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The Swedish Trade Union
Confederation (LO) and the
Trade Union International
at the Beginning of the Cold War

Klaus Misgeld



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Trade Union Neutrality?

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Trade Union International at the Beginning of the Cold War

Klaus Misgeld

Who should control the international trade union movement? Could it avoid becoming used in the struggle between great powers and ideologies? This question assumed real importance in the years after WW II, when cooperation between the Soviet union and the western alliance turned into a cold war between East and West. The Swedish trade union movement was also forced to take sides. It chose not only a western orientation but also independence: no political guidance from the outside of LO or the national unions would be allowed.

There is probably no area of concern, outside of military intelligence, which is more vital to the security of a nation than the activities within and through the international trades union movements. Importantly, the very obscurity in which this international union interchange takes place makes it more attractive to governments. For a very long time, and most vitally since 1948, the international trades union movement has been the arena of the most open Cold War struggles. First in Europe, and later in the Third World...¹

This quotation from a British study of the political role of the international trade union movement may sound dramatic, to Swedish ears it is at least, surprising. It touches upon an aspect of the history of the labour movement, which has as a rule been outside the interests of historic research in Sweden. The international trade union movement and its cooperation is a field of research which in Sweden has, at best, been discussed from more general or theoretical perspectives.² Certain aspects, however, have been described more in detail, particularly cooperation within the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) at the end of the 1950s and during the first half of the 1960s, i.e., during the period when the LO president Arne Geijer was also president of the ICFTU.³

The quotation raises a number of issues about the connection between the foreign policies of governments and states and the international trade union policies, about ideological orientation and the instrumentalisation of the activities of the international trade union movement. The first years of the Cold War provide lucid examples of how the trade union movement positions itself in politics and defines its role in a divided world. My question is how the Swedish trade union movement, and LO in particular meet the challenges.⁴

1. Gary K. Busch: *The political role of International Trade Unions*, London 1983, p 4.

2. Bernt Schiller: *World Labour unity. From above and from below*, (stencil) Göteborg 1975, and: *What is Internationalism?*, (stencil) Göteborg 1981; John Logue: *Toward a theory of Trade Union Internationalism*, Göteborg 1980

3. Åke Wedin: *International Trade Union solidarity. ICFTU 1957-1965*, Stockholm 1974

4. Cf. Klaus Misgeld: *Sozialdemokratie und Aussenpolitik in Schweden. Sozialistische Internationale, Europapolitik und die Deutschlandfrage 1945-1955*, Frankfurt, Main/New York 1984, on the foreign policy

The conflicts around the World Federation of Trade Unions, WFTU, formed in September/October 1945, its final split in January 1949 and the formation of the ICFTU at the end of 1949 are well known and discussed in detail in the international literature. These conflicts should be seen in conjunction with the political and economic developments after WW II, from the victory of the allied powers over Germany to the deadlock of the cold war. They also illustrate very clearly the connections between government and trade union foreign policy.

In this connection the Marshall plan is at the center of the controversy. A large number of European trade union organisations threatened to take actions against the plan. At least officially, these organisations represented the majority of the organised workers in their respective countries. Both the Nordic trade union federations and the British Trades Union Congress decided to support the plan. This led to the conflict inside the WFTU. How did LO act when the choice was between universality and self-interest? There are several aspects of this question which are even of a theoretical interest.

THE COLD WAR AND THE UNIONS

The first five years after the war, when cooperation around the war effort became dissension and conflict, has been thoroughly researched both in the Nordic neighbour countries and internationally.⁵ Swedish research concentrated on security policy and Nordic defence cooperation.⁶ The entire post war foreign policy orientation subsequently focused on different, often reevaluating judgements of the contents of the Swedish non-alignment policy.⁷

of the Swedish Socialdemocratic Party 1945-1955.

5. John Lewis Gaddis: *The United States and the origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*, New York 1972; Alan S. Milward: *The reconstruction of Western Europe 1945-1951*, Cambridge (1984) 1987; Michael J. Hogan: *The Marshall Plan. America, Britain, and the reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952*, Cambridge 1987; Gunnar Adler-Karlsson: *Western economic warfare 1947-1967. A case study on foreign economic policy*, Stockholm 1968; Geir Lundestad: *America, Scandinavia, and the Cold War 1945-1949*, Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø 1980; Misgeld 1984; Jean-Pierre Mousson-Lestang: *La Scandinavie et l'Europe de 1945 à nos jours*, Paris 1990; Bruce Olav Solheim: *The Nordic nexus. A lesson in peaceful security*, Westport, Connecticut 1994. - On Nordic cooperation: Jan A. Andersson: *Nordiskt samarbete. Aktörer, idéer och organisering 1919-1953*, Lund 1994; Kersti Blidberg: *Just good friends. Nordic Social Democracy and security policy 1945-1950*, Oslo 1987.

6. Cf. Karl Molin: *Omstridd neutralitet. Experternas kritik av svensk utrikespolitik 1948-1950*, Stockholm 1991; Erik Noreen: *Brobygge eller blockbildning? De norska och svenska utrikesledningarnas säkerhetspolitiska föreställningar 1945-1949*, Stockholm 1994; cf also Nils André & Yngve Möller: *Från Undén till Palme. Svensk utrikespolitik efter andra världskriget*, Stockholm 1990; *Socialdemokratin och svensk utrikespolitik från Branting till Palme*, ed. Bo Huldt & Klaus Misgeld, Stockholm/Göteborg 1990. See even Alf W. Johansson and Torbjörn Norman: Sweden's Security and World Peace, p. 339-373 in: *Creating Social Democracy. A century of the Social Democratic Labor Party in Sweden*, University Park, Pennsylvania 1992.

7. Gerard Aalders: *Swedish neutrality and the Cold War, 1945-1949. Een politicologisch-historische Studie*, Amsterdam 1989; and Paul M. Cole: *Neutralité du jour. The conduct of Swedish security policy since 1945*, Ann Arbor, Mich. 1989; on security and foreign policy debates see even Fredrika Björklund: *Samförstånd under oenighet. Svensk säkerhetspolitisk debatt under det kalla kriget*, Uppsala 1992; Ulf Bjereld: *Kritiker eller medlare? En studie av Sveriges utrikespolitiska roller 1945-1990*, Stockholm 1992. - On connections between Swedish foreign policy and economic policy see even Ebba Dohlman: *National welfare and economic interdependence. The case of Sweden's foreign trade policy*, Oxford 1989; Annie Lacroix-Riz: *L'Économie*

This is not, however, the place for a detailed evaluation of this discussion. Yet, certain aspects of it deserve attention, namely those referring to the international trade union movement which are found in non Swedish studies. The role of national trade union organisations (particularly in the USA) and of the international trade union organisations both as objects and subjects in the post war confrontations has been dealt with in studies made outside Sweden. I shall refer to this research from a Swedish perspective as a background for the main theme of my future research: trade union solidarity, assistance programs and European trade union cooperation in the decades following the formation of the ICFTU.

After the second world war national trade union organisations became involved in the international policies of their own countries and in the internal policies of other countries (not just the trade union policies) in a way which was unknown before the war.⁸ This is, of course, mainly true of the Soviet Union and the United States (the American Federation of Labor, AFL, and also the Congress of Industrial Organisations, CIO) but also of Great Britain (the Trades Union Congress, TUC, and its affiliated unions). The North American central trade union organisations played an important role in getting the Marshall Plan accepted and carried out in Europe, and in fighting the communist influence in the trade union movement, foremost in France, Italy, Greece and West Germany. The literature in this context refers to concepts like “new statecraft” or “total diplomacy”.⁹ It is this form of nationally motivated international trade union activity rather than an internationalistic

suédoise entre l'est et l'ouest 1944-1949. Neutralité et embargo, de la guerre au pacte atlantique, Paris 1991; Birgit Karlsson: *Handelspolitik eller politisk handling. Sveriges handel med öststaterna 1946-1952*, Göteborg 1992; Thomas Jonter: *Socialiseringen som kom av sig. Sverige, oljan och USA:s planer på en ny ekonomisk världsordning 1945-1949*, Stockholm 1995. - On European policy Mikael af Malmberg: *Den ståndaktiga nationalstaten. Sverige och den västeuropeiska integrationen 1945-1959*, Lund 1994. - See also memoirs and biographies: Tage Erlander: *Tage Erlander 1940-1949*, Stockholm 1973; Torsten Nilsson: *Människor och händelser i Norden*, Stockholm 1977, *Människor och händelser i Europa*, Stockholm 1978, *Lag eller näve*, Stockholm 1980; Sven Andersson: *På Per Albins tid*, Stockholm 1980; Yngve Möller: *Östen Undén. En biografi*, Stockholm 1986; Örjan Appelqvist on Gunnar Myrdal forthcoming; on the Nordic countries and the Marshall Plan Charles Silva forthcoming; Cay Sevón: *Visionen om Europa. Svensk neutralitet och europeisk återuppbyggnad 1945-1948*, Helsinki 1995; Alf W. Johansson: *Herbert Tingsten och det kalla kriget. Antikommunism och liberalism i Dagens Nyheter 1946-1952*, Stockholm 1995; Mikko Majander: The limits of sovereignty. Finland and the question of the Marshall Plan 1947, p. 309-326 in *Scandinavian Journal of History* 19:4, 1994.

8. Walter Schevenels: *Forty-five years International Federation of Trade Unions*, Brussel (1956); Hans Gottfurcht: *Die internationale Gewerkschaftsbewegung im Weltgeschehen. Geschichte, Probleme, Aufgaben*, Köln 1962; Lewis L. Lorwin: *The International Labor Movement. History, policies, outlook*, Westport Connecticut (1953) 1973; John P. Windmüller: *American Labor and the Internatioal Labor Movement 1940 to 1953*, Ithaca, New York, 1954, and: *The International Trade Union Movement*, Deventer 1980; Gary K. Busch: *Political currents in the International Trade Union Movement*, London 1980 (Economist Intelligent Unit, Special Report No 75), 2 vol, p. 25-64, and Busch 1983, chapter 3 and 4; Rolf Neuhaus: *International Trade Secretariats. Objectives, organisation, activities*, Bonn 1981.

9. Robert W. Cox: Labor and transnational relations, p. 204-234 in: *Transnational relations and world politics*, ed. by Robert O. Keohane & Joseph S. Nye Jr., Cambridge Mass. 1972, p. 205. Cox is relying on Windmüller's studies 1954-1970; Robert H. Zieger: *American workers, American unions, 1920-1985*, Baltimore 1986, on the connection between internal US trade union divisions and foreign policy; cf. Windmüller 1980; Denis MacShane: *International Labour and the origins of the Cold War*, Oxford 1992; and Federico Romero: *The United States and the European Trade Union Movement, 1944-1951*, Chapel Hill & London 1992; Michael Kerper: *The International ideology of U.S. Labor 1941-1975*, Göteborg 1976.

ideology, which has attracted researchers' interest.¹⁰

Roy Godson, the North American trade union researcher, draws the conclusion that "the AFL contributed to the post war power balance by helping to prevent the Soviet Union from dominating the European continent". The most important contribution of the AFL is supposed to have been the formation of new non communist trade union organisations able to resist Soviet attempts at influencing and controlling,¹¹ since "the political use of organized labor was a key element in Russia's postwar strategy", according to Godson.¹² The picture of the European trade union movement as a more or less helpless object of the influence of outside powers is, of course, one-sided, but leads to important questions.¹³ What was cause and what was effect in the fight for influence in the trade union movement during the cold war? What effect did this fight have on future developments? Is another British researcher, Denis MacShane, perhaps right when he turns the perspective upside down: "Indeed the confrontation within trade unions domestically and internationally was one of the causes rather than a consequence of the Cold War."¹⁴ There is reason to come back to this thesis even in the case of Sweden.

It was not possible to keep the WFTU as an organisation representing the trade union interest outside of the growing world conflict. The chance of world wide cooperation, which seemed to be possible after the joint victory over nazism and fascism, was lost in 1948/49 when the rift between the wartime allies had become too wide. The western minority in the WFTU saw the centralistic planning of the majority as a consequence of communist ideology and Soviet expansionism. It became obvious that it would not be possible in the long run to avoid a split, and the Marshall plan led "to the final decision in a permanent crisis",¹⁵ even without the manouvering of the AFL.¹⁶

10. cf. Cox, 1972, p. 208.

11. Roy Godson: *American Labor and European politics. The AFL as a transnational force*, New York 1976, p. 3; cf. David Heaps: Union Participation in Foreign Aid Programs, p. 100-108 in: *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 1955, p. 100: "Back in 1948, when the Marshall Plan was just beginning, the American labour movement had already established itself as an effective international force."

12. Godson 1976, p. 7.

13. Zieger 1986; P. Taft: *Defending freedom. American Labor and foreign affairs*, Los Angeles 1973; Ronald Radosh: *American Labor and United States foreign policy*, New York 1969, critical; Kerper 1976; Carl Gershman: *The foreign policy of American Labor*, Beverly Hills/London 1975, chapter 1-3, criticizes Radosh; cf. even MacShane 1992; different Peter Weiler: The United States, International Labor, and the Cold War. The breakup of the World Federation of Trade Unions, in: *Diplomatic History. The Journal of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations*, Vol. 5:1, 1981; and *British Labour and the Cold War*, Stanford Calif. 1988; Horst Lademacher/Jürgen C. Hess/Hermann J. Langeveld/Henk Reitsma: Der Weltgewerkschaftsbund im Spannungsfeld des Ost-West-Konflikts. Zur Gründung, Tätigkeit und Spaltung der Gewerkschaftsinternationale, p. 119-215 in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* vol. 18, 1978, p. 148-171, 209-215; Romero 1992, p. 12-15.

