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“The Ruhr Remains our Nightmare”: The International Metalworkers’ Federation and European Integration in the Early Cold War

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to study discussions within the International Metalworkers’ Federation (IMF) about the early postwar process of European integration at the intersection of international cooperation and nationally defined interests. The central question is the future of the Ruhr. This article argues that the developing Cold War, and the conflict between social democrats and communists, limited the reach of international trade-union cooperation but simultaneously strengthened the perceived need among social-democratic trade unionists in Western Europe to coordinate their policies in relation to supposed enemies. European integration in combination with the Cold War also highlighted a need to coordinate the resources of European and anti-communist trade unions in North America. The article shows that the IMF generally supported European integration as a defence against the hypothetical threat from the East, but made attempts to sway the process to include a pronounced social dimension.

Ever since nineteenth-century efforts to unite national trade unions at the international level, leading actors in the European labour movement have repeatedly emphasized the importance of an internationalist ideology in spite of the contradictory nature of such a starting point. In fact, socialists have often subordinated international cooperation and coordination to nationally defined interests. The main purpose of trade unions, i.e. to defend their members’ interests in national labour markets, has limited their ability to act internationally. World War I then undermined attempts to keep the international trade-union movement united, as did the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and its aftermath. As the Cold War unfolded after World War II, the

conflict and organizational split between socialists/social democrats and communists became even more manifest.¹

This article analyses how, against the backdrop of the developing Cold War, trade unionists in the West viewed the institutional identity and organizational principles of trade unions and how they sought balance between international collaboration and the nation state in cases where economic and political matters of significant importance to trade unions crossed nation-state borders. The specific aim here is to study discussions within the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) about the early postwar process of European integration at the intersection of international cooperation and nationally defined interests. In particular, the article analyses the highly politicized question of the future of the Ruhr.²

During the second half of the 1940s, the Cold War was confined mainly to Europe, and the Ruhr was of fundamental importance to all plans for European reconstruction and integration. This article therefore considers which aspects of the early process of European integration in general, and of the situation in the Ruhr in particular, united or divided IMF affiliates. How did the emerging Cold War, and the conflict between social democrats and communists, affect the IMF's European integration policies?

The natural resources and industries in the Ruhr had been an important background to three generations of wars beginning with the Franco-German war of 1870–1871 and for the two following world wars. After World War II, actors within the socialist/social-democratic labour movement anxiously realized that low output from the mines and factories would have negative consequences for other European industrial areas and for the general preconditions for European reconstruction. They noted a communist threat in the Ruhr and were keen to unionize the workers within the social-democratic

1. On the development of trade-union internationalism, see, for example, Frits van Holthoorn and Marcel van der Linden (eds), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement 1830–1940* (Leiden, 1988); Lars Olsson, "Labour Movements, History Of", *International Encyclopedia of Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 12 (2001), pp. 8194–8199; Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 155–171; Richard Hyman, "Agitation, Organisation, Byråkrati, Diplomati. Motsägelsefulla strategier i den internationella arbetarrörelsen", *Arbetshistoria*, 109–110:1–2 (2004), pp. 16–27.

2. The empirical basis for this study consists mainly of minutes from the Central Committee of the IMF. Although the triennially convened Congress was officially the organization's most important body, the executive Central Committee, which gathered once or twice a year, formulated most of its policies and statements. On the IMF's organizational structure, see Joseph Harmon, *The International Metalworkers' Federation: An International Labor Study* (Washington, DC, 1959), p. 8. The main IMF archive (Internationaler Metallgewerkschaftsbund Archiv) is stored at the Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Bonn. The IMF recorded its Central Committee meetings and transcribed them as detailed minutes. In the 1940s, the Secretariat transcribed them in English, German, and French, although not all those translations have been preserved at AdsD. From the early 1950s, the minutes were also translated into Italian and one Scandinavian language.

camp, at the same time noting that Ruhr capitalists had supported the Nazis. Reformist trade-union leaders therefore acknowledged the need for increased output and growth while struggling on two fronts, for they faced difficulties from both communists and employers.³

