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# January 1993: The Founding of Education International

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## Abstract

Since the late nineteenth century, teachers have come together to found associations and unions in Europe and beyond. Drawing on oral histories, primary and secondary documents, and media reports, this paper delves into this rich historical background, leading to the founding of Education International in 1993. In particular it explores the relationships and tensions within and between these predecessor organizations, as well as the ways in which they interacted with the larger political forces of their times. Education International is now a significant organization, representing teachers and related workers situated across 178 countries. This paper attempts to provide a critical historical background for the development of this institution.

**Keywords:** teacher unions; teacher associations; Cold War politics; professionalism

## Introduction

Education International (EI), based in Brussels, represents teachers, professors, and educational workers in “384 organizations in 178 countries.”<sup>1</sup> Its main website includes a short history of the organization and its two predecessors, the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) and the International Federation of Free Teachers’ Unions (IFFTU).<sup>2</sup> Despite the brief timeline suggested by EI’s historical survey, there is actually a rich and diverse history of attempts by teachers and their unions to form international networks over time. Some of this history has been documented—covering both the earlier (pre-World War II) period as well as the post-World War II and Cold War eras.<sup>3</sup> However, these histories

<sup>1</sup>EI, “About Education International,” [https://www.ei-ie.org/en/detail\\_page/4350/About%20EI](https://www.ei-ie.org/en/detail_page/4350/About%20EI).

<sup>2</sup>EI, “Origins and History,” [https://www.ei-ie.org/en/detail\\_page/15179/origins-and-history](https://www.ei-ie.org/en/detail_page/15179/origins-and-history).

<sup>3</sup>For the pre-WW2 period, for example, see: W.W. Brickman, “International Education” in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, ed. W.S. Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 617-27; Sara Elizabeth Hadley, “An Interpretation of the Role of the World Organization of the Teaching Profession in the Development of World Unity among Teachers,” MA thesis, The American University, Washington, DC, 1969; William F. Russell, “The Struggle for Unity in the Teaching Profession,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 31, no. 7 (March 1950), 341-52; Frank Simon and H. Van Daele, “The International Teachers’ Organisations until World War II,” in *Instruction, Education and Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Marc

often tend to reflect traditional historical approaches—stressing the importance of “educational progress,” and unions working in congruence with, and generally supporting, the development of the “one best system.”<sup>4</sup> Less often documented in the literature are the conflicts in and between these international organizations, the links between their executives and wider political-economic structures, and the efforts undertaken by these leaders to meet the interests of these global forces, particularly in the Cold War era.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on oral histories, primary and secondary documents, and media reports, this paper delves into this rich historical background leading to the founding of Education International.<sup>6</sup> In particular it explores the relationships and tensions within and between these predecessor organizations, as well as the ways in which they interacted with the larger Cold War forces of the era. The manuscript is divided into four main sections. First, it examines the creation of international teacher union networks in Europe and North America in the pre-WWI and interwar years, with a

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Depaepe and M. d'Hoker (Leuven/Amersfoort, Belgium: ACCO, 1987), 138-57; Augustus O. Thomas, “The Toronto Meeting of Federated Education,” *High School Journal* 10, no. 6 (Oct. 1930), 147-48, 168; L. A. Williams, “Edinburg: A Retrospect,” *High School Journal* 9, no. 1 (Jan. 1926), 3-6, 14; Casimir D. Zdanowicz, “Fourth Biennial Conference of the World Federation of Education Associations,” *Modern Language Journal* 16, no. 1 (Oct. 1931), 53-60. For the post-WW2 period, see: William G. Carr, “World Teachers Organization,” *World Affairs* 123, no. 3 (Fall 1960), 75-77; Paul M. Cook, “A World Front for Education: The World Organization of the Teaching Profession,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 29, no. 2 (Oct. 1947), 51-57; Rolland L. Dewing, “Experiment in International Education,” *Educational Forum* 34, no. 4 (1970), 479-83; David Dorn, “International Teachers Associations: Ideologies and the International Labor Movement, the Four Trade Internationals, Competition and Convergence,” *Education Encyclopedia*, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2130/International-Teachers-Associations.html>; Mary Futrell, Fred van Leeuwen, and Rob Harris, “Toward International Advocacy,” in *Teacher Unions and Education Policy: Retrenchment or Reform?*, ed. Ronald Henderson, Wayne Urban, and Paul Wolman (Oxford: Elsevier, 2004), 225-56; David H. Stewart, “Toward World Unity of Teachers: A Report of the Third Delegate Assembly of the World Organization of the Teaching Profession,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 31, no. 2 (Oct. 1949), 89-91.

<sup>4</sup>As exemplified in David Tyack’s book, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

<sup>5</sup>Some examples of these more recent critical analyses include: Paul Bocking, *Public Education, Neoliberalism, and Teachers: New York, Mexico City, Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020); Maria Elana Cook, *Organizing Dissent: Unions, the State, and the Democratic Teachers’ Movement in Mexico* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Jeff Schuhrke, “‘Comradely Brainwashing’: International Development, Labor Education, and Industrial Relations in the Cold War,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 16, no. 3 (Sept. 2019), 39-67; Ken Scipes, “Why Labor Imperialism: AFL-CIO’s Foreign Policy Leaders and the Developing World,” *Journal of Labor and Society* 13, no. 4 (Dec. 2010), 465-79; Harry Smaller, “Soldiers in the Front Line of Battle’: International Teacher Unions, the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession, and the Cold War,” *History of Education Review* 38, no. 2 (2009), 28-42; Harry Smaller, “An Elusive Search for Peace: The Rise and Fall of the World Federation of Education Associations (WFEEA), 1923-1941,” *Historical Studies in Education* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2015), 95-119; Wayne J. Urban, “The National Education Association (NEA), the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF), and International Teacher Organizations after World War II,” Paper delivered at the 2006 annual conference of the Organization of American Historians, Washington, DC, April 2006.

<sup>6</sup>I conducted oral history interviews over the past decade with former officials from both IFFTU and WCOTP, as well as national and regional-based teacher union officials and activists. Unfortunately, because of research ethics requirements and commitments made to interviewees who wished to remain anonymous, I have not been able to identify these individuals by name.

view to understanding the motivations (expressed and otherwise) for this development. In brief, it is clear that the initial impetus for teacher union networks was to facilitate efforts to prevent international conflict, although, once founded, the executives of these organizations soon added to the agenda their interests in professionalism and building centralized schooling systems.<sup>7</sup>

Second, the paper explores activities in the post-WW2 era—in particular, the establishment of three large networks, two centered in the West and one in the East. As the era unfolded, it became clear that relations between these three networks became increasingly complex, affected by the intense competition to enroll member unions across the globe, as well as issues regarding professionalism versus trade unionism, relations with larger global political-economic forces, and the politics of the East-West divide.

Third, the paper explores the events leading up to the decisions of IFFTU and WCOTP to amalgamate. While the competition between the two organizations continued on many levels during the 1970s and 1980s, pressures to merge also developed—based on the costs of maintaining two basically similar organizations, calls from a number of member organizations to unite, and the encouragement of the two US-based founding organizations to promote this amalgamation. Finally, as a number of observers have noted, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, much of the *raison d'être* for keeping the organizations apart dissipated.