14. MacShane 1992, p. 5. The author has been working for the IMF.

15. Lademacher et al 1978, p. 215; and Horst Lademacher: Die Spaltung des Weltgewerkschaftsbundes als Folge des beginnenden Ost-West-Konfliktes, p. 501-534 in: *Der Marshall-Plan und die europäische Linke*, ed.: Othmar Nikola Haberl & Lutz Niethammer, Frankfurt M. (1979) 1986; S. H. Leich & W. Kruse: *Internationalismus und nationale Interessenvertretung. Zur Geschichte der internationalen Gewerkschaftsbewegung*, Köln 1991, p. 97-106.

16. Anthony Carew: The schism within the World Federation of Trade Unions. Government and trade union diplomacy, p. 297-335 in: *International Review of Social History*, vol. XXIV, 1984, p. 297, 325; and Anthony Carew: *Labour under the Marshall Plan. The politics of productivity and the marketing of management science*, Manchester 1987; Hogan 1987, p. 146; Kerper 1976, p. 27-31; Weiler 1981.

The break-up of the WFTU had repercussions also in the “western” unions and in a notably conservative direction.¹⁷ The national centers affiliated to the ICFTU often played a system preservation role, e.g., in the decolonialisation process.¹⁸ The incompatibility between “the Leninist model of trade unionism as adapted to Stalinist totalitarians” on one side and “the model of unionism practiced under capitalism” on the other, was not just an international but also a national phenomenon for a long time to come.¹⁹ The fact that the activities of the international trade union organisations were fraught with conflict after the war must be seen in relation to political developments, when for a few years the hope of the war years of a radical change in the the society was met by international confrontation and the national stabilisation of the capitalist structures in Western Europe and of the Stalinist autocracy in the East.

Focusing Independence

The disintegration of the WFTU was inevitable, however, irrespective of the cold war and the Marshall plan. The role of the international trade secretariats, ITS, and the antagonism between Social Democrats and Communists were reason enough for a parting of the ways. The internal conflict between Social Democrats and Communists was in many instances irreconcilable as early as 1945.²⁰ Several trade secretariats were from the very beginning sceptical of the intentions of the WFTU (WFTU Constitution § 13) to turn them into departments in the organisation. This opposition grew ever stronger up to the breaking point in 1948.²¹ Had the WFTU original plan been carried out, it would have led to a very strong centralisation and the loss of the much-coveted independence of the ITS.²² The unions of the Soviet central trade union organisation were not members of the ITS, nor were most of the unions of the American Federation of Labor. However, around 1946/47 the latter began to seek membership in the ITS or their branches in order to strengthen their resistance to the WFTU. The ITS that was most negative to membership in the WFTU was the International Transport Workers’ Federation, ITF. Already in the summer of 1945 Charles Lindley, General Secretary of the Swedish affiliate and retiring president of the ITF criticized the proposed WFTU Constitution. The General Secretary, JH Oldenbroek, later played a key role in the battle.²³

17. Lademacher et al 1978, p. 212; cf. also Godson 1976, p. 6.

18. Åke Wedin, 1974, has written extensively on related problems.

19. Quote from Carew 1984, p. 333, 335.

20. MacShane 1992, p. 5 and passim.

21. See also Peter Rütters: *Chancen internationaler Gewerkschaftspolitik. Struktur und Einfluss der internationalen Union der Lebens- und Genussmittelarbeiter-Gewerkschaften (1945-1985)*, Köln 1989.

22. *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie. Der Konflikt zwischen den Internationalen Berufssekretariaten und dem Weltgewerkschaftsbund um den Neuaufbau einer internationalen Gewerkschaftsbewegung 1945-1949*, ed. Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten/Peter Rütters, Köln 1991; *Auf der Suche nach Solidarität. Eine Geschichte der internationalen Bau- und Holzarbeiterbewegung*, ed. Konrad Carl und Bruno Köbele, Autorenteam: Dieter Fricke, Arno Klönne, Reinhard Krämer und Bernd Schütt, Köln 1992/3.

23. MacShane 1992; Lademacher et al 1978, p. 138-148; Wilfried Loth: *The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)*, p. 541-573 in: *Transnational organizations of political parties and pressure groups in the struggle for European Union, 1945-1950 (Documents on the History of European Integration*, ed. by Walter Lipgens [+] and Wilfried Loth, vol. 4), Berlin-New York 1991; *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, p. 122-133, document on ITF meeting 8-10/7, 1945; Charles Lindley: *Svenska Transportarbetareförbundet. Historik. Andra delen: 1922-*

This paper deals with the Swedish trade union federation, LO. How did LO judge the developments? What conclusions were drawn by the LO leadership and how independently was it prepared to act? There are no studies made so far based on Swedish sources.²⁴ What role did the battle around the ITS play in the decision to leave the WFTU and participate in the founding of the ICFTU? How did the LO react? How did the LO view its role in the International? The problems look partly different from the LO perspective than from a cold war perspective. There is, therefore, reason to make a critical appraisal of the conclusions in international research on the main reasons for the decisions by “western” trade union movements to quit the WFTU and set up the ICFTU. Which factors were decisive for LO?

A NEW COOPERATION

The Art of Being Both Hopeful and Sceptical

The beginning in 1945 of new international trade union cooperation brought complications for the Swedish trade union movement. One problem was to cooperate with communist organisations at the international level while being involved in a bitter fight at home between Communists and Social Democrats for power over the trade union organisations.

Another complication had its roots in Sweden’s wartime neutrality, which was not a strong basis for a different international tactic. Towards the end of the war Sweden had no undisputed position in the international community: a country that had been neutral in the battle against national socialism had to accept that it was not very popular. This also influenced the international positions of the Social Democratic Labour Party and the LO.²⁵

Peace opened the door to a new beginning. To find a way out was also important for the Swedish trade union movement. It very much wanted to participate in an international cooperation for a new order in Europe and the world. Already during the war the LO had supported an international group which met in Sweden to prepare proposals for how democratic socialists should organise themselves once the war was over.²⁶ There were also very practical economic interests to defend: to put life into the international economy and to promote trade. It was very obvious that the LO was very interested in Swedish participation in international trade and the reestablishment of an international economy in a way that corresponded to the ideas and aims of the labour movement.

But in the beginning of 1945 international cooperation with Communists was problematic, mainly for reasons of domestic policy. During the war years attempts had been made to isolate the Communists within the trade unions. The battle had been particularly hard

1947, Stockholm 1947.

24. Wedin 1974 gives only a short overview; Tapani Paavonen: *Die Gewerkschaftsbewegung Finnlands zwischen Ost und West 1945-1951*, (stencil) Turku, 1990, and Majander 1991 on the Finnish perspective; Konrad Nordahl: *Gode Arbeidsår*, Oslo 1973, on Norwegian Trade union policy.

25. For SAP see Misgeld 1984, chapters I and II.

26. Klaus Misgeld: *Die “Internationale Gruppe demokratischer Sozialisten” in Stockholm 1942-1945. Zur sozialistischen Friedensdiskussion während des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Uppsala/Bonn Bad Godesberg 1976

in the Metal Workers' Union.²⁷ At the international level, however, the two sides were expected to cooperate.

On February 5th, 1945, one of the largest labour conflicts in modern Swedish history broke out. The whole engineering industry was paralyzed. 130 000 workers were involved. The conflict lasted until July. This is not the place to describe the conflict or to take sides in the interpretation of the reasons for the conflict.²⁸ Whatever the merits of the strike, it is enough to note here that the LO leadership considered the strike to be a part in the struggle between Communists and Social Democrats for power over the union. According to the LO leadership the Communists were responsible for the outbreak of the strike and for its adverse outcome. The strike should never have occurred in the very delicate post war situation, since it threatened the economy of the country.²⁹ The LO leadership saw in the strike a new reason to try to limit the influence of the communists in the Swedish trade union movement. At the same time, the LO was on its way to joining an international cooperation with Communism outside Europe.³⁰

This is the background against which the post-war relations between LO and the trade union international will be discussed. We shall also discuss the problem of trade union centralism versus independence in the WFTU from a Swedish point of view. A third section will deal with cold war problems and the LO attitude to the Marshall plan. The last chapter summarises the different aspects: what was it that forced LO to leave the WFTU and what were the prospects for international trade union cooperation in the beginning of the 1950s, after the big battle was finished and new international problems began to demand the attention of the trade union movement.

THE RETURN OF THE SCEPTICS

When the British TUC called a World Trade Union Conference in London 6-17 February 1945, i.e., at the same time as Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin met at Jalta, a relatively large delegation from Sweden led by the LO president August Lindberg answered the call. The conference was in two parts. The first part, beginning on February 6 was limited to the allies' trade union federations. The second part, which began on February 12, allowed the participation of other trade union movements which did not come from the enemy camp. A Finnish delegation was also allowed to sit in at the second session, but only "ex gratie".³¹

There were high hopes of the Conference. It was seen not only as a new direction for the

27. Cf. LO:s circular letter 1144/1940 and circular letter 3/1941 from the Metalworkers Union preventing communists from being elected to union office; cf Pär-Erik Back; *Svenska Metallindustriarbetareförbundets historia 1940-1956*, vol. IV, Stockholm 1977, p. 132-163.

28. Back 1977, p. 327, 333; Anders L Johansson: *Tillväxt och klassarbete. En studie av den svenska modellens uppkomst*, Stockholm 1989, p. 232; Walter Korpi: *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism. Work, unions, and politics in Sweden*, London 1978, p. 277-282. - About the conflict and Arne Geijer's role in it, see Charles Kassman: *Arne Geijer och hans tid. 1910-1956* (= vol. 1), Stockholm 1989.

29. Axel Uhlén: *Kommunisterna och verkstadskonflikten*, Stockholm (LO/Aktuella frågor) 1945

30. MacShane 1992, p. 54.

31. *Report of the World Trade Union Conference February 6th to 17th, 1945. County Hall London, London* (1945).

international trade union movement but also as a final tribute to the participation in the war efforts and the fight for independence for all nations. Unlike the situation during the prewar period international trade union cooperation could now transcend all ideological boundaries. Participation was open to all, not just Europeans: Social Democrats, Communists and Christians, the trade union movements of the Soviet Union, the United States and all other continents. The era of cooperation had come. That was the tenor of most of the speeches at the conference.

But what was the situation in the real world? What did the new unity mean when the largest American organisation, the AFL, refused to join because of its deep distrust of organisations governed by the state or political parties, i.e., the Soviet trade union federation? And how would any form of cooperation function with the Soviet organisation, which differed so basically from the organisations which had been and still were, members of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU)?

According to Ragnar Casparsson, the LO chronicler it was Walter Citrine in person who led the conference to a successful conclusion.³² The TUC General Secretary was a diplomat who steadfastly pursued the line that no politization would be allowed of the future world organisation. This thesis was to become the central point of future controversies.

It was evident that the aim of the majority of the conference to form a new international and to dissolve the IFTU was not shared by a number of participants, and especially not by the British. Sweden's LO also belonged to the group that did not want to see the old international being given an inceremonious burial. But the Swedish delegation quickly adjusted to the new situation.³³ August Lindberg, the LO President, realised that disbanding the IFTU was the price that had to be paid for achieving cooperation between the American CIO and the Soviet Union. For Sweden, the most important thing was to break the isolation. This was also clearly expressed by the LO leader in his speech at the conference. The Swedish labour movement had always been, and still wanted to be, part of the international movement, he added.³⁴

In this way, Lindberg managed to steer past a rather uncomfortable situation which had arisen when the Conference, before the arrival of the Swedish delegation, was on its way to condemning, and recommending action against, not only countries like Franco-Spain and Argentina but also Sweden and Switzerland for having continued to support Hitler Germany with food and raw material shipments during the war. Even if LO in principle was not responsible for the policies of the Swedish government, it still felt criticized. The text of the resolution was later changed, since it also indirectly accused the Soviet Union, which still had not declared war on Japan. Sweden and other neutral countries thus avoided being denounced as a state of war did not exist between the Soviet Union and Japan. Ragnar Casparsson noted that it was easy to see "that our good-will in the world was not very good".³⁵

Old Wine...

In his speech to the Conference, the Swedish LO President formulated a principle similar to

32. Casparsson in *Tiden* 1945, p. 163.

33. This is also made very clear in Casparsson's *Tiden* article p. 163.

34. *Report 1945*, pp. 143-144.

35. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* 10/1945, p. 227.

the one Lord Citrine had confirmed, and which the TUC was to defend throughout the coming battle. In Sweden, he said, there was a tradition of a sharp distinction between the economic and social duties of the unions, including social policies, on one side and the political arena which other organisations are responsible for on the other. And he summed up: “We consider that this should also be the case in the new International”. But this had not always been the case in the International, he continued, a situation which the LO had criticised already before the war. In some countries this division of responsibilities is still not observed, he noted: “We think that in the future international attention should be paid more than in the past to purely trade union questions and economic issues, leaving questions of social policy to the ILO [International Labour Organisation] ...” Even if the LO “wholeheartedly” supported the idea of an all-embracing International, he could not see that the new organisation was completely new: “For, after all, the new International has got to be made up of old material...” Then it did not matter much, he concluded, what name the new International was given. The problems would be the same.

