations in Geneva, and particularly that of the ILO in major international post-war conferences, waned considerably. Neither the ILO nor the LNHO was invited to the conference organized by the United Nations on food and agriculture in Hot Springs in May 1943, even though the LNHO had been contacted in January 1942 by the British Government to provide information in the

\textsuperscript{37} ILO-Archives, Si 23/3, Note de Stein à Stack, 19-6-1943.
\textsuperscript{38} ILO-Archives, Si 23/0.
\textsuperscript{39} ILO-Archives, Z 1/1/1/9, Correspondence between Phelan and Tixier, 1940-1944.
\textsuperscript{40} ILO-Archives, P 3926.
field of nutrition. In 1945, neither the League of Nations nor the ILO was invited to San Francisco.

The sidelining of the ILO was first severely felt by the global trade union movement, which interpreted it as a sign of its own marginalization. In a telegram written in September 1943, following the Emergency Council of the International Federation of Trade Unions, and sent to Edward Phelan and to the governments of the United Nations, the representatives of the International Federation of Trade Unions expressed strongest disappointment regarding position forced by allied governments particularly big powers upon ILO deliberately kept away from practical preparatory work regarding post-war reconstruction. Nearly 2 years ago at the NY conference over 30 governments unanimously and solemnly undertook great number of commitments. Since then responsible governments had several occasions to implement their pledges but they just ignored them. International organized labour bitterly deplores this state of affairs indicating that spirit of Atlantic Charter only in speeches of responsible statesmen not in deeds.

Like the ILO in San Francisco, the trade unions were not invited to the peace negotiations.

The disappearance of organized labour in the peace settlement and the decline of the ILO resulted from a wide array of causes. A desire to forget the Geneva system, which was remembered in association with the crisis of the 1930s and the failure of the Versailles system, clearly played a role. More fundamentally, however, the disappearance of the ILO reflects the transformation of social power relations both globally and within different nation-states, as well as the declining role of the labour movement as early as 1942. This decline was accompanied by a broader calling into question of the notion, developed in the 1930s, that economic planning and social welfare should be closely associated in order to ensure political stability in the world.

From a strictly diplomatic point of view, the ILO gradually lost the privileged support that it had previously enjoyed from the great powers. In 1941, John Winant was appointed US ambassador in the UK and

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41 Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation, 1921-1946* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 435.
an Irishman, Edward Phelan, became Acting Director. He secured the support of the US government but the British were suspicious. Unlike Winant, Phelan never had direct links with the Roosevelt administration.\(^{43}\) Moreover, the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 and the United Nations Declaration in January 1942 led to a triple rupture. Firstly, need to conduct war operations gave back a preponderant influence to national policy makers and global leadership clearly passed to the United States and the Soviet Union, further reducing the role of international organizations.\(^{44}\) Secondly, within the state apparatus of the USA, the role of the State Department and the military authorities in the organization of production and the setting of labour standards increased at the expense of the influence of the Department of Labour.\(^{45}\) Thirdly, the United Nations Declaration ushered the Soviet Union into world diplomacy, from which it had been excluded, with the exception of its brief admittance to the League of Nations between 1934 and 1939, since 1917. Soviet officials were suspicious of the League; their distrust was fuelled by their exit in 1939. In the case of the ILO, a fundamental ideological antagonism also added to this hostility: the organization was founded in 1919 specifically to promote reformist solutions and bring the revolutionary movement to a halt. Tripartism, which carefully distinguished between governments, trade unions and employers’ representatives, reflected a vision that contradicted the centrally planned command economy that existed in the USSR.\(^{46}\) In return, trade unions of communist persuasion, and the Soviet authorities themselves, manifested a marked hostility to the organization until 1954, the date of the entry of the Soviets into the ILO.\(^{47}\) For its part, the organization was also clearly influenced by political and

\(^{43}\) Van Goethem (2009), pp. 315-317. The mysterious death of Oswald Stein, deputy director of the ILO in 1943 and very close to the American administration, constituted a significant loss for the organisation in this respect.


\(^{47}\) The Soviet Union first joined the ILO in 1934 as an automatic result of its admittance to the League of Nations, but it was barely active within the organization. In 1939 the USSR withdrew from the League and the ILO. It entered the UN from the moment of its foundation but did not re-join the ILO. Meanwhile, Czechoslovak actors in particular, as well as some Poles, were very active in the ILO from 1919 onwards.
trade union forces hostile to the communists. The American Federation of Labour (AFL), which monopolized American representation at the ILO, fought in the national sphere against the development of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which was more open to communist influences, and opposed all the projects for rapprochement with the Soviet Union supported by Walter Citrine. Hostile to the communist model, this British trade unionist nevertheless wanted to ensure a place for organized labour in the negotiations and plans for peace; to do so inevitably implied an engagement with Soviet trade unionism. The TUC therefore decided in September 1943 to organize a major international conference, to which the communist unions and the CIO were also invited. Held in February 1945, it was the founding moment of the World Federation of Trade Unions, of which Citrine, moreover, became president. However, the AFL, which did not join the new global trade union federation, was already preparing, with the assistance of the Office of Strategic Services, for the global trade union scission that would occur in 1949.48 This trade union ‘cold war’, launched in 1943 by the AFL, clearly weakened the position of organized labour in post-war projects. This conflict weighed all the more heavily for the fact that, during the war, the global social-democratic trade union movement, organized within the ‘International Federation of Trade Unions’, had been greatly weakened.