The final section examines the steps taken in regard to the merger and the founding meeting of Education International—a formal agreement on both sides to consider amalgamation, the establishment of a joint planning committee, the approval of its resolutions by both organization executives, and the final concurrently held general meetings of both groups, followed immediately by the two groups coming together to endorse their new organization. For many in attendance, founding EI meant that they had “reach[ed] a new level of involvement in the defense of teacher interests.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Early History of International Teacher Union Networks

Efforts to establish international teacher union networks in Europe date back to at least the 1870s. A number of researchers have suggested that classroom teachers there were motivated to establish these networks as a result of what they understood as fundamental contradictions between national imperatives and human existence—the issue of war and peace. Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of international conflict, education and global peace rested strongly in the minds of teachers, along with a belief that state schools could play an important role in educating against war.<sup>9</sup> These sentiments might help explain the upsurge of interest among European

<sup>7</sup>In this context, arguments for professionalism usually entailed enhancing the perceived status of teachers, distancing them from the influence of parents, and enhancing the status and authority of teachers' associations.

<sup>8</sup>Fred van Leeuwen, Editorial, *Workers in Education* (June-Sept. 1992), 8, [Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs](#), Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI (hereafter ALUA, Reuther Library).

<sup>9</sup>A sentiment not confined to European educators, it seems. As one Toronto-based educator noted in 1947, “People turn to the school after a war . . . in the faint hope that the school may be able to do something which will make it possible for the next generation to avoid another calamity of the same kind.” Quoted in Robert M. Stamp, *The Schools of Ontario, 1876-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 183.

teachers in establishing international organizations following the French-German conflict of the 1870s, as well as after the First and Second World Wars. Activities of these organizations centered on annual conferences, which focused on two main themes: professionalism, and global peace and understanding.<sup>10</sup>

Following the First World War, at least four international teacher networks were established, or reestablished, in Europe and North America. Two West European organizations, the International Federation of Teachers' Associations (IFTA) and Fédération internationale des professeurs de l'enseignement secondaire officiel (FIPESO), representing elementary and secondary school teachers, respectively, became very active, holding annual conferences and publishing journals and/or newsletters. In addition, and standing as a point of comparison to the highly professional orientation of these two networks, a third European-based network was founded, the Secrétariat professionnel international de l'enseignement (SPIE), in 1926. This organization enrolled union-oriented national and regional teacher associations, East and West, and was affiliated with the International Federation of Trade Unions.

A US-based international teacher organization network also came into being during the interwar years. Its origin was a three-day "international education conference" in California in 1923, attended by "189 delegates from 40 countries," organized by and held in conjunction with the annual congress of the National Education Association (NEA).<sup>11</sup> As with its European counterparts, issues relating to peace and international relations dominated the events, and formal plans were made to establish the World Federation of Education Associations (WFEA). An official founding convention was held in Edinburgh, Scotland, the following year, and during the 1920s and 1930s subsequent biennial conferences were organized in various world cities in an effort to emphasize the "world" perspective of the organization, and to gain membership among national and regional teacher organizations.<sup>12</sup> Although the WFEA included one major British teachers' union, the National Union of Teachers, among its members, it was unable to gain the support of the National Union of Women Teachers in Britain, or to convince IFTA or FIPESO to join forces with it.<sup>13</sup> Further, as insider historian William Russell noted, "It never received much support on the continent of Europe."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup>For discussion of international teacher organizations in this era, see, for example, Simon and Van Daele, "The International Teachers' Organisations until World War II," 1887; Brickman, "International Education," 1950; Smaller, "An Elusive Search for Peace."

<sup>11</sup>From a mimeographed report on the WOTP's origins, conferences, etc., in World Organisation of the Teaching Profession [heretofore, WOTP], "World Federation of Education Associations," n.d., ca. 1946, 2-3, Archives of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, Ottawa (hereafter CTF Archives). See also Wayne Urban, *Gender, Race and the National Education Association* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Alan West, *The National Education Association* (New York: The Free Press, 1980).

<sup>12</sup>WOTP, "World Federation of Education Associations," 8. Subsequent assemblies were held in Toronto, Geneva, Denver, Dublin, Oxford and finally Tokyo in 1937. For a more thorough discussion of the WFEA, see Smaller, "Elusive Search for Peace."

<sup>13</sup>An exchange of letters between the WFEA and the National Union of Women Teachers, during the period February-June 1925, suggests the latter's concerns about the dominance of the WFEA and NEA in the ongoing activities of its "global" organization: Ethel Froud, General Secretary of the NUWT, and Charles Williams, Secretary of the WFEA; Jan. 21, Feb. 5, Feb. 25, March 26, 1925; Archive Collection, Records of the National Union of Women Teachers, held at the Institute of Education Library and Archives, University College, London.

<sup>14</sup>Russell, "The Struggle for Unity in the Teaching Profession," 1950, 343.

### Post-WW2 Organizations

The immediate aftermath of the Second World War saw a number of international teacher networks establish, or reestablish, themselves.<sup>15</sup> Both of the West European-based professional organizations, having been forced to curtail activities during the war, quickly re-emerged and continued their engagement in representing a broad spectrum of national teacher associations on the continent. They resumed holding annual conferences, along with resuming the publication of newsletters and journals emphasizing global peace and professional relations for teachers. In the US, the NEA also acted quickly after the war to leave behind its interwar creation. At an upstate New York conference in 1946, it established a new international organization, the World Organization of the Teaching Profession (WOTP), and began efforts to lobby for a merger with its European counterparts.<sup>16</sup>

The international labor movement also reestablished its many trade-based organizations immediately after the end of the war, including the SPIE, the teachers' network. As a deliberate effort to maintain class links across the global working class, these groups initially reestablished the East-West connections that had been formed in the interwar years (with the notable exception of the American Federation of Labor, which, owing to its fervent anti-Communist ideology, had refused to join).<sup>17</sup> However, as Cold War politics intensified, and pressures from the American unions mounted, these East-West formations would not last long. In 1949, in order to separate themselves from Communist-led unions of the Eastern bloc, many Western unions broke away from the World Federation of Trade Unions to found the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).<sup>18</sup>

Not surprisingly, given the American Federation of Teachers' position both within the AFL and SPIE, and its own long record of anti-communism, the SPIE followed suit, expelling East European members and adopting the English-language title International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions (IFFTU). Installed in Washington, DC, within the headquarters of the American Federation of Teachers, IFFTU began a major campaign in competition with the WOTP to bring national and regional teachers' unions from around the world into its fold, and to encourage their respective leaders to attend their "World Congresses" held every four years, along with participating in regional conferences and workshops organized by the IFFTU administration.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup>In addition to those considered in some detail here, there were at least two other international networks, which, while significant in themselves, did not play a significant role in (the reasons for) the formation of Educational International, and so will not be described in any detail at this time. The first of these was the World Confederation of Teachers (WCT), a network of teacher unions that were initially overtly Catholic in nature, but subsequently became more ecumenical; the second was the Confederación de Educadores Americanos (CEA), a network centred in Latin America, seen by Western unionists as a left-leaning organization, with links to Fédération Internationale Syndicale de L'Enseignement (FISE), described below.