The Swedish and British efforts to stop all attempts from the side of the new international to get involved in politics and in the internal work of the national organisations should be seen against the background of the suspicion that the Russian trade union movement, led by the Communist Party, would try to influence Communists in other national trade union movements. This had been the case before the war. In his first report Ragnar Casparsson, the LO press officer, also expressed fears in this direction.³⁶

The question of the influence of the communists in the labour movement was topical in the Nordic countries and was discussed by the Nordic social democratic parties and trade unions leadership at their first joint post war meeting.³⁷ But cooperation would be the joint policy at the international level. When the Nordic national trade union centers met on July 15th, 1945, they adopted a statement prepared by the Swedish delegation. “The Nordic trade union federations sincerely welcome the efforts of the London Conference to create a united trade union international.”³⁸ Then followed an attempt at writing history and a futuristic perspective: “Strong and well disciplined workers’ organisations, united in an efficient international organisation, would have been able to prevent the rising of Hitlerism to power and influence. They could have stopped the war ... This knowledge should be reason enough for the trade union movement to avoid division and internal disputes in the future”. To avoid division was the code word: “We need an International which is free and independent vis a vis organisations competing nationally and which could eventually contribute to a neutralization and eventual liquidation of such divisions of a political and ideological nature, which are now seen as obstacles to understanding and organisational

36. Ibid. p. 231. On 5 March August Lindberg reported on the London conference to the LO Executive Board, which supported his view and consented to participating in the preparations for the new organisation. - Here and henceforth quoted from the minutes of the LO General Council (GC) and Executive Board/praesidium (EB) meetings; Archives of Swedish Trade Unions Confederation/Landsorganisationen i Sverige (LO).

37. The meeting of the Nordic Labour Movement Cooperation Committee, Stockholm 13-14 July 1945. At this time the communist and Social Democratic parties in Denmark and Norway were even negotiating mergers, without results. Cf. *Samråd i kristid. Protokoll från den nordiska arbetarrörelsens samarbetskommitté 1932-1946*, ed.: Krister Wahlbäck & Kersti Blidberg, Stockholm 1986, p. 251-289.

38. *Fackföreningsrörelsen 29, 20/7-1945*, pp. 64-65. *LO activities report 1945*, p. 227-228 (see: Landsorganisationen i Sverige. *Berättelsen 1945ff*, Stockholm 1946ff).

unity. National unity and international cooperation between the workers of the world is a prerequisite of securing world peace.” These solemn but not very clear statements are open to many interpretations of national trade union divisions. But there is an anti communist edge built into the text, almost as a reservation against too high expectations.

This interpretation also follows from a very strange sentence in the middle of the text, just before the promise that the Nordic trade union organisations “are prepared to support all efforts, which can even the road towards trade union unity”. In the adopted text there is one condition for cooperation, namely that it must concern “such goals which are in conformity with the interest of the organised labour movement in *social democratic democracy*”.³⁹ The demand that nobody should be kept out of this cooperation either on the basis of “race, religion or political opinion” then loses part of its credibility. It is not surprising that Soviet reports from Stockholm at the time considered the Swedish trade union movement as being as “typically reformist” as before. That there was no thought of any national cooperation with the Communists had also been made clear by August Lindberg in an interview in *Aftonbladet* on July 15 1945. This was quoted in the same report.⁴⁰

Internationally, the situation was still different. The LO Executive Board (Landssekretariatet) accepted the proposed constitution of the WFTU with - as it was said - minor proposed changes, which had been agreed on at the Nordic Trade Union Conference in Stockholm on July 15, 1945, and which were communicated to the designated General Secretary, the Frenchman Louis Saillant.⁴¹ From the letter to Saignant it is very clear that the proposed changes were by no means “minor”. The LO points directly to a central reservation. First of all the LO guards the independence of the member organisations and rejects any politization and central dirigism through the new world organisation. Disunity and conflict would otherwise be an immediate consequence. If the autonomy of the member organisations would be threatened by any new constitution, the LO would demand changes.

The other major point where the LO suggests much more than “minor” changes concerns the international trade secretariats, the independence of which LO wants to maintain in relation to the future international - at least for the time being, until the time would be ripe for a change. The paragraph in the proposed constitution concerning the ITS should, according to the LO, simply be deleted!

Following a report by August Lindberg, the LO General Council (Representantskapet) on August 28 confirmed the LO participation “in the formation of a new international on a broader basis than the old one”.⁴² At the same time, Lindberg, in his report to the Council, again clearly explained the main problems. The most important objections was that in Sweden there is a great scepticism concerning “a cooperation with the Russian trade union movement”. But “in London we understood that it could no longer be considered to be practical policy to oppose the affiliation of the Russians.”⁴³ The General Council decided

39. My italics. - The draft resolution talks about “social and political democracy”.

40. Memorandum on the Swedish trade union movement 31/10 1945 prepared by Alexandrova and signed by Tjernysjev, Soviet ambassador to Sweden, Russian Federations Archives Moskow (GARF), Fond 5451, VTsSPS SSSR, Opis 72, Delo 706.

41. LO EB 16/7 1945 § 6b and 24/9 1945 § 5b.

42. Minutes, LO General Council § 9.

43. The LO position was well known by “the Russians”.

that the LO should affiliate with the new organisation “provided that unity could be won about the wording of the constitution”.⁴⁴ Thus the scepticism of the LO leadership was much greater than expressed in the letter to Saillant.⁴⁵

THE FUTURE OF THE ITS

Criticism of Centralism and Political Dirigism

Centralism and political dirigism were seen as the major problems in the new international trade union cooperation. The LO saw the risks, which were related to the Soviet influence over the new world federation, and tried to protect itself. Soon the Swedish national unions also began to complain about the new International and its future relations with the trade secretariats. After the London conference the next International Trade Unions conference was convened in Paris, September/October 1945. However, in a letter to LO long before the conference the Nordic Leather Workers’ Federation demanded that the freedom of the trade secretariats be maintained.⁴⁶ Ragnar Casparsson discussed the problem in an editorial in the LO journal, *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, on August 3 1945: the dissension on the formation of the new International was partly a result of the Russian representatives in the committee preparing a program and constitution that “suggested a strong centralisation of the decisions”, i.e, the International should decide on the national policies of the member organisations as well as on the international trade federations.⁴⁷ The Soviet Union had the support of the French and Latin American representatives, but objections were raised by the British and North American delegates, who were supported by the ITS. The Soviet attitude had to be changed, or there would have been no International at all, the LO journal noted.

The Nordic trade union federations were afraid of a “sworn brotherhood of the great powers in trade union matters”. Initially, the Nordic countries would not even be given a seat on the executive board of the International, while the relatively weak French Confédération Générale de Travail (CGT) would have two seats. The proposal was absurd, and was later changed. But it was evident that the trade union organisations of the countries that were victorious in the war wanted also to be the victors in the new organisation, and retain power in a world organisation which in the radicalized post war situation could be expected to play an important role for both national and international political developments.⁴⁸ According to the general secretary of the old international, Walter Schevenels, the goal of the spokespersons of centralism was “a world federation with powers to decide policies and the right to enforce these policies on each national organisation whether it agreed to or disagreed with the majority decisions which were made by its Congress, General Council or Executive Board”.⁴⁹ The Scandinavian distrust of such

44. Up to 1946 the Metalworkers Union was more positive to the WFTU since it thought that the trade departments would function more like the ITS. Even at the 1947 Congress WFTU was written into the union constitution. cf Back 1977, p. 374-375.

45. This criticism was expressed by Lindberg, in the name of all the Scandinavian Trade Union Federations, at the IFTU General Council meeting 3-4/9 1945. Minutes IISG IFTU vol 179.

46. LO EB 6/8 1945 § 6.

47. No 31/1945, pp. 97-100.

48. Summary of proposed constitution. LO Archives, Int. unit E:7 vol 3 WFTU 1945.

49. Memo to agenda point 1. Translation in Labour Movement Archives and Library, Stockholm (ARAB),

attitudes was shared, however, by the British and by the ITS.⁵⁰

From September 25 the World Trade Union Conference was held in Paris immediately followed by the inaugural Congress of the WFTU (to October 8).⁵¹ August Lindberg was elected one of the seven chairpersons of the Congress representing the small countries. This was a way to allay the fear of great power dominance. For some reason the Finns voted against the Swede.

The only Swedish contribution in plenum was made by Lindberg, who also spoke on behalf of the Norwegian LO. He expressed on one hand his appreciation of the achievements so far, and on the other hand also scepticism. But above all he came back to the controversial point: "We think at the moment it would be wise to limit the scope of the new organisation to trade union and economic matters, although perhaps it might be possible to extend our scope bit by bit later." Lindberg also thanked the Soviet representatives for having left their centralistic position and now accepted that the independence of the national organisations could not be questioned. He further supported the British proposal to include the ITS in their existing form in the international. At the first WFTU congress they obviously thought, even in the Nordic countries, that all problems were now solved.⁵² August Lindberg ended his short speech with the words, "Trust the British! They have the greatest international experience!"

The British attitude that only *bona fide* organisations (well known independent) should be affiliated was shared by the Nordic group. The Nordic delegations also felt it to be "satisfactory" (Eiler Jensen) that the TUC General Secretary Walter Citrine was elected the first president.⁵³ Eiler Jensen himself, President of the Danish LO, was elected to the Executive Committee as representative of the Nordic affiliates.⁵⁴

The LO Executive Board accepted August Lindberg's report from the Paris congress and the LO sought affiliation with the new organisation, since the old IFTU was to be formally dissolved on 14-15 December in London.⁵⁵ The Paris Congress had also shown that Scandinavian cooperation was natural at international trade union meetings, which was indicated by a joint preparatory meeting at the beginning of the congress.⁵⁶ The unity was needed since "the conflicts of opinion had been prominent".⁵⁷

P 933.

50. Sir Walter Citrine's proposal. LO Int. unit E:7 vol 3 WFTU 1945.

51. *Report of the World Trade Union Conference/Congress September 25 - October 8, 1945*. Ragnar Casparsson in *Fackföreningsrörelsen* No 42, 43 and comments 41. Report by Eiler Jensen (Koncentrat) Danish LO EB meeting 24 Oct 1945, ARAB SAP FXXVI:c:5.

52. According to Eiler Jensen's "*Koncentrat*".

53. Charles Lindley was of another opinion. According to him the British "had for decades tried to tie down the crafts unions". Manuscript to his history of the Swedish Transport workers Union. Second part 1922-1947, ARAB Lindley vol. 13.

54. Konrad Nordahl was elected substitute. To the General Council one delegate and one substitute were elected from each Nordic country, for Sweden August Lindberg and Gunnar Andersson. The Nordic unions were not represented in the Executive Committee, which had 9 members. World Federation of Trade Unions: *Constitution adopted by the World Trade Union Conference October 3, 1945*, Paris (1945); World Federation of Trade Unions: *Resolutions of the Conference - Congress September 25 to October 8, 1945*, Paris (1946).

55. LO EB 15/10 1945 § 7; LO EB 26/11 1945 §7a/b; Letter to the WFTU 3/12 1945, LO Int unit E 7 vol 3 WFTU 1945.

56. 28/9 1945, according to LO EB 2/1 1946 § 6a.

57. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 41, 12/10 1945, pp. 337-338.

It now seemed as if cooperation between the Swedish trade union federation and communist dominated organisations - not only the Soviet but also other east, west and south European as well as Latin American - was on its way. Would this also influence the situation in Sweden? That the Swedish communists considered these newly-established friendly relations as positive was quite natural. But the LO leadership did not intend to reconsider its view of the communist activities in Sweden. August Lindberg made this clear at the meeting of the Nordic Labour Committee (a joint trade union and party leadership body) meeting on 5-6 January 1946 in Copenhagen on the metal industry conflict and Communist policies in Sweden.⁵⁸ The distrust remained. "The Russian interests now dominate the world federation", the LO President felt. At the same meeting Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson underlined the principle that Swedish Social Democracy did not want to cooperate with Communists even at the international level. The LO leadership was staunchly Social Democratic. How would this balancing act continue?

It was the unity inside the United Nations (of which Sweden was not yet a member) and the ability of the super powers to cooperate that was the basis of a functioning international trade union cooperation between Social Democrats and Communists and others. This was made clear not least by the leaders of the trade union federations of Norway and Denmark at the Nordic Labour Committee meeting. The conflicts within the UN between the superpowers which had won the war would also directly lead to an end to the new trade union alliance. This was a different interpretation from the one the Nordic trade union federations has announced at their meeting only half a year before, namely that international cooperation inside the labour movement would be the basis for unity between the super powers, and even prevent the outbreak of wars.⁵⁹

Soviet Solutions?

Discussions on the WFTU structure and powers continued, now mainly between the increasingly sceptical national unions and their international organisations on one side and the WFTU leadership on the other. § 13 of the WFTU Constitution adopted by the Paris Congress was interpreted by the WFTU General Secretary and the centralistic group in the WFTU in a more restrictive way than by, among others, the LO in Sweden.⁶⁰ The Transport Workers International, ITF, presented the toughest opposition. Its retiring President, Charles Lindley of Sweden, was pessimistic. At the ITF 50th jubilee convention he expressed his "happiness at not having to preside over the lowering of the ITF flag at the association with the WFTU". For him the WFTU policy was no less than a "Soviet solution", and the equivalent of putting the ITS under tutelage.⁶¹

On 22-27 June, 1946, the WFTU Executive met in Moscow. The question of the membership of the trade secretariats was one of the most difficult, and no solution was reached.

58. cf LO EB report 28/1 1946 § 7 and 8/4 1946 § 5. *Samråd i kristid*, 1986, pp. 290-326.

59. Nordic trade union meeting 15/7 1945 in Stockholm; resolution in *Fackföreningsrörelsen* 29/1945, pp. 227-228.

60. Letters signed by Saillant and Schevenels 15 and 12 November to all member organisations and to the ITS; LO Int. unit E:7 vol. 3

61. According to Charles Lindley, cf. note 53; cf. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* 30/1946, p. 74-75. *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, doc 28, pp. 206-214. See also ITF EB meeting, Zürich 14-15/1946, doc 53 pp. 377-388.