In the United States itself, the rivalry between the AFL and the CIO helped to weaken the position of organized labour in an ambiguous context. On the one hand, the role of trade unionism in the war was institutionalized through the War Labour Board, but on the other hand, it came under the control of a state bureaucracy and lost its autonomy. Finally, and most importantly, the war was a moment when the power of both military and private interests within the state apparatus and American society were reinforced at the expense of the New Deal planners and trade unions.49

Reconstructing or Planning the World of Tomorrow

While both political leaders and the officials of international organizations agreed on the need to develop plans for the post-war world, they were divided over the nature of such plans. Between April and May 1941, during meetings organized at the International Labour Office between heads of sections, two visions were put forward. Some, like the French Socialist Adrien Tixier (a specialist in social insurance) or the Belgian Pierre Waelbroeck (responsible for questions of unemployment) supported large coordinated economic projects to reduce unemployment. To do so they drew on the idea, developed by Albert Thomas in the early 1930s, of implementing international plans for major construction projects financed by the Bank for International Settlements. But they were also continuing a trend for planning that had been very dynamic during the 1930s. Advocates of this trend stressed the need to invent a democratic form of planning in response to the models implemented by fascist and communist states. During the war these states continued indeed to exert a strong effect of attraction on public opinion in Latin America in particular. However, other actors in the ILO, including Phelan himself and Carter Goodrich, felt that the Office should not over-extend its purview beyond its social responsibilities and felt that any long-term economic planning should be avoided. Frederick Leggett, British government delegate to the ILO, shared this opinion. It was also the position of the employers group, which was increasingly reticent towards any form of interventionism from 1943 onwards. This hostility toward state regulation prevailed in the both global arena and the United States at the very moment that economic planning and the organization of social dialogue were gaining ground in national resistance movements in Europe. In August 1943, the US Congress decided by a narrow majority not to renew funding for the National Resources Planning Board, thereby excluding the pro-planning New Dealers from the US administration. In November 1943, the launch of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) made rehabilitation a priority over economic planning. The year 1943 therefore seems to mark a clear shift away from interventionism. This is evidenced by the growing influence exerted by the

50 On this point, see the file dedicated to this policy in ILO-Archives, CAT 6B-7-4 and L1/14/3.
classical economists of the Economic and Financial Organisation of the League of Nations, which had taken up residence in Princeton. Under the direction of the British economist Alexander Loveday, this section made plans for the transition to peace that favoured the liberalization of world trade, seen as a solution to the unemployment that demobilization would inevitably entail.\textsuperscript{53} It is on this model that the Bretton Woods System was later developed.\textsuperscript{54}

\section*{From Reconstruction to Development}

In November 1942, the New Dealers, losing influence in the US administration, had entered organizations dedicated to the reconstruction of Europe such as the Office of Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation Operations (OFRRO), created to provide relief to victims of war in areas reoccupied by Allied forces. The office was headed by one of Roosevelt's close associates, the former governor of New York Herbert Lehman. From November 1943, Lehman also ran the United Nation Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, which internationalized the activities of OFRRO. The agency gathered together the forty-four ‘united nations’ and was in fact the first organization of the UN system. Employing 20,000 people between November 1943 and its disappearance in 1947 (far more than the United Nations until the 1970s) it set itself the task of taking care of liberated populations and organizing the return of refugees.\textsuperscript{55} The creation of UNRRA fitted clearly within an American liberal tradition initiated by Hoover after the First World War. Throughout its existence, the United States provided 70 per cent of UNRRA's funding; the vast majority of its staff was American, including many experts from the New Deal. Despite being largely an American undertaking, UNRRA nevertheless greatly benefited from the technical expertise developed by the organizations of the Geneva system. Leading personalities among the staff of the LNHO joined UNRRA, including its founder and former director


Ludwik Rajchman, bringing to it his skills in the field of epidemiology. Nevertheless, the organization only maintained very weak relations with the ILO. In addition to the declared hostility of the USSR, the personnel and goals of the two organizations were fundamentally different. UNRRA performed an essentially humanitarian function; its purpose was not to provide social and economic security for all but to get the economy working again in order to avoid chaos and revolution.