<sup>16</sup>WOTP, 1946 Report, CTF Archives.

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, Anthony Carew, *American Labor's Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945-1970* (Edmonton, Canada: Athabasca University Press, 2018).

<sup>18</sup>For further coverage of US labor unions during this Cold War period, see Carew, *American Labor's Cold War Abroad*.

<sup>19</sup>Arthur Goldberg, *Directory of International Trade Union Organizations* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Labor, 1960).

With the breakup of the world trade union network in 1949, teacher unions in Eastern Europe, and others, including a number in Western Europe and the Global South that had a socialist/Communist orientation, formed a new organization, the Fédération Internationale Syndicale de L'Enseignement (FISE). Initially headquartered in Paris, this network remained active throughout the remainder of the Cold War, and continues today. While relevant archival documents are much less available than for the Western networks, regular congresses are noted, along with periodic publications of newsletters and journals.<sup>20</sup> Reports suggest that membership figures remained relatively high, involving a number of national and regional members, particularly in the Global South.<sup>21</sup> Like its contemporary Western network counterparts, this network holds official status with the United Nations and its subgroups, including the International Labour Organization and UNESCO. As such, it participates alongside its Western counterparts in global fora organized by these bodies.

### *Post-WW2 Intra-Union Relations*

During its first few years, the NEA-based World Organization of the Teaching Profession seemed to take a liberal approach to issues of international cooperation and global harmony. International peace was definitely on the minds of those attending the 1946 San Francisco conference, where “How to teach international understanding more effectively” served as one of the main themes of discussion.<sup>22</sup> A year later, at its founding Edinburgh conference, president William Russell signaled his continuing support for “education for peace,” and themes for discussion included “What could teachers, as private persons rather than government functionaries, and through their voluntary organisations, do for the strengthening of world-wide education and for the cause of peace?” and, “What organisation could be strengthened or created to achieve these purposes?”<sup>23</sup>

Within two short years of its founding, however, shadows began to appear in the WOTP’s global outlook. As the Cold War set in, Russell took up the new cudgels. In his presidential speech at the 1951 WOTP conference held in Malta, he advocated for a total shift away from global cooperation and peace:

Consequently I propose for a basis for future action: (1) that we make no plans whatsoever on the theory that peace is likely to come soon; (2) that we make serious preparations as to what we should do in the event of war, unlikely though

<sup>20</sup>World Federation of Teachers Unions, “FISE International Teleconference, October 6, 2021,” <http://wftufise.org/resolutions-fise-international-teleconference-october-6-2021-2/>.

<sup>21</sup>World Federation of Teachers Unions, *World Conference of Teachers* (Vienna: WFTU, 1953), Frederich-Ebert-Stiftung Library Archives, Bonn, Germany (hereafter FES Archives). According to a 2009 UNESCO profile, FISE claimed over twenty-six million members within 156 trade unions in forty countries. See UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics*, 2009, [http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/unesco-framework-for-cultural-statistics-2009-en\\_0.pdf](http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/unesco-framework-for-cultural-statistics-2009-en_0.pdf). A 1952 confidential CIA document suggested that FISE had a membership of seven million teachers in twenty-seven countries. See Central Intelligence Agency, *World Federation of Teachers’ Unions*, 1952, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78-00915R000600140013-6.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup>WOTP, *1946 Report*, 7, CTF Archives.

<sup>23</sup>WOTP, *1948 Report*, 11, CTF Archives.

we feel it to be. . . . The temptation will be to join those forces that oppose armaments, that talk peace when there is no peace, that tell of the foolishness of following the warmongers, and do everything they can to weaken our defences. This is the new line of the Communists.<sup>24</sup>

Although these comments may well have occasioned considerable internal discussion and tension, both during the conference and afterward, the dominant groups within the WOTP leadership made it very clear that their interest in world peace did not include global cooperation with all other international teachers' organizations.<sup>25</sup> While they pushed for closer relations with two long-standing West European groups (IFTA and FIPESO), they shunned the newly formed network centered in Eastern Europe (FISE). For example, when FISE and the two West European-based groups formed a *Comite d'Entente* in 1948, in an attempt to transcend the emerging politics of the Cold War, the WOTP executive announced that it was "strongly opposed" to taking up an offer to join this group—even though it was guaranteed the right of veto for any activity undertaken by the Committee.<sup>26</sup>

By the 1952 conference, the NEA had succeeded in convincing IFTA and FIPESO to merge with the WOTP under the new title World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP), with headquarters in the NEA building in Washington. Ronald Gould, president of the National Union of Teachers of Britain, was unanimously selected as president of this organization; he announced it a "red letter day in the history of teacher cooperation." Other founding conference speakers also cited the need to continue working on international cooperation, advocating for "freedom and peace and international goodwill," and "democracy, liberty, understanding and peace." However, in his closing speech, Executive Director William Carr warned ominously, "We know that some governments, working through their teachers, are trying to frustrate the establishment of the World Confederation and to check its aspirations to express the interests of all teachers in peace and in improved school services."<sup>27</sup>

From that point, the dominant course, and dominant discourse, of Cold War-ism became well established within WCOTP.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, although the leaders of

<sup>24</sup>WOTP, *1951 Report*, 71-72, CTF Archives.

<sup>25</sup>Nine of the twelve Executive members were from Western Europe and North America.

<sup>26</sup>WOTP, *1949 Report*, 31; WCOTP, *WCOTP First Annual Report* (Washington: WCOTP, 1953), 37, CTF Archives. The *Comite d'Entente* survived until the mid-1950s, when the Western partners finally succumbed to pressure to abandon it. See Futrell, Van Leeuwen, and Harris, "Toward International Advocacy," 271.

<sup>27</sup>WOTP, *1952 Report*, 20-21, CTF Archives. One can assume that he was referring to East European governments. Carr served as director both of the NEA and the WCOTP.

<sup>28</sup>See, for example, the specific attempt in 1960 by WCOTP to counter an increasing turn to socialism by teachers' unions in Latin America (described in more detail below) in Gerald Nason, "Report to the CTF Committee on International Relations," March 17-18, 1961, CTF Archives. This is not to say, of course, that IFFTU, or FISE, did not assume similar (albeit opposing) cultures and postures over the ensuing decades. At a World Conference of Teachers organized by FISE and held in Vienna in July of 1953 (entitled "Teachers for Unity"), speeches by participants from a number of countries (East and West) derided the "The Militarisation of the School" and "McCarthyism" in several Western nations, including the US, Japan, and Holland, while others lauded purported advances in education in the Soviet Union. See World Federation of Teachers Unions, *World Conference of Teachers*, 25, 186, 196, FES Archives.

the two West European networks, FIPESO and IFTA, agreed to join in on the WCOTP amalgamation, and share the US-based antipathy to communism and the Soviet Union, it seemed that their interwar concerns about the dominance of the US and the NEA in international affairs had not dissipated. Thus, even as they agreed to be part of the new organization, they also insisted on maintaining much of their own independence. In fact, right up until the merger of WCOTP and IFFTU in the early 1990s, they continued to hold their own annual general meetings separate from the annual gatherings of the entire WCOTP grouping, and continued to publish their own newsletters.