Three weeks later Eiler Jensen reported to the Nordic Committee.⁶² Here the unity was compact: all Scandinavian central organisations wanted to keep some measure of independence for the trade secretariats “as far as possible” (August Lindberg), but all wanted them to also join the WFTU in spite of the fact that “there are great differences of opinion between East and West” (Eiler Jensen).

A report from the joint conference of the WFTU executive and the trade secretariats held in Paris in December 1946 shows how a leading Swedish trade union representative could experience the situation. The report (dated January 1947) was written by one of the participants at the conference, Sture Christiansson, Secretary of the Swedish Transport Workers Union and later General Secretary of the Scandinavian Transport Workers’ Federation (1948-1957).⁶³ It was sent to all Nordic unions affiliated with the ITF. The conference which was called to deal with the question of the transformation of the ITS into departments of the WFTU (WFTU constitution § 13) began without either Soviet or North American participation. For different reasons they had not come in time. “It immediately turned out”, Christiansson writes “that the delegates from respective ITS without exception opposed the proposals of the WFTU executive in the matters at hand”. It was the centralisation and consequently the reduced striking power of the ITS that was the problem. The main speaker from the ITF was JH Oldenbroek, who is praised by the rapporteur. The WFTU had delayed the question, and kept intriguing without listening or giving proper information, Oldenbroek maintained. He was supported by the General Secretary of the Public Services International, PSI, Bolle, and above all by the Building Workers’ Coppock.

The main questions the Conference dealt with were those mentioned above: the freedom and independence of the ITS, their right to appoint their own functionaries and the location of their headquarters and, finally, their financial independence. The report notes that “the criticism became so hard and matter-of-fact that the members of the executive present had to back down step by step. The chief protagonists of the ITS were, in addition to Saillant, the French communist union representatives and members of the Executive Board. “With the lively temperament and large gestures of southerners they held lengthy speeches about Paris as the great pillar of socialism.” The rapporteur had no time for such behaviour, which he contrasted with the sinister economic realities of France.

One important question, especially for the ITF and the seamen’s unions, was cooperation with the ILO. Neither the CIO nor the “Russians” had any interest in this cooperation. That “the Russians” would be the main problem would be verified when “the Russian delegation, through its leader Tarrasov, appeared on the arena on the third and last day of the Conference”. The Russians wanted “obviously to be the dominating nation in the WFTU” as the rapporteur approvingly quoted Oldenbroek.

Neither did some other representatives of the ITS mince words. Coppock was not afraid of calling the WFTU “a political organisation” which used “Gestapo methods”.⁶⁴ “Gestapo methods” in the International? This was in 1946! But the Soviet delegation would not consider any changes or modifications to the WFTU Constitution in spite of efforts by

62. Nordic Labour Movement Cooperation Committee meeting in Copenhagen 18-19 July 1946, minutes in *Samråd i kristid*, 1986, pp. 332-350. LO activities report 1946, pp. 307-308, 309-313.

63. LO int unit E:7 vol 4, WFTU 1947-48. LO activities report 1947 pp. 283-289.

64. Charles Lindley also quotes Coppock’s expression of “a political organisation”, manuscript at ARAB, cf. note 53.

Saillant to mediate. The promises of “mutual understanding” which were made in the invitation to the Conference were no longer valid. The Conference degenerated. “For over an hour Communists and Social Democrats traded insults...” But in the end the representatives of the ITS had their demand that the conditions for inclusion in the WFTU would be renegotiated accepted. A negotiating committee was appointed without a Nordic representative.

North American Offensive

At the same time the American Federation of Labor (AFL) intensified its international activities, not least in Europe, to support the formation of *free trade union movements* and enlighten the Europeans on the AFL position on the WFTU and the AFL’s reasons for not seeking membership. The most important AFL representative in Europe was Irving Brown, soon to be notorious for his almost brutal way of agitating and intriguing in the name of the AFL. Policy was determined in the federation headquarters in Washington.⁶⁵ Brown’s attempts during a visit to London in the spring of 1947 at establishing a closer cooperation with European trade union organisations with the help of the British and even the British Foreign Office are well known and recorded.⁶⁶ The AFL was worried about the advances made by the Communists in the European trade union movements, especially in Germany and Italy. But the North Americans’ greatest worry was Greece and “the Russian-sponsored World Federation of Trade Unions”, i.e., the plans of the WFTU for this country. The AFL needed the help of the TUC in Europe since the Federation was not a member of the WFTU. He ought to succeed, Brown thought, in getting the TUC over to the AFL side, and he reported to the AFL president William Green that the AFL and the TUC were very close on many vital questions.

The next General Council meeting of the WFTU was to be held in Prague June 9-14, 1947, and LO intended to send Axel Strand, its treasurer and designated President.⁶⁷ At a Nordic trade union conference held in Oslo 3-4 January 1947 and at the meeting of the Nordic Labour Committee held at the same time, the international trade union situation was discussed again without any new decisions being taken.⁶⁸ The still unresolved question of the relations between the WFTU and the ITS was a central issue to the LO. The 20 ITS had not become less critical of the plan to reorganise them into 14 trade departments of the WFTU, i.e, to reduce their independence. The Soviet attitude was that the number of trade departments should be further reduced to four or five. The matter was discussed and commented upon by the LO journal, *Fackföreningsrörelsen*.⁶⁹ It was obvious, not only from the Swedish perspective, the journal thought, that the Soviet trade union leaders could not or did not want to understand “the needs and activities of the ITS”; they had, after all, not allowed their unions to become members of the ITS. The journal was critical of the WFTU

65. George Meany Memorial Archives (GMMA), AFL-Convention files, 24: Minutes of the International Labor Relations Committee, Washington DC, 13 Nov 1946. - cf Romero 1992, chapters 2 and 3.

66. Cf. even Confidential report 17 April 1947 *From the Economic Intelligence Unit...: American Federation of Labour’s [sic!] Role in Europe*, GMMA Office of the President, Int. Affairs and International Affiliations 3.

67. LO EB 3/3 1947 § 8b.

68. LO EB 10/3 1947 § 7b. Cooperation committee minutes in ARAB SAP F:XXVI, c:5.

69. Gunnar Dahlander: No 16 17/4 1947 pp. 349-350. Dahlander had obviously read the report from Jan 1947 by the Transport Workers Union delegate after the negotiations in Paris in December 1946.

and the Soviet demands: the trade secretariats had a long tradition of successful work, they ought to be allowed to continue. They also have an important part to play in relation to the ILO in Geneva and in contributing to a wording of the ILO conventions favourable to trade union members. WFTU on the other hand has no contact with the ILO, and the Soviet Union denounces it. Consequently, the plans of the WFTU would hurt the unions. But the author maintained there was still hope of a solution to the problems “in the interests of peace and the international labouring class”.

The WFTU General Council meeting of June 1947 in Prague did not provide a satisfactory solution from a Swedish trade union perspective, even if the Council took great pride in the achieved results.⁷⁰ The discussions in Prague had been tough as was confirmed by the report of the Swedish representative, Axel Strand, to the LO Executive Board.⁷¹

After the meeting in Prague the LO sent the WFTU “general rules for the trade departments” which had been agreed at the meeting to its member unions, which had until the end of August to send in their comments.⁷² The Nordic trade union federations were still interested in maintaining the newly-established international cooperation, which was verified by a joint statement from the Nordic committee meeting and the Nordic Labour Conference meeting immediately after the trade union meeting in Oslo at the end of August, that is to say, at a time when the attitude of the national unions was well known.⁷³ The union answers were presented at the LO Executive Board meeting on 15 September and were summarised by the LO as its own resolution, which was again submitted to the unions for approval.⁷⁴ The criticism of the majority of the unions was unambiguous, which is also clear from a short report in the LO journal of the LO’s and Swedish national unions’ “objections to the general rules for the trade departments”.⁷⁵

But the Swedish criticism was much softer than the one levelled against the WFTU by several western European representatives. Swedish and Danish delegates had, for instance, found themselves in a minority in the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF), after the WFTU Prague General Council meeting in June 1947 had adopted the revised rules on the ITS. At the IMF Board meeting in Copenhagen July 24-26 1947 the Scandinavians were bitterly criticised for accepting the decisions in Prague. Axel Svensson, the Swedish metalworkers’ delegate to the Copenhagen meeting, referred to the fact that the Swedish national center had participated in the decision, which should be seen as a necessary compromise. The strong Swedish Metalworkers Union and the LO leadership were in fact

70. *Report of Activity of the World Federation of Trade Unions, presented by the General Secretary of the WFTU to the General Council at Prague, June 1-14 1947.* - Announcement (uttalande) of the GC of the WFTU 14/6 1947.

71. LO EB 30/6 1947 § 7a; report as appendix with 14 WFTU resolutions.

72. LO EB 7/7 1947 § 6; WFTU: General Regulations for the Trade Departments of the WFTU as adopted at the session of the General Council, Prague 9th-14th June, 1947, 6 pages and Louis Saillant’s accompanying letter 21/6 1947 to the member organisation LO with this formulation: “We are confident that in the view of the unanimity of the General Council your organisation will inform us very quickly of the ratification of these regulations in order to carry out its implementation.” The underlining done by hand at LO. LO Int. unit E:7 vol. 4.

73. Minutes of the Nordic cooperation committee meeting, Oslo 28-29/8 1947. See also Misgeld 1984, p. 96-99.

74. LO EB 15/9 1947 § 6a; LO EB 22/9 1947 § 8a appendix II, 20 Sept 1947; LO Int. unit E:7 vol. 4; *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 42, 17/10 1947, pp. 263-264.

75. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 42, 17/10 1947 pp. 263-264.

less negative about a more centralistic line on a Swedish national level.⁷⁶ This attitude seems to have influenced the Swedish position for some time.

But new negotiations would be initiated, according to Axel Svensson and the second delegate from the Swedish Metalworkers Union, Arne Geijer, then Secretary at the union. At this meeting Gailly, the Belgian delegate, had a dig at the Danish metalworkers president Hans Rasmussen: did Rasmussen not know that the world situation was now very tense, with two political blocs opposing each other? He wondered “if the Scandinavian comrades had not understood this situation”. At the same meeting to the annoyance of many delegates Irving Brown, the AFL “notoriously anti-WFTU” representative, was also allowed to play a role as a representative of the Machinists’ Union, which had now affiliated with to IMF.⁷⁷

Undemocratic Methods

The Swedish criticism of the WFTU proposal regarding the ITS was now concentrated to two points: the first being that the ITS had not been allowed to participate in the decision process. The Swedish unions could not accept such an undemocratic procedure, and thus could not accept the proposal formulated in such a way. The Swedish unions further demanded that the ITS would continue to be allowed to act independently and with the same authority and competence - albeit “in conformity with the aims and Constitution of the WFTU”. The WFTU rules regarding the ITS would now prevent a continued successful cooperation (with the ILO and visavis the public); the WFTU rules were an expression of an undemocratic centralism which could not be accepted by the Swedish unions.⁷⁸ This attitude was forwarded to the WFTU on September 23, 1947, in a four page letter in which the LO position was motivated in detail.⁷⁹ The LO demanded immediate new negotiations with the active participation by the ITS.

In the meantime, the discussions between the WFTU executive and the ITS had continued, and the Swedish attitude was shared by most representatives of the ITS, according to a letter from Walter Schevenels, the assistant general secretary, who dealt with the issue in the WFTU secretariat. But according to Schevenels a solution was on its way.⁸⁰ However, his letter was too optimistic. He also categorically rejected the LO demand that the WFTU General Council bring up the question again, since such a meeting was not scheduled before the September/October congress in 1948. (This Congress was not to take place before the split of the WFTU).

The answer did not satisfy the LO, and when Schevenels returned to the matter on 8 December 1947, it was to announce that the WFTU EB had decided that the paragraph in the Constitution about the ITS was now confirmed. Schevenels now asked for information about the number of members of “respective groups of workers” in Sweden.⁸¹

The LO headquarters and the national unions worked closely together on this question, which meant that the LO did little more than repeat the criticism of the member unions and

76. Cf. Klas Åmark about relations between LO and the national unions, forthcoming (1998).

77. *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, doc. 66, p. 447-457; MacShane 1992, p. 76f, quote on page 76.

78. LO EB 22/9 1947 § 8 annex II.

79. Einar Norrman/Per Österberg, Int. unit E:7 vol 4 WFTU 1947-1948, answer to WFTU request 21/6 1947; LO activities report 1947 pp. 283-292 and 300-301.

80. Schevenels/WFTU 17/10 1947, LO Int. unit E:7 vol 4, WFTU 1947-1948.

81. Ibid.

the ITS. The heart of this criticism was that through the LO the Swedish unions demanded the same independence for their international organisations vis a vis the WFTU that they themselves enjoyed in the LO. The independent election of their own officials and independent finances are, of course, indispensable to the Swedish national unions.