However, the New Dealers involved in UNRRA progressively widened its reconstruction mission, transforming the organization into a development agency, especially in Central Europe and the Balkans. The US Congress, opposed to giving aid to the communists in power in these countries, did not prolong its mandate, and the Economic Recovery Program, or the Marshall Plan, took over from UNRRA in 1947. This project turned its back on the New Deal and its implementation marked the beginning of the Cold War.

The progressivists and New Dealers channelled their humanitarian messianism into serving a project of global development, among them David Morse, who became director general of the ILO in 1948. Development policies implemented in the framework of international programmes after the Second World War actually took on an age-old question: the political consequences that inevitably result from the increasing economic and social inequalities between the different countries of the world. Global social inequalities, not only those existing within a single country, were widely

57 See the failures of collaboration between UNRRA and ILO in ILO-Archives, Z 6/3/16.
discussed in various international forums during the war, and developing the economies of the poorest countries in order to ensure post-war global stability seemed to be a necessity. This concern was closely linked to debates on the future status of colonies, their underdevelopment being used as a justification for their lack of independence.

The colonial question re-emerged at the ILO in 1943, at the very moment when the organization was gradually being marginalized in European reconstruction plans. In an article published in the *International Labour Review* in February 1943, Wilfrid Benson, the official in charge of colonial questions, outlined a reform plan for the colonies which, cautiously, stressed the need to implement a policy of economic and social development and encouraged the internationalization of these issues. Once again, the ILO was able to draw on expertise accumulated during the inter-war period. In the late 1930s, the organization had prepared a convention (29) which sought to regulate the use of ‘native labour’. By recommending the abolition of forced colonial labour, which should eventually be replaced by wage labour, Convention 29 and the discussions that preceded it implicitly provided a model for an acceptable and rational exploitation of ‘dependent territories’. It was on this ambiguous heritage that the ILO’s understanding of the economic and social improvement of the people of ‘dependent territories’ was developed from 1943 onwards. It opened the door to a series of conventions and recommendations discussed and adopted between 1944 and 1947 at international conferences in Philadelphia (1944), Paris (1945) and Geneva (1947) which aimed to develop dependent territories as a means of ensuring world peace. Appropriated by local elites, these early development projects constituted an argument in favour of independence claims: all the more so given that the Atlantic Charter had promised equal rights to all people.

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64 On this subject, see Frederick Cooper, ‘Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans, and the Development Concept’, in *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays*
This universalist discourse, strongly reaffirmed at the International Labour Conference in Philadelphia in 1944, stood in contradiction to the continued existence of dependent states, a contradiction that was amply highlighted by presence of representatives of colonized peoples at international labour conferences, particularly the representatives of Indian workers and, soon after, African experts. All claimed the right to choose their own routes to modernity. As such, they added their voices to claims made in the 1930s by actors in the Balkans, the Middle East, Latin America and China.65

In order to meet these demands, the League of Nations and the ILO had implemented the first international technical assistance programmes. During the war, as we have seen, the ILO extended this technical assistance to the countries of Latin America.66 In order to do so, Oswald Stein was able to count on the support of the USA and especially the Inter-American Office, largely funded by Nelson Rockefeller. This was, in a certain sense, the first international development agency in the United States, and it would go on to inspire American international development policy from 1949 onwards.67 In the fight against global inequality, the ILO thus found its place in the peace plans. Meanwhile, in this process, the parliament of labour of the interwar years was transformed into an agency of experts.

Conclusion

To conclude, I wish to summarize the ways in which our understanding of the period 1943-1947 and the post-war world is enhanced through using the ILO as a point of entry. International organizations, in particular the ILO, did not constitute particularly powerful autonomous actors in the period between 1943 and 1947. However, the organization had expertise at its disposal, acquired in the period between the two world wars, which would be important in the development of the policies that accompanied the end of the Second World War. The role of the ILO is bound up with

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66 ILO-Archives, MI 3/0.

this expertise: it functioned as a space for the circulation, distribution and amplification of ideas and models promoted first in the United States and in Great Britain, and later elsewhere. The ILO was thus able to develop and promote models of intervention in the fields of social security and development. The organization would help to establish these models as dominant paradigms on a global level. In this way, the organization was able to retain an important role in the post-world war era.

In so doing, the ILO undoubtedly participated in a movement to universalize forms of social redistribution. Social security universalized the social insurance schemes developed as models by the ILO in the period between the two world wars. Activities of technical assistance, and later development, transformed the question of inequality, previously thought of as a problem of redistribution within the national space, into a global issue. But this process of universalization also reflected a change in the balance of forces on a global level: the unions lost the international role that the ILO had allowed them to play in the inter-war period. Conversely, the power of international experts increased. In this respect, the period 1943-1947 constituted a critical turning point, during which a disjuncture between non-interventionist global models and the interventionist economic and social policies of post-war European governments increased sharply.