Throughout the 1950s to 1980s relations between the three main international networks—WCOTP and IFFTU on the one hand and FISE on the other—remained complex, and for the most part, adversarial, reflecting, to a great degree, overall East-West Cold War political tensions. At the same time, however, relations between the two Western-based networks remained acrimonious throughout the era as well. To some extent these latter conflicts reflected and were shaped by the historical ongoing animosities between their two US-based founding organizations (NEA and AFT).<sup>29</sup>

First, two fundamental ideologies clashed—professionalism versus trade unionism. This was partly reflected in their comparative memberships. While IFFTU claimed that they enrolled as members solely those national and regional organizations that represented only frontline teachers and other educators, WCOTP boasted a large membership of organizations representing not only teachers but also school administrators, “home and school” chapters, and “friends of education” organizations.<sup>30</sup>

Second, global politics played a large part in the networks’ different positions. On the one hand, both organizations espoused anti-Communist positions, and both aligned themselves with, and promoted, US foreign policies and activities in this regard.<sup>31</sup> Both accepted funding for their global activities directly or indirectly from various sectors of the US government.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, differences in

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Similarly, the AFT’s long history of expelling teachers and union locals suspected of having Communist sympathies was certainly well known. See, for example, Robert Iverson, *The Communists and the Schools* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959); Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 256ff).

<sup>29</sup>In an otherwise highly adulatory memorial to AFT’s long-standing president, Albert Shankar, Kahlenberg’s lengthy biography provides a very detailed chronology of the issues and events that separated the AFT from the NEA over the years—and continue, to this day, to do so. See Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal: Al Shankar and the Battles over Schools, Race, and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup>This “large tent” policy was not without its limitations. See, for example, the reference to a “hostility” between European teacher union members and the US-based “friends” groups over the latter’s membership in WCOTP’s predecessor organization, and the “storm” that this created at one WFEA congress: Margaret Stroh, “Editor’s Report,” *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* 22, no. 1 (1954), 91, accessed from Ontario Institute for Education Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

<sup>31</sup>See, for example, Futrell, Van Leeuwen, and Harris, “Toward International Advocacy.” In the words of Sharan Burrow, former vice president of EI, “Prior to 1993, the ethos of organizations centred on cold war politics.” Quoted in Athena Vongalis-Macrow, *Deployed to Deliver: The Displaced Agency of Teachers in Globalised Education Systems* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2008), 92.

<sup>32</sup>Several researchers have documented the AFT’s and IFFTU’s close relations with the US government. See, for example, Hugh Wilford, “Calling the Tune? The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War 1945-1960,” *Intelligence and National Security* 18, no. 2 (2003), 41-50; Anthony Carew, “The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA,” *Labor History* 39, no. 1



their response to political developments, particularly in the Global South, did manifest themselves, often in supporting different grass-roots teachers' organizations based on their relation to, or distance from, more progressive or more reactionary governments at the time. At the 1972 WCOTP assembly, for example, the general secretary reported that a teachers' association in Nicaragua that they supported

elected new officers during the course of the year and appears to have found a measure of internal understanding between groups of differing tendencies; on the other hand, the new [and competing] union which was formed under the stimulus of the Government [the Somoza dictatorship] to combat the work of the Federation has been considerably strengthened by receiving international support, in particular from the International Federation of Free Teachers' Unions.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, although both organizations espoused anti-communism, this did not seem to translate into similar criteria for membership in their respective organizations. IFFTU, for its part, remained adamant in its fundamental anti-Communist stance—refusing to enroll as members any teacher organization sustaining even a hint of Communist sympathies, or any organization that also maintained membership in another international network deemed by IFFTU to be less than pro-West. By comparison, WCOTP adopted a more tolerant policy, and extended membership criteria, particularly to teacher associations in the Global South, regardless of their

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(1998), 25-42. Even Kahlenberg, who assiduously repeats Shanker's claim of the AFT never having received CIA or State Department funding, does admit that the AFT was in receipt of funds indirectly from the US government for international activities through a number of sources. See Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*, 254ff.

A well-documented example of this financial collusion between international teachers' networks and the US state was first exposed by a *Ramparts Magazine* investigative article in 1967, showing that the WCOTP had, for a number of years, received up to 90 percent of its annual budget indirectly from the US State Department. See Smaller, "Soldiers in the Front Line of Battle"; David Price, "The CIA Book Publishing Operations: Fragments of Sol Chaneles' Lost Manuscript," *CounterPunch+*, Sept. 13, 2020, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/09/13/fragments-of-sol-chaneles-lost-manuscript-on-cia-book-publishing-operations/>. Clearly as a result of this exposé, the organization decided to move its headquarters from Washington to Morges, Switzerland, and both the president and the general secretary resigned their positions. In their place were appointed a president from Ivory Coast and a vice president from Jamaica, and the organization embarked on serious (but unfortunately short-lived) efforts to activate new relations with international networks, both East and West. *WCOTP Assembly Report*, 1971ff, CTF Archives.

In addition to provision of funds, a number of reports suggest even a greater level of direct involvement by the US State Department and the CIA in the affairs of other national and international teacher networks. For descriptions of their involvement in Australian teacher unions, see Denis Fitzgerald, *Teachers and Their Times* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011), 11ff; John O'Brien, *A Divided Unity! Politics of NSW Teacher Militancy since 1945* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987). In his dissertation on teacher unions, Larry Kuehn describes CIA agents attending a WCOTP conference in South Korea in the 1960s. See Larry Kuehn, "Intercambio - Social Justice Union Internationalism in the B.C. Teachers' Federation" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2006), 45.

<sup>33</sup>1972 *Assembly Report*, Appendix B, 2, CTF Archives. To the extent this claim is true, it does suggest IFFTU collusion with the US State Department with respect to the latter's ties to the right-wing Nicaraguan dictatorship of the era. See, for example, Tim Merrill, ed. *Nicaragua: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1993), <http://countrystudies.us/nicaragua/11.htm>.

ongoing membership with other networks, including FISE and CEA (the Latin American network, deemed by many in the West to be Communist-dominated).<sup>34</sup>

Both Western networks, in addition to their own rivalry over membership and global influence, were also very conscious of FISE's position on the global stage. IFFTU executive meetings and congresses invariably included reports on FISE. At the May 1991 executive meeting, for example, the general secretary noted that "FISE remains relatively strong in Latin America and is a more dangerous rival than the WCOTP."<sup>35</sup> In addition, his report that year on the development that FISE had opened a regional office in Dakar, Senegal, may well have had an influence on IFFTU's decision to hold a subsequent executive meeting in that same location. Similarly, WCOTP, though more sympathetic to unions that shared dual membership with FISE, also maintained a strong anti-Communist bearing.<sup>36</sup>

A third difference between the two Western networks, which developed over the 1970s and 1980s, was occasioned by their different responses to the global shift toward neoliberal economics. Understandably, given its trade union underpinning, IFFTU officials looked askance at neoliberalism's attack on publicly funded institutions in general, as well as on trade unionism.<sup>37</sup> WCOTP, on the other hand, given its promotion of professional individualism, seemed to show (at the least) a more benign view toward these global shifts. In this regard, it is perhaps understandable why, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, it would invite representatives of the IMF and the World Bank to meetings that it organized with teacher unions in the Eastern bloc countries.<sup>38</sup>

In any event, in spite (or because) of their ideological clash between professionalism and unionism, both organizations worked assiduously throughout the entire Cold War era to enlarge their membership base, including incursions into Eastern Europe

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<sup>34</sup>While I have yet to find concrete evidence explaining why WCOTP took this more benign approach and deviated from a strict anti-Communist bearing, I propose three possible reasons: it was a) reflective of a more "liberal" ideology; b) done in the hopes of convincing dual members of the advantages of WCOTP and/or the importance of adopting an anti-Communist bearing; c) simply to enlarge WCOTP's membership lists.