Talbot C. Imlay stresses that the practice of socialist internationalism reached a new peak after World War II.⁴ The ambition in 1945 to unite the global trade-union movement within the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was part of the same wave of internationalism that led to the foundation of the United Nations. Victor Silverman, who likewise credits many trade unionists with a genuine belief in internationalist ideology after the war, nevertheless underscores that a world “torn by intense ideological conflict was an inhospitable place for labor internationalism”.⁵ The underlying ideological and political division between social democrats and communists since the interwar years, and then the circumstances of the emerging Cold War, soon undermined efforts to build a united trade-union movement. In 1949, West-leaning trade unionists, most of them social democrats, founded the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), while the WFTU ended up under Soviet control, with its headquarters in Prague.⁶ Actors sympathetic to the West now stressed that “free trade unionism” meant organizations governed by workers, a definition formulated in direct opposition to the supposedly state-governed trade unions of Eastern Europe. Although “free trade unionism” was itself a concept contested internally – mainly in the matter of how closely trade unions should be allowed to work with labour parties – anti-communism united those trade unionists who supported the ICFTU.⁷

None of this means that the importance of international trade-union collaboration disappeared with the organizational split in 1949. This article argues that while the Cold War context increased the perceived significance of international trade-union cooperation, anti-communists developed their

3. On the Ruhr in international relations, see John Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945–1955: The Germans and the French from Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community* (Cambridge, 1991).

4. Talbot C. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914–1960* (Oxford, 2018), p. 8 for example. On the early postwar period as an apogee of internationalism, see also Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA, 2013), ch. 3.

5. Victor Silverman, *Imagining Internationalism in American and British Labor, 1939–49* (Urbana/Chicago, IL, 2000), p. 178.

6. Anthony Carew, “Towards a Free Trade Union Centre: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (1949–1972)”, in *idem et al.* (eds), *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Bern, 2000) pp. 187–339, 189–199; see also Denis MacShane, *International Labour and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, 1992), pp. 5, 55, 143–144, 150–151, 170–171, 238, 279, 285–287.

7. Anthony Carew, *American Labour’s Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945–1970* (Edmonton, 2018), pp. 71, 341–342.

own form of internationalism within a narrower framework than the more universalistic ambitions of the WFTU. The most zealous anti-communists placed the Cold War struggle above work-related and more traditional trade-union concerns, while other trade unionists contested the very starting point, insisting that international cooperation must also challenge liberal capitalism. In any case, the struggle against enemies brought sympathizers closer, a unity defined both in relation to industrialists to the political right and communists to the left. In turn, the double-sided demarcation highlighted a mutual need to coordinate internationally the policies and resources of Western and Northern European trade unions, as well as of European and anti-communist North American trade unions.

By the end of World War II, the IMF was a distinctly Western and Northern European organization, with affiliates at its first postwar Congress in 1947 representing 2,650,000 workers. During the late 1940s, the IMF grew with powerful trade unions from the US, initially from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and then from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). By the time the IMF gathered for its second postwar Congress in 1951, the number of members within the affiliates had increased to six million.⁸ A trade-union elite now controlled the organization, a rather small group of men most of whom controlled national trade unions. Those trade union leaders were generally politically influential because their opinions could influence millions of working-class voters; many politicians were therefore mindful of the need for their support. Konrad Ilg of Switzerland, a well-known anti-communist, dominated the leadership as its Secretary from 1920 until his death in 1954, while simultaneously controlling the Swiss affiliate at the national level.⁹ When the United Auto Workers (UAW) joined the IMF in 1949, IMF meetings were attended by either its President, Walter Reuther, or Victor Reuther, head of its International Affairs' Department. Another example of a powerful trade unionist is Hans Rasmussen, President of the Danish affiliate and a man who often added a coordinated Scandinavian voice to the IMF. When such men spoke at the international level, their arguments were authoritative, not least because they represented powerful national trade unions.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AS LABOUR HISTORY

The history of European integration has been a growing field of research since the 1990s, when a number of government archives were thrown open to researchers. By then, the usual thirty-year confidentiality time limit had

8. Karl Casserini, *International Metalworkers' Federation, 1893–1993: The First Hundred Years* (Geneva, 1993), p. 107.

9. On Ilg, see e.g. MacShane, *International Labour*, pp. 14–15.

passed, which made it possible to study European integration during the 1950s and 1960s and the development of European Union institutions and intergovernmental relations have become subjects for in-depth research.¹⁰ Scholars have begun to analyse “Europe” as a socially constructed concept and interrogate the idea of a European identity.¹¹