The continued correspondence with the WFTU on the status of the ITS did not lead to any new developments before the WFTU EB meeting in Paris 18-20 November, 1947.⁸² The Scandinavian organisations were united on this question.⁸³ When the WFTU sent a “final” proposal in a letter after the executive meeting in Paris 18-20 November and demanded that the paragraph on the ITS should now finally be accepted, this letter was rather brusquely turned down by the LO EB: the Swedish amendments had not been accepted. The concessions made by the WFTU after the meeting with the ITS in August and at the Board meeting in November were not satisfactory. Several Swedish unions had criticized “important points” of the proposal.⁸⁴ The LO did not accept the WFTU attitude to the ITS and could therefore not accept the winding up of the ITS.⁸⁵

It is difficult to see how the different views could have been bridged over.⁸⁶ The attitudes of the two camps were irreconcilable. The communist oriented representatives of the WFTU felt that the opposition represented “old reformist tendencies, which are inherited from the Amsterdam international”, according to a report in the LO journal of a statement by Kutznetsov, the Soviet trade union President.⁸⁷ But the question of the ITS was by no means isolated from another development: the confrontation between the two political blocs, East and West. The LO journal commented: “The Swedish apprehensions expressed at the start have been confirmed”. The WFTU “has not developed into an economically active international trade union organisation”. “Instead, it has become a tool for world politics”. The lack of cooperation between the major powers paralyzed the UN - and also the new WFTU. Any concessions made in future meetings would not matter.⁸⁸

The failure became apparent in the fall of 1948. At the extraordinary meeting of the LO General Council 10-11 November, 1948, Axel Strand reported on the situation. “All arguments were in favour of a division of the WFTU”.⁸⁹ And, he added, “One of the most difficult problems in the International is the relationship between the International and the ITS”. Thus, in the opinion of the LO leadership expressed at the General Council meeting,

82. LO EB 3/11 1947 § 6a.

83. LO EB 8/12 1947 § 6a, 12/1 1948 § 7b and 19/1 1948 § 6e.

84. See above Schevenels' letter 8/12 1947; Saillant 16/12 1947: the text is “final” and has to be accepted, LO Int. unit E:7 vol. 4; *Joint meeting of the WFTU Executive Bureau and the Representatives of the ITS. Paris 14th, 15th, 16th September, 1948.* - LO EB 30/12 1947 § 7a and 12/1 1948 § 7a.

85. See also LO activities report 1948, p 73.

86. See also MacShane 1992 about the ITS. - Cf. Werner Reutter: *Internationale Gewerkschaftsorganisationen zwischen Einheit und Spaltung. Die Internationale Vereinigung der Textilarbeiter und der Weltgewerkschaftsbund 1945 bis 1949*, p. 168-186 in: *IWK 2/1995*. Reutter stresses the internal national union conditions, “natürlich vor dem Hintergrund der sich verändernden politischen Rahmenbedingungen” (p. 170). He also plays down the anticommunism in the ITS and the AFL influence, which during the crucial year of 1946 still did not exist (p. 177).

87. No 10, 5/3 1948 pp 201-203, editorial written by Yngve Möller.

88. An example is a resolution from the WFTU General Council meeting 4-10/5 1948 in Rome about the relations to the national centers.

89. Minutes § 9.

it was the controversy over the ITS that was of central importance for the split. There is reason to return to this judgement after we have discussed the second major controversial issue in the WFTU, the Marshall plan, which had begun to paralyse the organisation in 1947.

THE UNIONS AND THE MARSHALL PLAN

The Economy, Not the WFTU, Decides the Foreign Policy

It may seem surprising that the minutes of the LO EB meetings do not mention the Marshall Plan before the WFTU Executive Paris meeting in November 1947. There had been many reasons to follow the developments very closely, since the Marshall plan would have important consequences for Sweden's economy and trade and thus also for the trade union movement.

On March 12, 1947, President Truman had unveiled the so-called Truman doctrine to Congress in Washington, which marked a new departure in US foreign policy: support to "free" states (Greece and Turkey) against foreign (Soviet) interventions. On 5 June, 1947, Foreign Secretary George Marshall held his famous Harvard lecture on the need for American help in European economic (and political) recovery. At the end of June, Sweden decided to participate in the European recovery program, but initially wished for it to be administered through the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), a position which later had to be abandoned.⁹⁰ On July 4, Great Britain and France jointly recommended European cooperation as an answer to the American proposal. In Sweden it was made very clear that participation in the Marshall plan did not mean that Sweden would abandon its position of non-alignment in foreign policy or that the country would be tied to "the West". In October of the the same year the "East" answered the western challenge by establishing the Communist information bureau, KOMINFORM. On 22 January, 1948, the "West" again answered through a speech in Parliament by Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Minister, in which he suggested the formation of a defence union by the democratic states in Europe. This led to the Brussels Pact which, however, lost i importance when the plans to form a North Atlantic defence community (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) were carried through. The NATO Pact was signed on April 4, 1949, in Washington with Denmark and Norway among the signatory powers.

On March 18, 1948, the so-called Marshall Plan was ratified by the US Congress; on 16 April the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was formed, and in August the same year the Swedish Parliament accepted Swedish participation after an ERP (European Recovery Program) agreement had been signed between Sweden and the USA on July 3rd, 1948. The trade union movment was brought in at several levels both through its international organisations and in national bodies. In January 1949 the "East" countered by forming the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon).⁹¹

90. For a description of the different phases of the Marshall plan, see e.g. af Malmberg 1994. For ECE see Václav Kostecky: *The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The beginning of a history*, Stockholm 1989; af Malmberg 1994, p. 72ff and Sevón 1995.

91. About the cooperation at national level, af Malmberg 1994, p. 107; af Malmberg also about the negotiations concerning the US embargo policy etc and the consequences for Sweden. Also Jonter 1995, Adler Karlsson 1968 and Aalders 1989. For the development and discussions inside Swedish and Nordic social

The political conflicts at the international level presented the international trade union movement with great problems, mainly in connection with the Marshall plan. The front line in the WFTU, two years old by now, followed the lines drawn between the major political powers, the Soviet Union and the USA, where the trade union organisations of both countries served as foot soldiers. The AFL now saw another opportunity to intervene on the European scene with the avowed purpose of pushing back communism.⁹²

The CIO had also begun to move away from the communist-oriented group in the WFTU. The AFL - still outside the sphere of the international cooperation - fought both the WFTU and the CIO while intensifying its contacts with the British TUC. In the fall of 1947 the AFL thought that it had achieved unity with the TUC leadership in its interpretation of the Communist intentions in the Kominform and the WFTU and against the Marshall plan.⁹³

In Sweden a tough battle was fought against the Communists in the election campaign leading up to the parliamentary elections in September 1948. The Communist coups in central Europe - and especially the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in February 1948 - had repercussions in the Swedish labour movement, where the communists were increasingly pressed back. At the same time the Social Democrats, supported by the unions, fought a hard battle against the bourgeois opposition. The outcome of the elections was by no means sure.⁹⁴

Avoid Discussion

The trade union centers which had a western orientation supported the acceptance of the Marshall plan. The LO also supported the plan, the character of which was described as an economic and not a political program, "a protective device against economic fluctuations" not at least in the USA, according to an editorial in the first 1948 issue of the LO journal.⁹⁵ In another editorial, written after the Paris WFTU meeting at which the fate of the ITS was to be decided, the position taken by the Swedish government was reiterated, namely that it was "basically" a "material economic plan - a kind of a planned recovery".⁹⁶ But even if the plan was not recognised as "political", the editorial had to agree that it had in fact become "a very controversial issue in world politics", "a focal point in the US-Soviet controversy".

How do you avoid being seen as a "political" actor in a "world political" controversy between great powers? The simplest way is to avoid any discussion. The fact that the LO

democracy see Misgeld 1984, p. 121-172; Blidberg 1994. - cf Romero 1992, part II.

92. A statement on 17 November 1947 by the AFL President William Green made at the request of President Truman, makes this political analysis. The AFL was eager to have west European trade union cooperation; Truman's answer 19 November 1947: GAMMA, AFL, President's Office Files Series and William Green Papers 6:0474. - AFL's George Meany, who succeeded Green a few years later, was particularly eager to get European trade union support, according to Robinson, 1981, p. 136. - At its conference in October 1947 in Boston the CIO adopted ten principles for "aid to the peoples destroyed through the War!". In a detailed memorandum to President Truman the CIO President Philip Murray developed these principles for the planned aid. The memorandum warns against a formation of political blocs as a consequence of the aid program (p. 1). The memorandum was placed before the international trade union Marshall conference in March in London. A German version available at ARAB P 935 (ICFTU).

93. William Green, President AFL, 4/2 1948 to Sir Arthur Deakin, new TUC general secretary and WFTU president; GAMMA William Green papers 8:0192.

94. See also memoirs of Sven Andersson 1980, p. 326ff; Tage Erlander 1973.

95. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 1/1948, 16/1 1948, p. 34.

96. *Ibid.* no 49, 5/12 1947 pp. 409-410.

was in favour of the plan consequently also meant that the LO EB wanted at all costs to keep the discussion of the Marshall plan outside the WFTU. It was quite obvious that such a discussion would only lead to dissension. Naturally, the LO also refused to accept the idea that the plan would be allowed to be used “as a means of pressure in politics”.⁹⁷ Here, the LO took the same position as the WFTU majority, and made a direct repudiation of the TUC and CIO positions.

But the question could no longer be kept outside the WFTU councils. When the CIO wanted to put the Marshall plan on the WFTU agenda at the Paris meeting of the executive committee on 19-24 November, 1947, this was refused after a vote, “but the CIO representative was given the opportunity to explain the attitude of his organisation in the question”, according to the LO activities report for 1947.⁹⁸ In the beginning of 1948 now the Soviet side demanded that the International should declare itself *against* the plan. The coming EB meeting planned for May to be held in Rome thus threatened to become an arena for serious confrontation. According to the LO if the WFTU declared its opposition to the plan would split the organisation in two. At this time the LO still presented the image of a WFTU supporter. The WFTU “still represents the only world organisation of free organisations that the world has managed to produce since the end of the war. It is one of the few forces of unity in a dangerous world”, according to the editorial writer of the LO journal.⁹⁹

The meeting of the WFTU EB planned for February 1948 to discuss “the economic reconstruction of Europe” was never held. This was openly regretted by the Nordic representative on the board, the Danish LO President Eiler Jensen. He had looked forward to a discussion of the Marshall Plan at the meeting.¹⁰⁰ Thus there was a difference of opinion between the Swedish LO and its Danish counterpart. Unlike the Danish LO, the CIO and the TUC the Swedish LO did not want any discussion of the plan. The communist group was prepared to denounce it. Thus the situation would have become embarrassing for the Swedish LO if putting the Marshall plan on the WFTU agenda had led to an open debate about its political implications.

But it was soon quite obvious that a discussion of the plan could not be postponed. Instead, the organisations in favour of the Marshall plan were invited by the TUC to a conference in London on March 8-10.¹⁰¹ The AFL was also invited even though it was not a member of the WFTU. The days of the International were numbered.

The Marshall Plan As a Means and a Goal

The success of the first conference on the Marshall Plan in London in March 1948 could be partly attributed to Irving Brown.¹⁰² During the first two months of the year he had managed to see representatives of at least 14 national centers in Europe, including the Scandinavian organisations meeting in Copenhagen.

The Swedish trade union leaders fully understood the role of the AFL,¹⁰³ namely to divide the WFTU in Latin America and elsewhere, in order also to combat its North American

97. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 3, 16/1 1948, p. 34. - cf Hogan 1987, p. 146 about what happened in reality.

98. Activities report 1947, p. 301.

99. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 3/1948, p. 34.

100. LO EB 16/2 1948 § 7a.

101. LO EB 23/2 1948 § 7a; 1/3 1948 § 7b.

102. cf Godson 1976, p. 113. - The meeting of the Nordic Labour Movement Cooperation Committee 7-8 February in Stockholm, minutes LO archives, Nordic cooperation committee vol 4.

103. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 1, 16/1 1948, p. 35f. - cf Hogan 1987, p. 146ff.

opponent, the CIO. The Marshall plan was both a means and a goal. It was used by the AFL to break up the WFTU. At the same time the road opened to cooperation within the European recovery program (the ERP). The Swedish, Danish and Norwegian trade union federations (LO) accepted the British invitation, after the issue had been discussed at their Nordic committee meeting on 7-8 February in Stockholm.¹⁰⁴ The fate of the WFTU came second to the Swedish interest in participating in the Marshall plan.

The Marshall plan had been the main point on the agenda of the Stockholm meeting. There was a unanimous feeling that the Scandinavian countries should participate in the plan and in the ERP without stipulating any political conditions such as demanding a “socialist reconstruction” in Europe. This latter aspect was important to the two senior Swedish ministers, Gustav Möller and Ernst Wigforss, who wanted to see the plan only “as an economic rescue operation”, but without giving the impression of “defending American capitalism”. A politisation of the plan in a “socialist” direction had not promoted the aims to be achieved, namely the “reconstruction of Western Europe” (Wigforss) with American help. The Foreign Minister, Östen Undén, also underlined that “it is important to emphasize that the Marshall plan is an economic action”. He could not see that the communist attacks against it were so dangerous: “When the workers understand the economic importance of the plan they will also support it to a large extent.”

There were no divided opinions in the Swedish group but some Norwegians were suspicious of the US intentions (Minister of Trade Erik Brofoss). Other Norwegians (Party Secretary Haakon Lie and to some extent Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen) saw the Marshall plan as a “world political event”. In the trade union discussions concern was also voiced about the effects on the international: should the WFTU split over the issue? On this question Eiler Jensen of the Danish LO and Konrad Nordahl, President of the Norwegian LO, did not agree. Jensen wanted to bring up the question of the Marshall plan at WFTU meetings, believing that a breach was inevitable. He probably even wanted to speed up this breach. Axel Strand of the Swedish LO took an intermediate position, but he also made it clear that he did not see in the WFTU an organisation that could achieve very much “because of the inbuilt tension between Social Democrats and Communists”.¹⁰⁵ He also mentioned in passing that contacts were already established between the Scandinavian organisations and the AFL (Irving Brown). Strand also mentioned that it was to be expected that the Finnish representative would abstain from voting on a resolution on the Marshall plan. With these reservations the Nordic trade union committee was in complete agreement, even if there had not been any active discussion of the Marshall plan in Sweden, since it had not been presented as a political issue.¹⁰⁶

104. Minutes LO archives. Nordic Labour Movement Cooperation Committee vol 4.

105. In a first draft version of the minutes, in ARAB, SAP F:XXVI:c:V, it even says that the WFTU “had mostly served the communist interest”. The wording of the minutes were changed at Strand’s request: Einar Norrman/LO to Sven Andersson/SAP, 2/3 1948, *ibid*.