<sup>35</sup>Minutes of the IFFTU Executive Board meeting, Amsterdam, May 28-29, 1991, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>36</sup>An interesting example of this anti-Communist stance by WCOTP members appears in the minutes of the 1962 Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, in the rationale provided for a motion requesting that WCOTP increase the frequency of its meetings: "While the WCOTP is not meeting, Communist groups are." CTF, 1962 AGM Minutes, CTF Archives.

<sup>37</sup>For example, in his speech at the 1993 IFFTU Congress, an IFFTU rep from Sweden expressed his organization's growing concern about, and need to fight back against, the worldwide phenomenon of heavy spending cuts in the public sector. "IFFTU 1993 World Congress, Proceedings," ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>38</sup>"Editorial," *ECHO* 21, no. 1 (March 1992), 4 (Published by WCOTP), Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen, Denmark). The article claims that the meetings were "well attended and a success in terms of invaluable information exchange and establishment of contacts. The representatives from the World Bank and the IMF were particularly impressed. . . . Presentations were made by the IMF and World Bank to clarify their roles in implementing structural adjustment policies that have direct effects on educational policies."

even before the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> Reports to regular assemblies of both organizations were replete with detailed reports on the number of new members enrolled during each reporting interval.<sup>40</sup> This competitive push to enhance membership numbers apparently overruled concerns about the costs of supporting teachers and their organizations unable or unwilling to meet the financial requirements for membership.<sup>41</sup> As David Dorn, director of International Affairs for the AFT, pointed out in his reflections on the era,

Many teachers' organizations from poorer countries, however, held more than one affiliation in order to benefit from financial assistance from different international organizations and free participation in international conferences and congresses—while paying little or nothing in membership fees to any international. . . . The competition between the internationals for members, and therefore to claims of strength on the international stage, made it difficult for an international to pressure members to pay dues for fear of losing those members.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, both international networks worked over the entire era to undermine national and regional teacher organizations, which, they believed, smacked of Communist predilections—either through direct pressure on these unions themselves, or promoting and supporting competing, Western-oriented unions in the same jurisdiction, or through both approaches. Interestingly, even a member of IFFTU's inner circle, a German member of the IFFTU International Executive and Board, took exception to at least one instance of his own organization employing this tactic. In 1992 he wrote an open letter to the general secretary of IFFTU to complain about a unilateral action taken by this top official (which he deemed was against organization policy) in supporting a new dissident, Western-oriented teacher union in Nicaragua in opposition to the nation's dominant teachers' union, which had supported the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, AFT's involvement in Poland during the *Solidarność* era. Grover C. Furr, "The AFT, the CIA and *Solidarność*," *Comment* (Montclair State College, NJ) 1, no. 2 (Spring 1982), 31-34, <https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/furraft82.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup>As evident in IFFTU's *Workers in Education*, June/Sept. 1989, ALUA, Reuther Library. A typical claim by WCOTP was voiced in the opening address to the annual assembly in 1972, via an announcement that the organization now had a membership of 140 associations from more than eighty countries representing nearly five million teachers, "the most extensive professional international organization in the world." As a result, it "has become more representative and much more powerful." *WCOTP 1972 Proceedings*, 1, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>41</sup>WCOTP general secretary Robert Harris prudently noted (while arguing for amalgamation in a lengthy 1992 article printed in the association magazine *ECHO*) that "the essential work of solidarity with developing countries has been sometimes diminished by competition between WCOTP and IFFTU." "Unity," *ECHO* 21, no. 4 (Dec 1992), 7.

<sup>42</sup>David Dorn, "International Teachers Associations." At least one source has noted that another advantage to having these non-paying members on board, in addition to augmenting membership figures, was that their representatives could be counted on to support policies and activities, and executive candidates, promoted by the organizations' executives. For an example of this claim, see Kuehn, "*Intercambio*," 26.

<sup>43</sup>Dieter Wunder to Fred van Leeuwen, Dec. 21, 1992, ALUA, Reuther Library.

Similarly, a Canadian teacher association official noted in a report to his executive, after his experience in participating in a 1960 WCOTP-organized “Committee for the Americas” gathering in Costa Rica, that it consisted of representatives from six Latin American and one Caribbean teacher union, “many [of whom] did not represent the major organizations in their own countries” (emphasis in original). As he continued in his report,

As the meeting progressed, I became aware that in some respects the Committee for the Americas was an attempt by the WCOTP (admittedly a late attempt) to make inroads into an increasingly strong and increasingly Communist-affiliated stronghold [CEA] made up of teachers’ organizations which, a few short years ago, had been comparatively sympathetic to North America and what is popularly called “the West.”<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, this active competition on the global scene for new members ramped up even more intensely after 1989, with both international networks sending representatives and organizers into East European countries, in attempts to sign up existing organizations, and/or in many cases, to help form new associations of teachers willing to join their respective networks. For example, in December 1991 WCOTP organized a large four-day “seminar on education in Eastern European countries” in Budapest, including invitations “to member organizations in Western Europe and North America,” as well as the IMF and the World Bank.<sup>45</sup>

### *Why Consideration of Amalgamation, and why in the Early 1990s?*

In spite of the ongoing animosities between IFFTU and WCOTP, it is clear that the possibility of (eventual) amalgamation also dwelled in the minds of at least some officials and members over a number of years. At times, such views were voiced openly at meetings and other settings within each organization.<sup>46</sup> By the late 1970s and early 1980s, calls became more pronounced in this direction, leading up to a formal request by IFFTU to WCOTP in 1989 to begin discussions of a possible merger.

Individuals I interviewed suggested a number of motives for the ultimate decision to merge. On the one hand, being required to cooperate when participating in international assemblies seemed to have an effect on both organizations. More than one interviewee noted the growing influence of the European Union and OECD and their social, health, and education-related subcommittees. During the 1980s IFFTU

<sup>44</sup>Gerald Nason, “Report to the CTF Committee on International Relations,” March 17/18, 1961, pp. 2-3, CTF Archives.

<sup>45</sup>“Editorial,” *ECHO* 21, no. 1 (March 1992), 4.