Wolfram Kaiser claims that researchers have suffered from a bias towards diplomacy and intergovernmental negotiations. Considering the early postwar period and European integration, most have neglected transnational actors other than those representing states.¹² In line with this argument, Jürgen Mittag maintains that previous research has ignored trade unions altogether.¹³ Talbot C. Imlay’s detailed and substantial book, which inter alia addresses socialist internationalism and European integration, is one example, for it focuses on political parties to the explicit exclusion of trade unions, thereby neatly highlighting that European integration history and trade-union history have tended to be separate research fields.¹⁴ A further purpose of this article is therefore to bridge the habitual gap between the fields of European integration history and labour history, by making trade-union actors the centre of attention.

Similarly, Brian Shaev argues that labour historians should try to reverse the perspective that dominates the field of European integration history. Instead of describing how intergovernmental negotiations have affected trade unions, labour history should explain how the agency of the working class and their organizations have affected the process of European integration.¹⁵ Denis MacShane has made a similar remark concerning the Cold War, underlining that scholars should consider the Cold War not only as something external

10. For a historiography, see Wolfram Kaiser, “From State to Society? The Historiography of European Integration”, in Michelle Cini and Angela Bourne (eds), *Palgrave Advances in European Union Studies* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 190–208.

11. See e.g. Mikael af Malmborg and Bo Stråth (eds), *The Meaning of Europe: Variety and Contention within and among Nations* (Oxford, 2002); Menno Spiering and Michael Wintle (eds), *European Identity and the Second World War* (Basingstoke, 2011); Mark Hewitson and Matthew D’Auria (eds), *Europe in Crisis: Intellectuals and the European Idea, 1917–1957* (New York, 2012); Dieter Gosewinkel (ed.), *Anti-Liberal Europe: A Neglected Story of Europeanization* (New York, 2015).

12. Kaiser, “From State to Society?”, p. 196.

13. Jürgen Mittag, “Deutsche Gewerkschaften und europäische Integration: Forschungsphasen, Desiderate und Perspektiven aus historischer Sicht”, *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen: Deutsche Gewerkschaften und europäische Integration im 20. Jahrhundert*, 42 (Essen, 2009), pp. 5–24, 5–6; see also Bernd Bühlbäcker, “Debatten um die Montanunion: Gewerkschaften und europäische Integration in der 1950er Jahren”, pp. 43–62, 43, and Hitoshi Suzuki, “The High Authority of the ECSC, the European Network of Trade Unions and the DGB: Ideas, Strategies and Achievements”, pp. 63–88, 79–80, 88, in the same issue.

14. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, p. 4 for example.

15. Brian Shaev, “Workers’ Politics, the Communist Challenge, and the Schuman Plan: A Comparative History of the French Socialist and German Social Democratic Parties and the First Treaty for European Integration”, *International Review of Social History*, 61:2 (2016), pp. 251–281, 253, 270, 277.

affecting trade unions, but also as developing inside the labour movement.¹⁶ This article is a contribution to that debate.

Most literature on international trade-union cooperation has tended to focus on one of the two sides of the international movement, so that the confederations of national centres are generally well researched.¹⁷ The International Trade Secretariats (ITS), which gather national trade unions from specific sectors, have attracted less interest. Barbara Barnouin for instance, in her book with the far-reaching title, *The European Labour Movement and European Integration*, expounded her study of the European Trade Union Confederation.¹⁸ However, that organization was not established until the early 1970s and even then was mostly a platform for national centres. Barnouin treats early postwar European integration only briefly in her book, as background material, and gives the ITS no attention at all. A more recent example is Anthony Carew's book, *American Labour's Cold War Abroad*, which deals with the AFL-CIO. The AFL and the CIO merged in 1955 and Carew studies their relations with European national centres during the first decades of the Cold War, as well as their conflicts over international affairs. Carew points out that a number of the trade unionists who are the main characters in the book acted simultaneously both within international confederations and different ITS, although his study focuses on the former. Indeed, Carew chiefly cites personal correspondence instead of sources from the ITS archives when writing about the latter.¹⁹ As Klaus Misgeld maintains, for historians interested in "hands-on" international trade-union cooperation, the ITS are in fact the most appropriate subjects for study because the ITS organized trade unions within specific sectors and thus were somewhat closer than the great confederations to everyday trade-union matters.²⁰

A NARRATIVE OF GERMAN DISTRESS

Generally, the trade-union movement in both Western Europe and North America emerged from World War II more powerful than ever. Particularly

16. MacShane, *International Labour*, pp. 279–280, 285–289.

17. See e.g. Carew, *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*; Geert van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International: The World of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913–1945* (Aldershot, 2006); Magaly Rodriguez Garcia, *Liberal Workers of the World, Unite? The ICFTU and the Defence of Labour Liberalism in Europe and Latin America (1949–1969)* (Oxford, 2010).