106. Like LO a delegation of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) also participated in a parallel meeting of the Western Social Democratic parties on 19-20 March at Selsdon Park (Surrey). The Swedish delegates were Sven Andersson, party secretary and Kaj Björk, international secretary of the party. The meeting was held at the invitation of the British Labour Party but the initiative had been taken by the Norwegians. The eastern European Social Democrats were not present any more. The Swedish movement consciously did not send a minister, a tactic which was often used by SAP in the meetings of the COMISCO/Socialist International (SI). However, Sven Andersson was expected to join the government after the September elections. See

At the London meeting on the Marshall plan the LO was represented by the President, Axel Strand, the economist Rudolf Meidner and Owe Casparsson, London correspondent of the LO-owned evening paper *Aftonidningen*. The LO Executive Board knew already before the conference that it would divide the WFTU,¹⁰⁷ or as the LO journal put it: “if the WFTU cannot fulfill its mission of mediator and bridge builder, it cannot exist in its present form”.¹⁰⁸ By participating in the London Conference the LO in reality pronounced its final judgement on the WFTU “in its present form”. The national interest - participating in this “prectical matter” - i.e., the possibility of receiving dollar credits and improving the conditions for international trade, weighed more heavily for the interests of the central trade union organisations than the interest in saving one of the last bastions of East-West cooperation.¹⁰⁹ Basically, the attitude of LO (and the TUC), formulated already in February 1945, was now tested: that the world federation should not have the right to decide centrally which positions to be taken by the member organisations in individual questions.¹¹⁰ Facing the impending split, the All Soviet Trade Union Federation suggested that every national center had the right to formulate its own position (on the Marshall plan), but this was seen as a last desperate Soviet attempt at saving an organisation, which “during its two year existence had increasingly tended to become a supporter of Soviet foreign policy”.¹¹¹

LO followed the resolutions of the London conference to the letter. The trade union organisations in the countries that had participated in the London conference would now “be in a position to deal with international economic planning problems of a real and imminent nature” - a rather pompous concept the realisation of which was hardly very imminent.¹¹² Axel Strand reported on the London meeting to the LO Executive Board. In London “there was complete unanimity concerning the necessity of US aid to European reconstruction”.¹¹³ The participants had felt that it was important that the trade unions represented the workers’ interest in connection with “the economic and industrial problems” that would occur in conjunction with the execution of the plan.¹¹⁴ The national centers participating in the London meeting (12 European and three US organisations: AFL, CIO and the Railway Workers) had promised to establish contact with their governments for a joint participation in the design of the plan. The conference had set up a “joint trade union advisory committee” (ERP-Trade Union Advisory Committee, TUAC) for the European reconstruc-

Misgeld 1984, p 132 ff and passim. On the LO side the top leadership was engaged in the International. As late as 1951 a non elected expert was hired to deal with international questions. The reason was the heavy workload of the elected top officials, not tactics.

107. LO EB 1/3 1948 § 7b; *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 10, 5/3 1948 editorial by Yngve Möller, p. 201-203; no 12, 17/3 1948, editorial p. 249-250; no 13-14, 26/3-2/4 1948, editorial pp. 274-275.

108. No 10/1948, p. 203.

109. The quotes from the *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, editorial no 12/1948.

110. There is a certain hesitation on the LO side, which the US Embassy had also discerned and reported on. cf Carew 1987, p. 77 and 258. - Cf also Hogan 1987, p. 14. - Even for Scandinavia the role played by the US labor attachees ought to be researched.

111. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 10/1948, p. 202.

112. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 12/1948, p. 250; see also Jonter 1995.

113. LO EB 15/3 1948 § 7a.

114. Ibid., appendix 1: “The international trade union conference. The European aid plan. Decisions about future organisation”; appendix 2: translation of resolution. - A summary of the so-called Harriman committee report to President Truman was available at the conference (8/11 1947). A German version available at ARAB P 935 (ICFTU).

tion program. Konrad Nordahl was the Scandinavian representative on the committee with Eiler Jensen and Axel Strand as substitutes. The task of the committee was to consult with the bodies set up within the Marshall plan (ERP, OEEC).¹¹⁵

On 26-27 April 1948, Rudolf Meidner reported to the LO General Council meeting about the discussions in London.¹¹⁶ He saw it as “one of the most remarkable events of the conference ... that the otherwise competing US unions had united around the Marshall aid”.¹¹⁷ Indeed the situation in the USA had changed. In the campaign leading to the presidential elections in November 1948 president Truman and the democrats also had an opponent from the left, Henry A. Wallace, who had communist support. Losing votes to him made Truman’s position precarious. Even inside the CIO there were strong groups that supported Wallace. It was very important that the Communists both in and outside the CIO were defeated by the auto worker president Walter Reuther and his group. If successful, the road would be open for future cooperation with the AFL, which traditionally supported the Democrats. Cooperation around the Marshall plan and breaking up the WFTU, which, like the American Communists, was considered to be run from Moscow, was then only a logical consequence. When the LO representatives met the officials of the CIO and the AFL, they were in the midst of a fight which had brought the two organisations closer to each other.¹¹⁸

No Demands from the USA?

According to the reports, the discussion at the London meeting had only covered the principles of the plan, not detailed practical questions, and even Meidner emphasized that the United States would not be allowed to set any conditions. On this point, the US delegates had tried to reassure those attending the meeting. An important argument to allay all fears was that the American trade union movement itself had a hand in drafting the plan, a fact which should guarantee that no economic or political strings were attached. There was not to be any “American intervention in internal European affairs”.

The European trade union leaders were later to learn, if they did not already know, that things were not quite as simple as that, and that it was important for the USA to get control over the planned trade union OEEC body, the joint trade union advisory committee, TUAC. But to the Swedish participants this reassurance was important for them to be able to motivate a positive attitude, which was also made clear in the name of the three Scandinavian organisations. One particular sentence is worth quoting in full: the Swedish delegation underlined “that the aid must not contribute to increasing the tensions between

115. Ibid., - *Declaration on the European Recovery Program* even in Loth 1991, 551-554. - A summary of the Marshall plan and the role of the trade union movement was available at the March conference. There is no mention of the name of the author, but the paper seems to emanate from the AFL: *Internationale Gewerkschaftskonferenz - Europaeischer Hilfsplan. Darstellung fuer die Konferenz von Gewerkschaftsvertretern der beteiligten Laender; London, 9-10 Maerz 1948; in ARAB P. 935 (ICFTU)*.

116. LO General Council 26-27/4 1948 § 12.

117. cf Hogan 1987, p. 146ff on a conscious tactic in the USA to have both organisations participate. About the difference of opinion between the USA and Great Britain in the ERP question see Hogan 1987, p. 148. - According to Meany’s biographer Archie Robinson: *George Meany and his time. A biography*, New York 1981, p. 138, Meany had decided to cooperate with the CIO in the new international in spite of President Green opposing it.

118. cf Carew 1987, 76ff; MacShane 1992, 97ff; Robert H. Zieger: *The CIO, 1935-1955*, Chapell Hill & London 1995, chapters 9 and 11; Victor G. Reuther: *The Brothers Reuther and the story of the UAW. A memoir*, Boston 1976, chapter 24 with criticism of Irving Brown, p. 332, 337.

East and West”. But not even the Swedish participants believed in it. They had, after all, by attending the conference already taken sides, even if the Conference itself also made a statement against the formation of two blocs.¹¹⁹ That was a sham battle.

After the London Conference the LO paid no heed to WFTU statements in the Marshall plan question. Eiler Jensen’s report from the WFTU Board meeting in Rome 4-10 May, 1948, did not change this attitude.¹²⁰ Instead, the LO leadership actively participated in the continued talks with the national centers that had accepted the Marshall plan, to begin with at a second conference in London, 29-30 July 1948 (Axel Strand and Per Österberg),¹²¹ and after this meeting in the cooperation with the new international bodies, e.g. at the OEEC in Paris.¹²²

The LO Executive Board formally accepted the decisions and the statement of the second London conference on the European Reconstruction Program and the participation of the trade union organisations in its administration through the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) and the OEEC.¹²³ The statement mentions the invitation by Averell Harriman and Paul Hoffman to cooperate (p 4). At the same time all participating governments were encouraged to associate the national trade union movements to the ERP, which had not yet happened. (p 5) But above all the statement emphasized that the Marshall Plan was an economic program without political implications and without intervention “in the internal affairs and policies of the participating countries” (p 6 and 8). Here again, the American trade union colleagues are trusted to help (p 8). It is also worth noting that point 9 in the statement says that the recovery program will serve “successively to unite Europe” - a statement which was obviously accepted by the LO. It is hard to think that the Swedish SAP government would have supported such a formulation if it had had a concrete meaning.

The LO subsequently participated regularly in the OEEC, ERP and TUAC meetings and actively promoted the idea that the OEEC should have a functioning trade union advisory committee.¹²⁴ The LO journal, *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, supported this policy in editorials about how Europe’s and even Sweden’s interests coincided with US interests in their cooperation on the Marshall Plan.¹²⁵

The WFTU Collapses

In the meantime, the work of the WFTU was close to collapse. On October 27, 1948, the TUC General Council suggested that the WFTU suspend its activities for a year. The proposal would be discussed at the next WFTU board meeting. The TUC announced on the same date “that if the WFTU refused to suspend its activities the British organisation would

119. The LO opinion is made clear in a pamphlet by the LO economist Nils Kellgren: *Marshallplanen*, Stockholm (LO: Aktuella frågor 12) 1948, pp. 8, 13, 20. The Marshall plan is described in very positive language while the Soviet Union is criticized. It is also made clear that the plan has a political significance, which would not mean that Sweden was giving up its political independence. - In the other direction you find “dictatorships”, the spokesman and historian of the LO, Ragnar Casparsson wrote. See Ragnar Casparsson: *LO under fem årtionden*, vol. II, Stockholm 1948, p. 582.

120. LO EB 31/5 1948 § 7a and 7/6 1948 § 7a.

121. LO EB 5/7 1948 § 5c; 9/8 1948 § 7.

122. LO EB 23/8 1948 § 6a.

123. The statement in Swedish as annex to LO EB 23/8 1948.

124. LO EB 1/11 1948 § 8a.

125. No 43-45 1948, 22-29/10 1948, p. 193-195.

have to withdraw”. Thus it was in effect a threat, not a proposal.¹²⁶ The TUC had even proposed that all member organisations would have to consider the demand. The CIO threatened not to pay any affiliation fees to the WFTU, the reason being the great disunity which had marked the activities of the WFTU during the past year, especially during the autumn of 1948.

Facing the demands of the TUC, the LO, however, announced that it would wait for the upcoming WFTU Congress. The Danish and Norwegian organisations shared this attitude, which was also accepted by the LO General Council meeting. But apart from this formal attitude, the LO leadership ignored the WFTU and its “Kominform policy”.¹²⁷ In November 1948 the LO General Council formally decided to participate in the western organisations’ Marshall Plan cooperation. However, there was not complete unanimity. According to the minutes, a member of the Council questioned the wisdom of a decision to participate in the deliberations “of the so-called Marshall countries”. But he did not register any reservation in the minutes.¹²⁸

On 17-23 January 1949 the sub committee of the WFTU Executive Board met in Paris. The TUC demand that the organisation suspended its activities for at least one year and to resume its work if and when the situation so allowed was not accepted by the majority of those present, led by the Soviet delegation. The formal reason given was that the committee was not empowered to make such a decision.¹²⁹ Then on 19 January the TUC representative, Arthur Deakin, who was also president of the WFTU, then on 19 January walked out of the meeting together with the CIO representative Jim Carey and the Dutch delegate E. Kupers.¹³⁰ It was “a riot” Hogan writes, staged by the TUC and the CIO with the AFL in the background. “Shouting erupted from all sides”.¹³¹

The Nordic organisations were not represented on the Executive Committee and therefore managed to stay out of the firing line. When their representative, Eiler Jensen, came to the full Executive Board meeting in Paris January 28-February 1, there was not much left of the WFTU to save.¹³² In reality, the Scandinavians had decided to follow the

126. The TUC letter of 27/10 1948 and the reaction of the general secretary was submitted to the LO EB 22/11 1948, § 8b in the minutes; letters in LO Int. unit E:7 vol. 7. A summary of the letter also in the activities report 1948 p. 73.

127. *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, report on the TUC and AFL demands and the current situation, no 45-46, 5-12/11 1948, p. 218 -219.

128. Minutes from the extraordinary meeting 10-11/11 1948 § 9.

129. WFTU: *Session of the Executive Bureau*, Paris 17th-22nd January, 1949; Declaration of the Executive Bureau of the WFTU to workers throughout the world (the majority position); the official announcement from the secretariate about the meeting and the position taken by the Executive Bureau in circular letters to the affiliates, 20/1 1949 LO EB 28/2 1949 § 7c; at the LO EB meeting 28/2 1949 there was a letter from the TUC about the meeting § 6c and a letter from the AFL proposing a new international cooperation § 6b.