<sup>46</sup>For example, the general secretary of IFFTU reported at the 1989 congress that “the General Secretaries of IFFTU and WCOTP met at regular intervals to discuss matters of common concern [which] contributed to a better mutual understanding.” Fred van Leeuwen, “Report,” *1985-1989 Activity Report*, Proceedings of the 1989 IFFTU Congress, Toronto, June 1989, p. 14, ALUA, Reuther Library. It is perhaps not coincidental that these amalgamation efforts seemed to occur concomitant with the sporadic (but unsuccessful) attempts by the two US unions to amalgamate themselves. See Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal*.

and WCOTP member unions were increasingly required to cooperate and find common ground developing positions in a number of policy areas relating to schooling, social development, health, and so on.<sup>47</sup>

Another explanation suggests that member organizations, and especially those that belonged to both networks, began to question why they existed as separate entities, their negative effects on teacher unity, low levels of political clout owing to the division between the networks, and expenditure of resources. Particularly influential in pushing for amalgamation was a group of Scandinavian teacher unions, themselves true trade unions in character, but who belonged to the more professional-oriented WCOTP for historical reasons and felt that there was no further reason for the conflict to continue.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the requirement of paying membership fees to both international organizations was clearly seen as a detriment. According to at least one source, more than one national member from northern Europe had threatened to leave one or other of the networks unless an amalgamation occurred.<sup>49</sup>

As a third factor, a number of sources point to the central role played by officials of the two founding US-based teacher organizations, the NEA and the AFT, in promoting a merger. The official website of EI, in a section entitled “Origins and History,” points to the role of the two US teacher unions in orchestrating the merger—and the influence which the two unions held over their international counterparts. The fact that AFT president Al Shanker was also president of IFFTU and NEA president Mary Futrell was also president of WCOTP created an environment that changed the nature of discussions and led to unity. There was also a major commitment by the respective general secretaries of IFFTU and WCOTP, Fred van Leeuwen and Bob Harris, to facilitate understanding and good relations and to remove barriers to unification.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, in relation to the timing of the merger, it is clear that merger talks evolved concomitantly with the fall of the Berlin Wall. This suggests that a major reason for the division between the two networks—their fundamentally different positions on dealing with the East—no longer pertained. As Sharan Burrow, then vice president of EI, noted, “[The merger] came about as a result of the politics of 1989 and the reshaping of world politics. Prior to 1993, the ethos of organizations centred on

<sup>47</sup>These inter-organization groupings seemed also to extend to voluntary affiliations for the purpose of researching and promoting school-based issues. For example, a report in the June 1992 issue of *ECHO* noted, “A decade ago, a number of member organizations of WCOTP, IFFTU and WCT founded a committee against racism, anti-semitism and apartheid.” “Report,” *ECHO* 21, no. 2 (June 1992), 2.

<sup>48</sup>The fact that the NEA, while striving to maintain its “professional” bearing, was also moving toward adopting trade union tactics in the US during these times also blurred these differences. See Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*.

<sup>49</sup>An early instance in which these concerns were cited is a 1952 letter to IFFTU officials by the general secretary. M. Van De Moortel, General Secretary, IFFTU to Irvin Kuenzeli, President, IFFTU and Secretary-Treasurer, AFT and G. Walusinski, Associate Secretary, IFFTU, Dec. 29, 1952, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>50</sup>Education International, “Origins and History, 2021,” [https://ei-ie.org/en/detail\\_page/15179/origins-and-history](https://ei-ie.org/en/detail_page/15179/origins-and-history). An article authored by the Albert Shanker Institute, in the April 1997 issue of *American Teacher*, stated that “Shanker also was a chief architect of the merger in 1993.” Albert Shanker Institute, “A Passion for Life,” *American Teacher*, April 1997, 4.

cold war politics. The Berlin wall comes down; world politics reshaped.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, as Peter Rütters, in his review of international trade secretariats, put it:

This merger came through only because after the breakdown of the Eastern Bloc and the increasing insignificance of Communist trade union organisations on the national as well as international level (here: World Federation of Trade Unions and its international trade union associations), the political divergence had lost its fervour and meaning.<sup>52</sup>

This same interpretation appears in a special episode of the EI podcast *EdVoices* that celebrates the organization’s twenty-five-year history, entitled “Big Moments in the History of Education International.” It also points to the downfall of East European communism as the reason why the two formerly competing networks saw little need to continue their animosities: “It was the beginning of 1993, four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world had entered a new era. Political and social organizations quickly realized that change meant opportunity, and a chance to change the future. Education International was born.”<sup>53</sup>

### *Steps to the Merger*

There is no question that the formal impetus for amalgamation initially came from IFFTU. In introducing the idea to representatives of national and regional union members at the IFFTU 1989 Congress, the general secretary himself suggested reasons to consider the merger. In a lengthy address at the outset of the assembly, Van Leeuwen first provided some background information about the various international networks then in existence, and then focused on WCOTP in rather laudatory terms (considering the past animosities):

In the past ten or twenty years some important WCOTP organizations have transformed themselves from professional associations into trade unions and have become members of national trade union centres that are affiliated in the ICFTU [International Confederation of Free Trade Unions]. . . . [WCOTP] has shown a growing interest in the ILO and the OECD. . . . Furthermore, the WCOTP has started sponsoring labour education programmes in Third World nations which resemble that that IFFTU organises, while in Asia and in Africa many teachers’ organizations are members of both WCOTP and IFFTU.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Vongalis-Macrow, *Deployed to Deliver*, 92.

<sup>52</sup>Peter Rütters, “International Trade Secretariats - Origins, Development, Activities,” International Trade Union Organisations Inventory of the Archive of Social Democracy and the Library of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, p. 20, [https://library.fes.de/libalt/netzquelle/intgw/geschichte/pdf/ruetters\\_e.pdf](https://library.fes.de/libalt/netzquelle/intgw/geschichte/pdf/ruetters_e.pdf).

<sup>53</sup>“Big Moments in the History of Education International,” *EdVoices*, produced by Education International, Feb. 15, 2018, <https://soundcloud.com/user-918336677-743440864/big-moments-in-the-history-of-education-international>.

Considering these developments, and also considering the tremendous international challenges facing us, wouldn't it make sense to combine our forces?<sup>54</sup>

However, he was quick to point out that this coalescence, if it were to happen, must be formal in nature, and "within the ICFTU family." Further, he cautioned against any move to attempt to improve relations with WCOTP if it chose not to consider a merger:

I do not think it would pay us any for closer cooperation while the WCOTP remains outside the trade union movement. That would, in my mind, be highly undesirable. Such cooperation would weaken IFFTU, for it would give the WCOTP the advantage of trade union membership without the responsibilities and commitments such membership entails, such as the commitment to the principles and goals of the free trade union movement.