18. Barbara Barnouin, *The European Labour Movement and European Integration* (London, 1986).

19. Carew, *American Labour's Cold War Abroad*.

20. Klaus Misgeld, *Den fackliga europavägen. LO, det internationella samarbetet och Europas enande 1945–1991* (Stockholm, 1997), p. 25.

well placed were trade unions connected to war industries like steel, shipbuilding, the aerospace industry, and other areas of the metallurgical and engineering industries. For example, in Britain, the sector's largest trade union was the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, which grew from 400,000 members in 1939 to 700,000 in 1945. The UAW is another example, increasing from 165,000 in 1939 to more than a million in 1944.²¹ Such growth meant that the prospective organizational base of the IMF was greater after the war than it had been in the interwar period. Nonetheless, the IMF had to rebuild its structures after the war before it could gain from that development, while in its turn, the developing Cold War forced internal negotiations of organizational borders to settle the question of which national trade unions were appropriate new members.

The social and political situation on the European continent dominated the agenda of the IMF's Congress in 1947. Only representatives from Britain, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the Benelux countries attended as full members, while trade unionists from Germany, Austria, Finland, Czechoslovakia, and the US were in Copenhagen as guests or observers. The French metalworkers had no representation, according to Secretary Konrad Ilg because of the power of the communists in the French trade-union movement. As an organization, the IMF aligned itself with the social-democratic camp, for example by inviting the Swedish Minister of Social Affairs, Gustav Möller, to address the Congress.²²

In any case, Irving Brown, the AFL's European attaché since 1945, assumed great influence during the Congress. Brown is one of the main characters in Carew's aforementioned book, and Carew carefully describes Brown's cooperation with Jay Lovestone, who controlled the AFL's semi-independent body dealing with international affairs. That body was the Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC) and, to put it simply, Brown was Lovestone's roving right-hand man with the general mission overseas to counter communist influence anywhere within the European trade-union movement. During the early postwar period, Brown attended trade-union meetings in occupied Germany, France, Sweden, Greece, and other countries, often with the object of undermining the WFTU,²³ and in Copenhagen, Brown certainly pushed the IMF's Congress towards anti-communism. Formally, he attended as a representative

21. MacShane, *International Labour*, pp. 1, 7, 106, 167.

22. IMF, "Report of the Secretariat and the National Organisations 1938–1946 to the XVth International Metalworkers' Congress in Copenhagen July/August 1947", (undated). IMF Collection (Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek, ARAB), vol. 4; "Deltagarlista 1947 års kongress"; Programme, "Internationalt Metalarbejderforbunds 15. Kongress i København 27. Juli–1. August 1947". IMF Archive, vol. 1018.

23. Carew, *American Labour's Cold War Abroad*, pp. 4, 22–25, 29, 33–38, 43–52 for example; about Lovestone, see Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (Toronto, 1999).

of one of the largest AFL unions, the International Association of Machinists (IAM), on the verge of becoming the first US member of the IMF. One of the most important items on the agenda was the IMF's relationship with the WFTU, an organization that the CIO had joined but the AFL rejected because of the cooperation between trade unions from Eastern and Western Europe. By developing transatlantic cooperation and coordinating the IMF with a powerful AFL union, the anti-communist Ilg could strengthen the wing of the organization that wanted to keep the WFTU at arm's length, chiefly in opposition to British delegates.²⁴ The IMF remained independent, albeit with close ties to the ICFTU from 1949.