130. Jim Carey’s speech at the bureau meeting on Jan 17 - “a rousing speech” (Hogan 1987, p. 202) - was distributed by the European representative of the CIO, Elmer F. Cope. - Carey gives an historic overview of the developments and also brings up the question of the increasing communist dominance of the different WFTU bodies, which undermine cooperation. There was no other way than leaving the organisation for organisations who were not prepared to “accept the dictates of the Polit Bureau and the Cominform”. Instead a new world organisation should be set up! LO EB 31/1 1949 § 6b; GMMA, AFL President’s Office Files, William Green Papers, WFTU 1948-1949, 10:0468; LO activities report 1948, p. 73.

131. Hogan 1987, p. 202.

132. LO EB 17/1 1949 § 6c; LO EB 21/2 1949 § 8c; Eiler Jensen’s report; LO EB 28/2 § 7e and 21/3 § 7a (the WFTU minutes - ad acta).

British and the Americans (both CIO and AFL).¹³³ There was also no alternative, even if there was some local Swedish resistance to the idea of dissolving the WFTU.¹³⁴

Yet the break-up of the WFTU was bemoaned by the Scandinavian trade union movement in spite of its western orientation and in spite of the strong communist, antireformist dominance of the organisation, which was condemned. There were those who had seen in the International “the perhaps most important factor for peace and the greatest asset in the solidarity efforts of the working class”.¹³⁵ However, such lofty language was not very common. But to Sweden and the Swedish LO, any access to international cooperation across the frontiers of the cold war were very important after the years of isolation and forced restraint. But the protests of the Scandinavian organisations against the “unparliamentary” rampagings of the TUC, which had contributed to deepening the crisis, were of no avail.¹³⁶ As a matter of fact already in 1948/49 the TUC was secretly negotiating with a small group of French and Dutch trade union leaders without the Scandinavians’ knowledge. But even if the British, American and Dutch “method of leaving the federation (could) look rash and did not follow parliamentary praxis”,¹³⁷ the WFTU also rather “unparliamentarily” closed the door, when the secretariat directly contacted national unions, bypassing the member organisations. This stirred up bad blood among the national centers and hurt those who still believed in a solution within the framework of the WFTU.¹³⁸

Eiler Jensen’s report from the WFTU Board meeting (29/1-1/2) only served to confirm that there was not much room left for manoeuvre. At the Nordic LO meeting on 5-6 March 1949 in Copenhagen, held right after the failure of the Nordic defence union, Eiler Jensen concluded that the ideological antagonisms inside the WFTU were simply too large.¹³⁹ Even if the Nordic organisations wanted to wait and see for as long as possible, there was now no reason to remain in the organisation, particularly as the WFTU majority did not want to discuss the principles for the establishment of trade departments in spite of the resistance of the international trade secretariats.¹⁴⁰ Konrad Nordahl agreed with Jensen. Even Strand agreed on behalf of the Swedish LO, but even now he wanted to delay the formation of a new trade union international.¹⁴¹ He was also “concerned about the Finnish position and about the basis for future Nordic cooperation, if the Finns were the only remaining Nordic member of the WFTU”. The importance of this “Finnish card” at the trade union level was confirmed by the Finnish participant in the Copenhagen meeting, Olavi Lindblom: Finland could not leave the WFTU at this stage, but would “try to avoid any participation in its

133. About contacts with the TUC and AFL, LO General Council meeting 28/4 1949 § 17.

134. LO EB 24/1 1949 § 6b and c; see also presentation of member organisations in *Report of activity of the World Federation of Trade Unions 15 October - 30 April 1949*, and *Session of the Executive Committee, Paris, 28 January - 1st February 1949* (without “western” representation).

135. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* no 5-6, 4-11/2 1949, p. 50. - The leader of the Norwegian Trade Union Confederation (LO), Konrad Nordahl, was disappointed about the split. Nordahl 1973, p. 128.

136. cf Carew 1987, p. 327, 333.

137. cf Lademacher 1979/1986.

138. cf Back 1977, p. 375f; Lademacher et al 1978, p. 206; Ibid. 1979/1986.

139. Minutes SAP F:XXVI:6:c, agenda item 3.

140. LO did not respond to an invitation from the WFTU to participate in an inaugural conference setting up certain trade departments. The letter was forwarded to the LO member unions. Some of them answered that they would not participate, LO EB 2/5 1949 § 7a, 25/3 and 30/5.

141. Cf. *Fackföreningsrörelsen* 11-12, 18-25/3 1949.

work”.¹⁴² The situation was not easier in Iceland, due to the strong Communist position in the Icelandic organisation. But it was reasonable to expect that the organisation could decide to disaffiliate at its Congress in 1950. Axel Strand could report on these developments at the LO EB meeting on March 8, 1949.¹⁴³ The Board decided to put the international problem on the agenda of the forthcoming General Council meeting, since the next LO congress was not before 1951.

IN WESTERN COMPANY

In spite of the LO hesitation to participate immediately in the establishment of a new International, this was already under way. One way of making it easier to seek membership was to play down the role of the International. “The activities of the trade union international have always been of secondary importance to trade union activities. Not least during the period 1945-1949 has this been the case” the LO journal writes in May 1949, at the same time as it admits that trade union internationalism “could fulfil an important mission”.¹⁴⁴ We are to understand that in the Swedish perspective the trade union International had a less than central role. Still, the LO through the International had had to take a position in a question of political, and not least foreign policy, importance: it had made a clear commitment to the West. The LO criticized the British for having forced a decision. The situation for “the trade union movement in the small democratic states” had become “complicated” as a result of the tough and “formally” questionable rampaging of the British and the Americans. The LO was now forced to take a position before it was really ready to do so.¹⁴⁵ Axel Strand told the General Council that the EB had not been completely unanimous, mainly because the TUC/CIO/NVV (Nederlands Verbond van Vakverenigen) had not waited for an international congress before deciding to leave the WFTU. Strand understood that “the trade union movements of the western democratic countries”, including the Danish and Norwegian LOs would decide to leave the WFTU, and he concluded: “it is unthinkable for Sweden to remain affiliated under those circumstances”. To participate in the forthcoming WFTU congress in Milan as the only “western democratic” organisation was also unthinkable. But Strand still did not want the General Council to make a decision, but rather to refer the matter to the Executive Board.

Even in the discussion in the General Council there were critical voices. The representative of the Commercial Workers Union, SA Johansson, and Sven Ekström of the Foundry Workers Union were not happy about “having to consider what other national centers would decide”.

142. Majander 1991 and 1994 about Finland.

143. Minutes § 7a.

144. No 19-20, 13-20/5 1949, p. 233-236. - A similar formulation was used by Arne Geijer at the Metalworkers Union convention in 1950; cf Back 1977, p. 377.

145. Minutes from the LO General Council meeting 27-28/4 1949 § 17. The LO General Secretary, Otto Westling, was among those who wanted to wait and see. cf also *Fackföreningsrörelsen* 19-20/1949, p. 235. - It's worth mentioning that LO, in 1949, sent a delegation to Moscow to participate in the May Day celebration. The delegation was headed by the vice president of the LO, Einar Norrman. As Rudolf Meidner, one of the members of the delegation, tells 1997, the delegation gave the Soviet trade union leaders the impression that LO planned to stay in the WFTU. - Some years later Norrman had to leave his positions in the LO and became an active member of the Communist Party of Sweden.

(Johansson) They wanted rather to postpone a decision until the next General Council meeting, i.e., in the fall of 1949.¹⁴⁶ Both were united in their criticism of the WFTU, but they did not like the way things were decided, or in Ekström's words: "I think the correct thing for a minority that does not have its way is to stay and work for its opinion." Most of the GC delegates did not want to participate in the formation of a new organisation at this stage, in spite of British and American pressure, which Ragnar Casparsson confirmed after contacts he had had at a meeting in Brussels with the western organisations.¹⁴⁷

Representatives of national centers in several small countries had already met in Brussels. At that meeting a proposal from the AFL to form a new trade union international had been discussed. The Americans and the British were well prepared after their own secret negotiations.¹⁴⁸ Those present at the meeting, among them representatives of all the Scandinavian national centers, were united in the opinion that it was time to quit the WFTU, but they did not want to be "too hasty" in forming a new international. But above all they did not want to be forced by the big powers. The participants in the meeting "could not accept an invitation from the major powers to join an international which had been formed (by the big organisations), since this could not be seen to be in keeping with democratic practice".

Soviet dominance was not to be exchanged for North American or British. The experience of the British-American actions during the final stages of the WFTU had also shown that democratic principles and constitutional rules weighed lightly if they did not serve the interests of the major powers' organisations. Democratic principles and the Constitution were the guarantees the small organisations had against being steamrolled.

But there was also a political problem which the LO could not ignore. Casparsson reminded the General Council of the situation in 1938 and the neutrality line that the Nordic labour movements followed at the time.¹⁴⁹ He again called attention to the fact that Sweden's position during the "war was not considered very honorable" at the first international meetings in 1945. A trade union line of neutrality was not something the Swedish unions should seek. But if a new western-oriented International were to be formed, it would be necessary to see to it that it was limited to pure trade union matters and avoided "political activities". It would, in other words, have "a secondary importance" as the LO journal had formulated it.

The proposal to disaffiliate from the WFTU was accepted in principle in spite of the LO attitude that the TUC "way of handling matters did not conform with democratic working

146. The next LO Congress was not to take place before 1951, but it was to be expected that the Norwegian and Danish LO were going to decide at their conventions in May 1949.

147. 13-14/4 1949; cf LO EB 4/4 1949 § 4i with Ragnar Casparsson's report annexed.

148. Such negotiations took place already in conjunction with the TUAC meeting on January 21 in Bern; Hogan 1987, p. 202. - A preparatory memorandum about the constitution of a new international, by George Delaney for William Green, GMMA, AFL President's Office Files, William Green Papers, WFTU 1948-1949, 10:0468. Robinson 1981 p 137ff; Hogan 1987, 202.

149. About the background see Rolf Steininger: *Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die deutsche Frage, die Internationale und das Problem der Wiederaufnahme der SPD auf den internationalen sozialistischen Konferenzen bis 1951, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Labour Party. Darstellung und Dokumentation*, Bonn 1979, chapter I and document; Kersti Blidberg: *Splittrad gemenskap. Kontakter och samarbete inom nordisk socialdemokratisk arbetarrörelse 1931-1945*, Stockholm 1984.

methods” (Ernst Falk of the LO EB) and in spite of the fact that the Scandinavian countries even in other questions - like foreign and security policies - followed different roads. However, there was no alternative to “following the British”. Formal objections did not weigh heavily considering “that the International had failed and become a Communist organisation” (Knut Larsson, Wood Workers Union). To participate in the formation of a new International, however, was not considered to be urgent. It was also decided not to publish the decisions by the General Council. Anyway, the question was now answered: the LO was to leave the WFTU, even if the date remained an open question.

However, this question did not remain open for very long. At the EB meeting on June 7, 1949 it was decided, to disaffiliate from the WFTU, immediately, after the proposal of one of the members (Andreas Karlsson of the Painters’ Union) to shelve the question had been rejected.¹⁵⁰ The decision to disaffiliate now became unanimous. The criticism of the undemocratic behaviour of the western representatives who walked out of the January Executive Committee meeting was again raised in the meeting in conjunction with the discussion of the exact date for the disaffiliation and the period for which the LO should pay affiliation fees. A minority of those present (4) wanted to set the WFTU Board meeting of 28-29 January as the date, but the majority (6) decided that June 15 was to be the day of disaffiliation. Dues had to be paid up to this day in accordance with the Constitution. On 9 June the LO informed the WFTU secretariat in Paris by registered letter that the LO disaffiliated as of June 15. At that time the LO had had no contact with the EFTU since the previous fall.

In the LO Activities Report for 1949 the blame for the breach was unreservedly put on the Communists and “the Communist tactics” in the WFTU.¹⁵¹ The whole affair could not have looked quite that simple through the eyes of Strand and the national union leadership. They knew very well how the Americans had acted. They had had many opportunities to learn about the full picture, for instance in the spring of 1949 when a Swedish study group of trade union leaders including, among others, Axel Strand, Arne Geijer and Per Österberg had travelled around the United States to study production and labour conditions. One purpose of the trip had been to establish connections with American unions.¹⁵²

A New International

This is not the place for a detailed description of the negotiations leading to the foundation of the ICFTU and the LO affiliation with it. The discussions began in June 1949 in Geneva, where the LO was participating. On 15 August the LO EB proposed to the General Council that it should decide “in principle that the LO should affiliate with the planned new trade union International”, but to delegate to the EB the final decision after the LO had participated in the planned founding congress in London (November-December 1949).¹⁵³ One of the Swedish negotiators was LO’s legal advisor Arnold Sölvén. In his report to the General Council he said: “I believe that there would be a strong reaction in other national

150. Minutes § 5a.

151. LO activities report 1949, pp. 74-75: “the communist members of the Executive Bureau”, “communist tactics”.

152. The study trip, March 10 - April 12, resulted in a booklet: *USA. LO-Delegationens intryck* (the impressions of the LO delegation), Stockholm 1949; Reuther 1976, p. 404.

153. The extraordinary meeting of the General Council in August had two major questions on the agenda: the wage negotiation situation and “the international trade union situation”. Minutes 18-19/8 1949 § 9.

centers if Sweden, with its in democratic terms impeccable trade union movement, would abstain from affiliating to the new democratic International from the very beginning. It would put us in a secondary position and would seriously endanger the goodwill we have so far enjoyed. Naturally, such a policy from our side would also weaken the new organisation and be used by the Communists against the new organisation”.

Sölvén was very firm in his opinion: it was not in the LO interests nor in the interests of the international free trade union movement not to decide to affiliate to the new organisation, even if it was oriented towards the west. Axel Strand, the LO President could only agree with Sölvén.