At the same time, he recognized that there would be "many obstacles" to reaching an accord. "Some WCOTP member organizations are downright hostile to trade unionism in general, and others compete with IFFTU unions in their countries."<sup>55</sup>

According to the official record, after the general secretary's speech, "most delegates who took part in the discussion expressed themselves in favour of the idea of a merger." One concern raised was that of the unionism-professionalism dichotomy, and that, according to one delegate, "a merger should not affect IFFTU's identity as an international trade union organization with the ICFTU family." In response, Van Leeuwen assured the assembly that "IFFTU's identity would never be at stake" and that merger talks should not even "commence until WCOTP had clearly expressed its agreement in principle with the concept of creating a new international trade secretariat within the ICFTU family."<sup>56</sup>

Following on the hints that Congress delegates were taking up the amalgamation idea, the Executive Board of IFFTU agreed to proceed with a formal invitation to WCOTP to enter into merger talks. In a July 5, 1989, letter to Robert Harris, general secretary of WCOTP, Van Leeuwen outlined his invitation, along with a clear caveat, that "before entering into any discussion of these differences and obstacles or of means to remove them, WCOTP should clearly express its agreement in principle" that any merger would result in the new organization becoming a member of the ICFTU.<sup>57</sup>

Van Leeuwen was certainly correct in his stated belief that WCOTP would find it much harder to consider amalgamation. As compared with IFFTU, it appeared that many members had serious reservations about a possible merger. For some, the ideology of professionalism continued to weigh heavily, something which, they perceived, would have to be seriously compromised, if not abandoned, under a

<sup>54</sup>Fred van Leeuwen, "Introductory Comments," *Workers in Education*, June-Sept. 1989, p. 8, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>55</sup>Van Leeuwen, "Introductory Comments," 10.

<sup>56</sup>Van Leeuwen, "Introductory Comments," 8.

<sup>57</sup>Fred van Leeuwen to Robert Harris, July 5, 1989; cited in *Workers in Education*, June-Sept. 1989, p. 9, ALUA, Reuther Library. The letter closed with "Awaiting your reply . . ."

merger with IFFTU.<sup>58</sup> Another concern was raised by some teacher unions in Australia that were members of WCOTP. Given the global Cold War animosities that had possessed all three major networks almost since their founding, they insisted that if there were to be significant changes, they should truly be global in nature. No merging should occur unless it included FISE—a demand that clearly was not in the interests of either WCOTP or IFFTU, and certainly not enacted in the resulting agreements.<sup>59</sup> A further complication was suggested, in a report given at an IFFTU executive meeting in 1992. According to the source of the report,

FISE strongly opposes the idea of the creation of a new International Trade Secretariat for the Education Sector by IFFTU and WCOTP. It has informed WCOTP of its willingness to recommend its member organizations to affiliate with WCOTP.<sup>60</sup>

For all these reasons, there is no question that a decision to formally consider amalgamation with IFFTU weighed heavily on WCOTP officials during this time. Almost a year would pass before there was agreement, at the June 1990 meeting of the Board of Directors, to enter into negotiations with IFFTU.<sup>61</sup>

A formal negotiating team was subsequently appointed by each party (seven members from each side, including the presidents and general secretaries of both networks), and an extensive series of formal meetings were scheduled over the subsequent months, to take place in several global locations.<sup>62</sup> Following each meeting, reports were sent back to respective executives, with requests for feedback and permission to continue with the negotiations.<sup>63</sup> By mid-1992 agreement had been

<sup>58</sup>Perhaps anticipating this resistance, many successive issues of WCOTP's quarterly journal *ECHO*, beginning in 1988, included lengthy (often front-page) editorials promoting "unity" among teacher organizations (at least, among those in the West). In the December 1991 issue, after the start of formal merger negotiations, member organizations were asked to "tell us what kind of international organization you want. . . . Your responses will be of enormous help to the WCOTP Unity Team." Unfortunately, to date I have not been able to locate any of these responses (assuming ones were submitted). "Request to Members," *ECHO* 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1991), 22.

<sup>59</sup>As noted in O'Brien, *A Divided Unity*, 76.

<sup>60</sup>Minutes of the IFFTU Executive Board meeting, Dakar, April 22-24, 1992, ALUA, Reuther Library. To date, I have found no evidence in WCOTP reports of this purported offer by FISE.

<sup>61</sup>As noted below, once negotiations began, there were no public pronouncements from WCOTP that I have identified about any concerns that might have been raised by their member organizations, no further requests for opinions, and no reference as to how the WCOTP bargaining committee members might have dealt with the concerns regarding their organization's "professionalism" principles.

<sup>62</sup>Although the combined committee included representatives from other member unions, as the EI website notes, "the two Presidents played a major and ongoing role in laying the basis for a successful merger." EI, "Origins and History."

<sup>63</sup>Unfortunately, these reports were sent only to executive members, and not made public. Other than general comments made in newsletters by observers from member organizations, there is little information yet available on which specific issues occasioned serious discussion within the joint committee. For example, the report of the representative from the All India Federation of Teachers Organizations stated, "They had many turbulent sessions in many cities of the world. Hopes and disappointments, successes and failures, agreements and disagreements continued to persist, till both the parties committed to unity." *AIFTO NEWS* [All India Federation of Teachers Organizations], Feb. 1993; as reported in *ECHO* 42, no. 2 (June 1992), 14.



reached, at least in principle, on a number of structural and process issues: a draft constitution, bylaws, membership criteria, future of existing secretariats, etc., as well as plans for the founding meeting, and interim plans and budget for the first two years of the newly amalgamated organization. In July a brief joint letter was sent to all members of both networks, co-written by the two secretaries-general. Accompanying this letter was “a detailed report . . . on the creation of a new Educational International” and a draft of the constitution and transitional arrangements, negotiated by representatives of IFFTU and WCOTP and approved in principle by the two Executive Committees. The letter added, however, that “we would like to draw your attention to the fact that some further work is required on details of the documents which were approved in principle, so these are not the final versions.”<sup>64</sup> The two general secretaries also admitted that they “recognized that there is a legitimate demand by member organizations for more detailed information on the likely prospects in the final package.” However, in spite of this “demand,” and the admitted flux in negotiations, there was no apparent effort made to share or discuss these issues with member unions, let alone request comments or suggestions on these matters or engage member unions in discussions.<sup>65</sup>

After subsequent discussions over the mid months of 1992, the joint committee reached agreement on a final draft of the merger agreements. At an “extraordinary joint executive meeting” of both organizations on September 9 at the ILO headquarters, the final draft merger package was adopted.<sup>66</sup> In October both organizations sent out the full proposal package to all their members for their viewing, along with a request to send representatives to the (proposed) final meetings of their respective networks in January, to be followed immediately by the (proposed) first meeting of the newly amalgamated organization.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to sending out these draft statements, both networks engaged in an active promotion of the proposed amalgamation, lauding its virtues and advantages in their respective membership magazines. Van Leeuwen, for example, after identifying what he saw as some of the limitations that the two competing networks experienced, emphasized that:

[W]ith the EI however, we will have the resources to reach a new level of involvement in the defense of teacher interests. We will be able to increase our actions on behalf of teacher unionists whose political or trade union rights are violated and to organize actions against those states who are the violators. We will have

<sup>64</sup>Fred Van Leeuwen and Robert Harris to member organizations, July 14, 1992, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>65</sup>Leeuwen and Harris to member organizations, July 14, 1992..