Based on his experience, Brown also wrote a lengthy document that served as a basis for discussion of the situation in occupied Germany. It was a story of hunger, workers suffering from frostbite, and social unrest in a country on the brink of economic collapse. From the lack of food, proper housing, and warm clothing, Brown identified a clear risk that "tuberculosis and infectious diseases will rise to the point of plagues in a few years". He pointed out that inflation undercut real wages, which, in turn, decreased the incentive to work; few people wanted to labour in mines or factories when a packet of cigarettes was worth more in the real economy than the few marks that came with a wage packet. Brown told his fellow trade unionists that the German manufacturing industry was working at less than a third of its pre-war capacity, with the mines in the Ruhr producing only about half their pre-war coal tonnage. He then emphasized the effects on the overall European economy, pointing out that the deficit in coal production was hindering the steel industries in other countries, that the low output in and around Germany forced idleness on dockworkers in Belgium and the Netherlands, and so on.²⁵

According to Carew, both Brown and Lovestone perceived it as folly to see the communist threat as a consequence of economic distress, an approach they scorned as "belly communism".²⁶ In any case, in his discussions with Europeans, Brown apparently felt able to argue within the dominant European discourse, and did so in terms he presumably supposed Europeans understood. In Copenhagen, when he implicitly stressed that the social distress in Germany would push workers into the arms of the communists, Brown apparently took as his starting point the theory of "empty-stomach communism". He argued that it was necessary, therefore,

to plan Germany's future in terms of European and world economic ties. Assuming the reality of the present Eastern European political situation there should be no hesitation about the creation of an integrated Western European

24. "Report on the Congress of the International Metalworkers' Federation, held in Copenhagen on July 28–August 1, 1947", 1947 (undated), IMF Archive, vol. 1018; see also MacShane, *International Labour*, pp. 66–75, 89–90.

25. "Report on the Situation in Germany", 1947 (undated), IMF Archive, vol. 1018.

26. Carew, *American Labour's Cold War Abroad*, p. 114.

economy. This obviously requires that we stop wasting time idly waiting for an economic and politically unified Germany. Present Russian policy in the Eastern zone of Germany prevents any such realization.²⁷

In the current political situation, it was time to stop dreaming of a united Germany, and Brown instead pushed to the forefront of the IMF's agenda the idea of West Germany as part of a future integrated Western European economy. In turn, that realization made more urgent the incorporation of German metalworkers' unions from the western zones into the IMF.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND COMMUNISTS IN A DIVIDED EUROPE

When the IMF Central Committee gathered in Lugano in March 1948, both the continuing conflict between social democrats and communists within the WFTU and the recently experienced communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia loomed darkly over the discussions. According to Konrad Ilg, it was obvious that "where the social democrats did not bend to the principles of Bolshevism, they were annihilated with violence". The communists held strong positions in France and Italy, and Ilg had observed immediate developments there with great anxiety, prompting him to warn that both might go the same way as Czechoslovakia. Equally crestfallen, Hans Rasmussen confessed that he and other Scandinavian trade unionists had believed it would be possible to cooperate with the Soviets, for example within the WFTU, but that after the Czech coup they had realized they had been mistaken.²⁸

The discussion about allowing German trade unions to re-enter the IMF therefore reflected the importance of the Cold War. Ilg emphasized the post-war distress in occupied Germany, and hinted at his agreement with the common idea that the dire social situation there would drive the population into the arms of the communists. The Secretary insisted that it was alarming that the WFTU had approached the German unions, and that a number of them already seemed to be under communist influence.

Nevertheless, Ilg was confident that the IMF could help organize the metalworkers in the western sectors under the social-democratic umbrella. Arthur Gailly, from Belgium, added that they must hurry, otherwise the Soviets would organize them first. Rasmussen, in turn, stressed that the matter of the Germans reassuming their membership was beyond discussion, for in

27. "Report on the Situation in Germany", 1947 (undated), IMF Archive, vol. 1018.

28. IMF, Sitzung des Zentralkomitees Protokolle, 13–18 March 1948, § 1, IMF Archive, vol. 1208A. All translations of quotations from German to English in this article are the author's.

Germany the question now was, “to realize either socialism or communism”.²⁹ Accordingly, the next Central Committee meeting in October 1948 welcomed the three German metalworkers’ unions, one each from the British, US, and French sectors.³⁰ Thereby, the IMF took an important step towards stronger integration of the metalworkers’ unions in Western Europe and clarified the dividing line between those whom it included in the category of “us”, as reformist trade-union leaders, and “them”, who, in this case, were all communists, whether in Eastern or Western Europe.