The General Council followed the proposal of the EB with the understanding that certain open questions, like the status of the ITS, would be clarified. Thus the LO became one of the founding members of the ICFTU at its first Conference and Congress (26/2-9/12, 1949, in London).¹⁵⁴ From this Congress, which the entire LO leadership had attended, Sölvén reported to the General Council ordinary meeting in 1950. He concluded: “The convention was strongly aware of the fact that the new International had to carry on a war on two frontiers, against capitalism on one side and Communism on the other. The result of the fight against the first enemy was to decide the success of the fight against the latter enemy.” The minutes of the General Council meeting records: “Applause”.¹⁵⁵

Sölvén’s final sentence echoed the profound emotion in the long speech by AFL president William Green on December 1st on the Conference which led to the inauguration of the ICFTU.¹⁵⁶ Green had ended his speech with a bold comparison: the solidaristic fight for “international free democratic trade unionism” was like the “idealism” that made “the early martyrs [give] all they had to establish the church”. It is not very difficult to visualize the faces of the Swedish delegates, with Axel Strand at the helm! The contrasts between Green’s pathos and the later Swedish manoeuvring around the ICFTU constitution and resolutions aiming at blurring the picture of Sweden among the anti-Communist armies were all too evident.¹⁵⁷

The Art of Constructive Scepticism

The Swedish trade union confederation, the LO, would have been happier had it not been forced to take sides between East and West. This is the impression one gets from reading available source material. The LO leadership certainly never trusted “the Russians” and fought a hard battle against the Swedish Communists. But there were certain democratic rules of the game which have to be observed in the interest of the organisation and particularly so in new cooperation with the organisations of the major powers This is held to be an important principle in the international field, both for small states and for organisations with modest numerical strength. Another rule of the game was to try to avoid politically inflamed subjects.

154. *Official Report of the Free World Labour Conference and of the First Congress of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, London, November - December 1949*, p. 225ff; *Fackföreningsrörelsen*, 16/12 1949 p. 471-481; see also *First Congress of the ICFTU, County Hall, London Dec 7, 1949 to Dec 9, 1949*. -cf Windmüller 1980, p. 72.

155. LO General Council Meeting 26-27/4 1950 § 14, no discussion. - LO EB 27/12, 1949 § 6.

156. *Official Report 1949*, p. 86-91.

157. LO activities report 1949, p. 75-76. The reports on international cooperation became ever shorter in comparison with the reports from 1945-1946. - About the discussions on the Swedish membership in the ICFTU see Misgeld forthcoming.

This latter rule could, of course, not be followed in the case in question.

The battle over the WFTU was considered to have weakened the European trade union movement. In the international field, the division of the international trade union movement obviously meant that both governments and employers were less likely to consider trade union positions. The international division also affected the trade union organisations of several countries, including Italy and France. In Sweden, however, one finds no signs that the LO was in any way weakened by the division of the WFTU or that it was in any way “disciplined”. After all, LO’s position closely corresponded with the Social Democratic labour party policy vis a vis the Communists. The disciplining, if any, was rather by economic stabilisation agreements and devaluation of the krona. In a wider perspective, however, the choice between the WFTU line of politization and confrontation, on one hand and western economic cooperation to improve living standards and the quality of life of the members on the other, was rather a choice for or against the integration of the working class in the emerging welfare state along the lines of a Nordic and western European model.

The birth of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the ICFTU, and the maintenance of the freedom of the international Trade Secretariats changed the international picture. In 1949, there was only one common principle in the ICFTU: fight against “the totalitarians”. A thorough change of the social system was not the aim of the ICFTU, notwithstanding Sölvén’s rhetoric about a two front war. There was no room for even the Nordic demand from 1945 that the trade union international should be built on “a foundation of social democracy”. In 1945 this demand would have excluded cooperation with the Soviet unions in the WFTU. In 1949 it would have excluded the Americans from the ICFTU. But the LO was pragmatic. Socialist programs were not an issue in the trade union International.

Membership of the ICFTU meant taking sides in a polarised world with several battlefields, one being Spain. To take sides was a delicate matter for the LO, since it indirectly concerned Swedish foreign and security policy of “freedom from alliances in peace, aiming at neutrality in war”. When the LO takes the position that the Marshall Plan and the OEEC should be accepted, thereby leaving the all-embracing international trade union cooperation for alignment with the West, it knew, of course, whom it decided to cooperate with, just as it understood the political implications and consequences of the Marshall Plan.¹⁵⁸ The LO was not neutral. But the political ties which were established were not seen as problems by the LO, all the more as Parliament and government had defined the European Recovery Program (ERP, the Marshall Plan) as a purely economic program of cooperation. If the LO had refrained from participating it would not have served Sweden’s interest, nor the interests of the LO members.

The WFTU battle of 1946-1948 was not just the great battle about the international direction of the trade union movement; it also had a substantial impact on the development of the cold war. Let us for a moment - knowing the facts - imagine an integrated world federation along the model perceived by the Soviet trade union federation, i.e., united and centralistic, worldwide, with full control over all unions and their negotiations with transnational enterprises and the work of the ILO. Such a world organisation would have become a sharp and powerful instrument in the solution of, or aggravation of, international conflicts.

158. This was clear also from the conference document at the London meeting in March 1948 (note 114 above).

The battle was about power over the trade union movement, a central force in the work of recovery.¹⁵⁹ The fact that there were now two ideologically different world trade union organisations competing for power sharpened the conflict. (We do not include here the relatively smaller Christian International). It is not easy to define the international political role of the trade unions. The role is partly acted on a separate stage, and the plays on this stage are often seen as less interesting from the practical perspective of the national trade union movements. But the leaders of the major powers after the war saw it differently. In 1944 when the Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC) was formed in the United States as an agent in the fight against fascism and national socialism, and established cooperation with the American secret service (Office of Strategic Services, OSS), the basis was formed for continued cooperation between government (the State Department) and unions after 1945. It was quite natural for the Soviet Union to act in the same way. The solidarity between Communist organisations - or 'guidance' from Moscow - became apparent when the Marshall aid transports were stopped or sabotaged in French and Italian harbors. Against this background the question is of some interest: what would have happened to the LO had the organisation remained in the WFTU?

An Impossible Project?

One question remains to be answered: what was it that made LO decide to leave the WFTU, to the extent that other circumstances allowed any freedom to make an independent decision? Two answers are close at hand, one based on a more general political consideration and one based on organisational interests. The general political consideration was - as was clearly stated by Strand, Casparsson and Sölvén - that it was unthinkable that the LO would remain in an international organisation, which, after the exodus of the western organisations, was completely dominated by the Soviet Union and the Communists. In the same way as it had been an impossible political indication from Sweden to refuse to participate in the Marshall Plan,¹⁶⁰ it would have been the wrong signal from the LO to stay in the WFTU. The consequence would have been isolation as it would have been after a decision to stay outside all international trade union organisations. In the world political situation at the time, any of the two decisions would have been incompatible with Swedish trade union ideology and with the membership opinion.

The question is if the second complex of motives was not, after all, the most decisive: the complex internal structure of the Swedish trade union movement and especially the status and role of the national unions inside the LO. This organisational interest would have been decisive irrespective of the decision on the Marshall Plan issue. The membership of the unions in their respective ITS, did not allow the LO to be isolated. The Scandinavian national unions were used to great independence, eg independent elections of officers and independent finances. This was also made clear in international discussions both by representatives of the LO and the unions themselves. This freedom could not be negotiated away nationally and it was unthinkable that they could give up this freedom in an international context, i.e., allow the work of their International to be directed from the trade departments of the WFTU. The Swedish standpoint was quite naturally, that the relationship between the national unions and the LO should be mirrored in the relationship between the ITS and the International. Charles

159. Godson 1976; *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991; Busch 1983, p. 4, quoted above.

160. cf af Malmberg 1994, 127ff.

Lindley had made that point from the very beginning.¹⁶¹

Against this background it is not surprising that several Swedish (and Danish) unions, like the British, belonged to those who already in 1945 were very critical of the proposed WFTU Constitution. The Norwegians and Finns, on the other hand, were not as sceptical.¹⁶² Already in 1945 August Lindberg voiced criticism from the Swedish national unions and from the LO in a way that showed that he did not believe in the success of the new world federation.¹⁶³ Still, there was, in the beginning a certain ambition not to condemn the WFTU. MacShane's formulation in 1947 about the International Metalworkers Federation can be applied to the Swedish position at the same time: "In political principle they were for the WFTU. In organizational practice they kept a distance."¹⁶⁴ The distance became ever larger and by and by developed into rejection; not even a political will in principle to cooperate was sufficient. There was even a theoretical risk that by holding on to the WFTU the LO would have ended on a confrontation course with its own unions.¹⁶⁵

In the fall of 1948 the Marshall Plan issue had already "bypassed" the conflict on the status of the ITS, which then became less central.¹⁶⁶ But it was obvious even earlier that the Constitution proposed by the WFTU General Council in Prague in June 1947 would not be accepted, and that the British and Scandinavian unions had begun to back down from their earlier decisions in principle to become members of the WFTU departments. From the Scandinavian side, there was first a will to be "loyal to the WFTU policy of the national centers" which had participated in principle in the Prague decision but requested changes and a consideration of the ITS attitude.¹⁶⁷ When the ITS position hardened, it led to the British and Scandinavian national centers not wanting to influence their member unions to accept the WFTU departmental structure. From the end of 1947, the joint ITS committee for the Marshall plan and ERP-discussions also pressured the national centers by declaring themselves in favour of the Marshall Plan.¹⁶⁸ A decision for the freedom of the national unions was also a decision for the Marshall Plan and against the WFTU.

In addition to their demand to run the international cooperation of the national unions, the WFTU also showed an increasing tendency to want to decide the political positions of its member organisations. The battle about the Marshall Plan is not just a battle between East and West, a decisive moment in the development of the cold war, but also a battle about the independence and freedom of the WFTU member organisations to make their own decisions on national and international matters. Through its inflexible centralism, the WFTU offered an excellent opportunity for its enemies to act. The majority inside the WFTU had prepared the fragmentation bomb itself. The AFL and the British had only to turn the switch. The LO and the Scandinavians did not have to show their hand until relatively late, when

161. Lindley at the negotiations between the ITF and the WFTU in Paris 25/4 1946; *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, doc 28, p. 206-214. ITF Ex Comm meeting in Zürich 14-15/1 1946; *ibid.* dok 53 p. 377-388.

162. cf *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, introduction p. 59: "Die Integrationsbedingungen des WGB waren für eine Mehrheit der europäischen Einzelgewerkschaften einschliesslich der Briten und Skandinavien nicht akzeptabel". Also Dok 9, p. 122-133, and dok 12, p. 141.

163. August Lindberg at the IFTU General Council meeting 3-4/9 1945 about the WFTU statutes, IISG IFTU vol 179; cf *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, dok 16, p. 157-158.

164. MacShane 1992, p. 76. - Reutter 1995, considers the Swedish and British representation at the Textile Workers International to be "bedingte Integrationisten" (p. 177).

165. cf also the interpretations in *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, eg the introduction, p. 59ff.

166. Cf. Koch-Baumgarten and Rütters p. 35 in *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991.

167. *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, p. 53.

168. *Zwischen Integration und Autonomie*, 1991, p. 54-61.

there was no longer any alternative.

The centralistic model of the WFTU did not suit the tradition of the Scandinavian trade union movement. From the LO perspective, one can talk about a threatening picture: the establishment of the WFTU trade departments meant a risk that the independence of the national unions would be weakened, which in turn would have influenced the independence of the LO. In short, the WFTU was an impossible project. Under those circumstances the final LO decision to disaffiliate was predestined. It is rather the fact that the disintegration process took such a long time that has to be explained, not that it occurred in the end. That the process took such a long time was probably largely due to the fact that there were no alternatives. Once the alternative was available, the LO quit the WFTU. It is another question that the timing of the formation of a new international and the forms under which it happened did not win the full approval of the LO.

The LO did not have any confidence in the Soviet Union, a factor which weighed more heavily than the irritation over the big power behaviour of the Americans and the British. The LO also wanted to make a contribution to Sweden's regaining an honoured position in the world. Remaining in the WFTU would not have boosted Sweden international reputation, while quitting the WFTU did. As far as the LO international relations are concerned the deference of the West was far more important than any possible criticism from the East for lacking neutrality. Sweden's post-war political reputation and strong commercial interests were decisive. In this respect the LO was part of the Swedish establishment and shared the dominant interests of the nation. These political considerations also contributed to the LO being able to leave the WFTU without any major conflicts arising among the unions.

Several factors influenced the formation and division of the WFTU. The WFTU battle was a battle about the direction of international coordination and the place of the trade union movement in the world community, and was therefore also a part of the Cold War.¹⁶⁹ The battle was about power over the trade union movement as an instrument to influence national and international political developments. The position taken by the Swedish LO in this battle solidly anchored the Swedish labour movement on the western side of the barricade. Indirectly, this process contributed to the Swedish society in reality, even if not in the official rhetoric, following a "freedom from alliances" which was western-oriented.¹⁷⁰ However, this had nothing to do with the choice of roads made by the Swedish trade union movement in its efforts to change Swedish society. The LO was not impressed by the far-reaching radicalism aired in the WFTU; Swedish unions never drifted into any such rhetoric. The low political profile of the ICFTU suited the LO much better. Future development would show that the ICFTU would seldom make political demands on its member organisations, but that it was some national centers, including the LO, that would make demands on their International.

Translation: Birger Viklund

169. MacShane says that "the confrontation within trade unions domestically and internationally was one of the causes rather than a consequence of the Cold War"; 1992, p. 5.

170. *Dagens Nyheter* 31/7 1950; cf Alf W Johansson 1995, p. 271f.

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