<sup>66</sup>According to the coverage of the event provided by the All India Federation of Teachers Organizations, “It was also a difficult session. However, good sense prevailed.” *AIFTO NEWS*, October 1992; as reported in *ECHO* 41, no. 4 (Dec., 1992), 9.

<sup>67</sup>Minutes of the IFFTU Executive Board meeting, Dakar, April 22-24, 1992, ALUA, Reuther Library. Members were also informed that the proposal package would not be open for amendment, not at the final meetings of the two networks nor at the founding meeting of EI.

the resources to advise teacher unions on their rights under international agreements and to help wronged teachers take their case before international tribunals like the ILO.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, Robert Harris of WCOTP penned a lengthy article in its magazine, outlining all the advantages of the merger.<sup>69</sup>

### *The Founding Meeting*

By January 1993, after many months and years of back-and-forth discussions, reports, and interim agreements, all was in place to formally initiate a new era in global teacher union activities. The final, highly orchestrated “founding” event occurred in a conference center in Stockholm. First, in adjoining rooms, over three days, each network held its final congress, at which time votes were taken to wind up their respective organizations and endorse the new creation.

For his part, the general secretary of IFFTU, in his opening remarks at his organization’s final meeting, welcomed and thanked “so many member organizations” for participating in what he claimed was “an historical event”:

We are going to discuss proposals and to take decisions which will determine the future of the entire international teachers’ movement. We are going to build new bridges and dismantle old ones. The active participation in this process of all member organizations is of great importance.<sup>70</sup>

In a subsequent speech, a spokesperson representing the three Swedish teachers’ unions sponsoring the final IFFTU Congress lauded the impending merger. With Education International, “it will be easier to maintain and strengthen” international solidarity and funds for cooperative development, and “support colleagues in other countries that are under repression from regimes which do not respect fundamental human rights.” In addition, he shared his “hope that the foundation of the Education International today will mean that the teachers and education staff all over the world will be better prepared to fight against heavy spending cuts in the public sector.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, delegates to the simultaneously held final congress of WCOTP were treated to introductory formalities reminiscing on the history of their network and extolling the virtues of the proposed new organization. Subsequently, in both meetings, the delegates discussed and approved motions to dissolve their respective organizations and endorse the new international association.

These two final meetings were well-timed. After their respective decisions to dissolve, and motions of adjournment, the wall separating the two gatherings was rolled back, to much applause. The opening addresses to the combined audience were

<sup>68</sup>Fred van Leeuwen, “Opening Remarks,” *Workers in Education*, June-Sept. 1992, p. 8, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>69</sup>“Unity in Education,” *ECHO* 41, no. 4 (Dec. 1992), 4-6.

<sup>70</sup>Fred van Leeuwen, “Opening Remarks,” *Proceedings of IFFTU 1993 World Congress*, Stockholm, Jan. 1993, p. 4, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>71</sup>“International Teacher Unity,” *Proceedings of IFFTU 1993 World Congress*, 11.

numerous—not only representatives from the two founding networks, but also from other international organizations such as ICFTU, ILO, UNESCO, and WHO. This was followed by the reaffirmation of a resolution to create Education International; subsequently, a representative from each union delegation was asked to sign the charter document.

After the ceremonies, the participants discussed (but did not amend) the extensive planning package prepared by the merger negotiating committee and approved by the two network executives.<sup>72</sup> This package included a proposed new administrative structure, a plan of activities for the first two years of the new organization, a detailed budget including policies about membership fees, and plans for creation of the new headquarters in Brussels along with succession arrangements for the secretariat employees of both former networks.<sup>73</sup> With respect to membership, all organizations that had previously been members of WCOTP and/or IFFTU would be invited to become members of the new organization. However, in order to maintain their membership in EI, any member organizations that previously also held membership in another international network (e.g., FISE, CEA, or WCT) would be required to leave that other body no later than six months prior to the first ordinary World Congress, which was slated to be held in two years' time.

The gathering also dealt with the appointment of an executive for the new organization. Accordingly, a slate of candidates proposed by the negotiating committee was presented and duly approved. Al Shanker, president of the AFT, was elected EI's "founding president"; Mary Futrell, former president of NEA, was elected president. IFFTU general secretary, Fred van Leeuwen, was elected as general secretary of the new organization, and WCOTP general secretary Robert Harris as executive director for intergovernmental relations. Following the founding convention, offices previously arranged in Brussels were occupied, and the new organization began its operations.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on the hundred-plus-year evolution of international teachers' organizations, leading up to the formation of Education International, two themes stand out. First, while the founding motivations of many of the early formations were based on teachers' desire to promote global peace and understanding, as they evolved through the political conflicts of the twentieth century, their leadership came to align their vision of international relations with ideological positions represented by East-West divisions. This was particularly so for the two organizations that came to be dominated by the NEA and the AFT. As William Russell expressed it, as early as 1951 in his WOTP presidential speech, teachers "should make no plans

<sup>72</sup>Amendments to the plan would remain in the sole purview of the new executive board—an officially proposed slate which would be endorsed by the founding congress, and which would remain in place for at least two years, until the next constituted assembly gathering. *Proceedings of IFFTU 1993 World Congress*, 7.

<sup>73</sup>Plans were also put in place for the establishment of standing committees and regional offices in other parts of the world. *Proceedings*, 14-15.

whatsoever on the theory that peace is likely to come soon; the temptation . . . to join those forces that oppose armaments . . . is the new line of the Communists.”<sup>74</sup>

Second, however much the early formations were initiated, organized, and promoted at the grassroots level, over time international teacher organizations adopted top-down direction and bureaucratic control. This shift was clearly apparent by the time the 1993 merger was being considered: planning was undertaken by a small select group, with no transparency over its discussions. Indeed, the merger was achieved at a great distance from classroom teachers, who had little to no opportunity to learn about the decisions being made, let alone become involved in commenting on them. Even representatives of national and regional unions from across the globe who attended the final meetings were not allowed to amend in any way the merger proposals that were presented. Instead, they were on view strictly to be rubber-stamped, along with the slate of “candidates” who would steer the new organization for at least its first two formative years.

Against this background, it is intriguing to read that, in the view of the new executive, the newly merged organization would allow educators across the globe to “reach a new level of involvement in the defense of teacher interests.”<sup>75</sup> It remains for further critical research to explore the nature of this “new level of involvement” and extent to which it reflects the very diverse interests of teachers in diverse parts of the world.<sup>76</sup> In addition, scholars and union activists may wish to explore the ways in which Education International may have been affected by events leading up to its foundation. For example, what impact might these earlier events have had on teacher organizing more broadly, going forward?

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<sup>74</sup>WOTP, 1951 Report, 71-72, CTF Archives.

<sup>75</sup>Fred van Leeuwen, *Workers in Education*, June-Sept. 1992, p. 8, ALUA, Reuther Library.

<sup>76</sup>Such further research might include an examination of interactions within the organization between various national organizations, EI’s relations with “dissident” teacher unions across the globe, or recent critiques of aspects of EI policies and practices in relation to the “defense of teacher interests.” See, for example, the website of the organization Teacher Solidarity ([teachersolidarity.com](http://teachersolidarity.com)); Bocking, *Public Education, Neoliberalism, and Teachers*.