A few months before the IMF Congress in 1947, US Secretary of State George Marshall introduced what became the European Recovery Programme (ERP). In view of the subsequent process of European integration, an important aspect of the programme was that the US government did not provide a ready-made, detailed plan for its implementation, instead demanding that potential recipients should cooperate to work out the details and should coordinate their economies to do so. A further US demand forced countries benefiting from the ERP to liberalize trade regulations in accordance with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which also pushed European economic integration in a liberal direction.³¹

“Of course”, Ilg admitted, “the Marshall Plan has nothing to do with socialism”. All the same, he stressed that claims from the East, and the fear in some parts of the West that the plan was only a tool invented by capitalists, were certainly excessive.³² For example, the communist-dominated French centre, *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT), condemned Marshall aid as “a plan of subjugation of the world by the capitalist American trusts and preparation for a new world war”.³³ Ilg’s view was that the IMF must counter the communist narrative of the ERP, not least to ensure that it should not become the dominant perception among rank-and-file union members. In that respect, the new transatlantic bonds created at the Copenhagen Congress became even more important. Indeed, for the IMF, the conflict over the Marshall Plan between social democrats and communists was the final reason for its decision to break all prospective bonds with the WFTU.³⁴

29. IMF, Sitzung des Zentralkomitees Protokolle, 13–18 March 1948, § 5, IMF Archive, vol. 1208A.

30. IMF, Sitzung des Zentralkomitees Protokolle, 10–12 October 1948, § 1a, IMF Archive, vol. 1208B.

31. The literature on the Marshall Plan is huge. See e.g. Greg Behrman, *The Most Noble Adventure: The Marshall Plan and How America Helped Rebuild Europe* (New York, 2007); for a labour perspective, see Anthony Carew, *Labour under the Marshall Plan: The Politics of Productivity and the Marketing of Management Science* (Manchester, 1987).

32. IMF, “Resolution betreffend die Beziehungen zum Weltgewerkschaftsbund”, Protokolle Sitzung des Zentralkomitees, 13–18 March 1948, § 1, IMF Archive, vol. 1208A.

33. Cited after Carew, *American Labour’s Cold War Abroad*, p. 49.

34. IMF, “Resolution betreffend die Beziehungen zum Weltgewerkschaftsbund”.

With a scarcely hidden anti-communist motive, Irving Brown took the opportunity at the Central Committee meeting in March 1948 to vindicate a strong trade-union commitment to the Marshall Plan. Brown's suggested resolution stressed that European trade unions must work nationally to secure positive attitudes among workers, while, internationally, trade-union organizations should ensure that they secured representation on all planning and implementing bodies. For the ERP to operate smoothly and as expected, it needed both trade-union support and expertise, Brown concluded.³⁵ The trade unions could therefore be of assistance, while defending their own interests, if they won influence with the politicians and employers who were discussing output targets, commodity distribution, modernization of industry, and other matters affecting workers. The gist of Brown's resolution was the idea that whether the Marshall Plan ended up as a project anchored in working-class interests or became a capitalist venture – as the communists had claimed – was still an open question that trade unions could sway by international cooperative effort. At least to that extent, then, the representatives on the Central Committee found themselves able to agree.

All the same, the IMF response to the communist attack on the Marshall Plan required careful navigation. A few Central Committee members even argued against Brown's visceral anti-communism, which was too explicit for their liking. Lincoln Evans from Britain maintained that it was unnecessary to "convert the question of reconstruction to anti-Soviet propaganda". Karl Maisel from Austria added that the IMF must formulate its resolution very carefully so that the communists "would not get new opportunities to attack us". Rather than construct a narrative about the ERP that stressed its actual anti-communist dimension, or one that highlighted economic growth to the extent that workers might perceive it as too employer-friendly, the IMF should emphasize its social potential and possible gains for the working class. Accordingly, the IMF retained Brown's positive tone in the resolution it subsequently adopted about the ERP. The final resolution urged the member organizations to "give their full support to economic reconstruction at the national level".³⁶

SOCIALIZATION, NATIONALIZATION, OR INTERNATIONALIZATION?

Just as the communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia influenced the IMF's meeting in Lugano, the Berlin blockade and the generally increased level of international tension rested heavily on all its discussions during 1949. In

35. IMF, Sitzung des Zentralkomitees Protokolle, 13–18 March 1948, § 3, IMF Archive, vol. 1208A.

36. *Ibid.*

April 1949, when the IMF highlighted the importance of transatlantic cooperation by gathering the Central Committee for the first time outside Europe, which it did in Washington, DC, the Soviet road blockade of West Berlin had been going on for about ten months. In such a fraught context, the future of Germany in general and the Ruhr in particular, where economic and political questions intersected, was high on the IMF's agenda. Konrad Ilg emphasized that above all "we must prevent the communists from obtaining further influence".³⁷

The IMF did not limit its activities to traditional trade-union issues, but rather tried to represent the members of the affiliates by broadening its view of society and taking active stands in international politics. In the Cold War, the Ruhr became the setting for a battle between social democrats and communists. Firstly, the area's future encompassed a number of important matters of traditional concern to trade unions, such as wages, working conditions, and appropriate levels of output, but in this case the immense question of who should own the mines and industry in general – the means of production – was also an important aspect of international relations. Arthur Gailly, who was very active in the discussions, expressed the problem clearly:

The problem of the Ruhr is for us all a nightmare. Without the immense capacity of production of the Ruhr, Hitler would never have been able to launch that last war [...]. We therefore have not the right to wait and see how others decide about the future of the Ruhr, without safeguarding the interests of the workers. [...We] must also insist that the workers will be represented in the administration of the Ruhr, in order to make sure that the Ruhr will become demilitarised and de-nazified.³⁸

The IMF should therefore act towards the occupational powers as an active lobby organization, similar to their response to the Marshall Plan; it could certainly not allow the interwar period ownership conditions and power structures to be re-established. On that point, the trade unionists remained unanimous, but the Central Committee was divided over the matter of the actual management of the Ruhr. Who, then, they wondered, if not the old owners, should possess and control industry when the occupying powers withdrew?

Internally, the IMF contested the question of the Ruhr in relation to a resolution adopted by the International Trades Unions Ruhr Committee (ITURC) at a meeting in Luxembourg, a month before the Central Committee gathered in Washington, DC. The ITURC was a cooperative organization for mineworkers' and metalworkers' unions in France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg; in other words, the

37. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 April 1949, § 5b, IMF Archive, vol. 1202C.

38. *Ibid.*, § 5c, IMF Archive, vol. 1202C.

relevant industrial sectors of the countries most concerned with output from the Ruhr. In the resolution published in March 1949, the ITRUC suggested that the control of industry in the Ruhr “should be put into the hands of an international corporation, in which representatives of the workers’ organisations participate”. The authors were even more forthright in the final paragraphs, in which they demanded that national trade unions should make great efforts to achieve “internationalisation of the mining and metal industries of the Ruhr district”; and finally, they underlined that the internationalization of those means of production was only the first step “towards the internationalisation of all key-industries”.³⁹

During the following IMF Central Committee meeting, Gailly led the arguments for what he termed international socialization. His narrative took as its starting point the great and well-known production capacity of the area:

If we leave it to the Germans again without any control, we risk that Belgian, Luxemburg and French heavy industry will be crushed someday. [...] Even if we stand for the international socialisation of the Ruhr, we do not claim the Ruhr for ourselves. [...] We only want to avoid the risk, that the Germans should again dispose of the free exploitation of such a huge industrial centre, as we have not yet sufficient confidence in them, although our German Comrades are men, who deserve our full confidence. [...] But we dare not forget, that in Germany there are still dangerous minorities, and that nationalism is not yet dead. [...] If we want to avoid a third war tragedy, we must act. How can we find the necessary protection? Only in a new form of exploitation of the Ruhr, by internationalising it without any reservations. [...] Without being a 100 percent Marxist, I know, that the fundamental principle of the trade unions is to realise nationalisation.⁴⁰

In the first place, Gailly obviously wanted to protect employment in his own country against future competition from the Ruhr. He saw that if the international community left an independent Germany alone to exploit the capacity of the Ruhr, there would be a great danger that Belgium’s eastern neighbour would saturate the market with German commodities and industrial products. Between the wars, Belgium had been extremely dependent on export revenue, to the extent that it had exported about half its steel production.⁴¹ Secondly, as a Belgian, Gailly did not consider the German de-Nazification chapter to be quite closed. Former supporters of Hitler still lurked among the ranks of German capitalists, leading Gailly to suspect that German nationalism too might be concealed within a general framework of lingering extreme right-wing forces. However, in spite of his reservations about German industrialists, Gailly declared that he saw the German trade unionists in the IMF as his comrades. Concluding his narrative, Gailly tried

39. ITRUC, “Resolution of the Luxemburg Conference of 14–15th March 1949, concerning the Ruhr problem”, IMF Archive, vol. 1210.

40. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 April 1949.

41. Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe*, p. 24.

to include his German colleagues in the collective “us”, which, until then, had set Belgian, Luxembourg, and French labour market interests in opposition to German interests. Now, by referring to socialist ideology, Gailly was attempting to build an international consensus that could lead to internationalist practice.

Leading actors within the West German labour movement also disagreed on important steps towards early postwar European integration. While social democratic politicians generally rallied behind Kurt Schumacher’s critique, a number of trade unionists were more positive.⁴² Nevertheless, Walter Freitag’s thoughts on international socialization of the Ruhr reflected parts of the critical approach:

Since my 18th year of age I have been a socialist, but I think that the socialist development within a country is its own affair and is not to be ordered by strangers. If this would happen, we would resemble the example of Russia. [...] We think, that a solution should be possible on the basis of the co-operative movement. Then the plants and mines could choose their own management and also take their own decisions, which would be of great advantage for the welfare of the people.⁴³

As Klaus Misgeld has pointed out, international socialist cooperation has always suffered from the fact that national organizations have been reluctant to yield power to the international level.⁴⁴ According to Freitag, the Ruhr lay on German soil and therefore its future was, ultimately, a matter for the Germans. Freitag argued both in relation to the overall debate about the premises of possibly pending West German independence, and to German workers’ simultaneous struggle for industrial codetermination (*Mitbestimmung*). An obvious and convenient gambit to support his position was for him to play the communist card, which he did by referring to the IMF’s repeated condemnation of the Soviet Union for forcing other nations to accept its political and economic system. Could it then be legitimate to force West Germany to accept any particular system?

However, Freitag did not oppose increased international cooperation but insisted that an “international regulation of the whole problem” was necessary. After years of state-regulated production during the war, confidence was high. Powerbrokers and other representatives of labour should be able to calculate requirements and formulate production plans accordingly. Freitag was sure that careful planning, at both national and international levels, would disperse the storm clouds pointed to by Gailly.⁴⁵

At the same time, the discussions within the IMF were complicated by different definitions of key concepts. Gailly talked not only about international

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 286–287; Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, p. 314.

43. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 April 1949.

44. Misgeld, *Den fackliga europavägen*, pp. 16–17.

45. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 April 1949.

socialization of the Ruhr, but also of nationalization of the means of production as a basic socialist principle. What was the main difference between international socialization and nationalization of the Ruhr? On that point, it is obvious that the trade unionists in the Central Committee were talking at cross purposes.⁴⁶

“THE RUHR REMAINS OUR NIGHTMARE”

Because of the internal conflict in the IMF, it was important for the ITURC to meet again soon, if possible, to remove the question marks and achieve new consensus. Arthur Gailly, who was also President of the ITURC, informed his colleagues in the mining sector that the discussions during the IMF meeting in Washington, DC, had been “rather lively”, because of the complete disagreement on the Luxembourg resolution.⁴⁷ As pointed out here, it was chiefly the Germans who were uninterested in any “international socialization”.

Nevertheless, it proved difficult to reconvene the Luxembourg meeting. The Germans cried off, first when a new meeting was suggested in July and then again in August 1949. When the ITURC did manage to meet in Brussels in September 1949 it was without German representation, and a number of participants were evidently annoyed. They dismissed the Germans’ excuse, that they had had difficulties obtaining passports, as nothing but subterfuge. “The Ruhr remains our nightmare”, Gailly complained in his opening address, “today, as in the days gone by”.⁴⁸

At the same time, the former war allies France, Britain, the US, and the Benelux countries had founded the International Authority of the Ruhr (IAR) to control the area’s coal and steel production and its international trade.⁴⁹ Antonie Krier of Luxembourg, Secretary of the ITURC, informed the meeting that, unfortunately, the IAR had started its business “without any participation from workers”. Gailly added to the complaints by stating that it had been difficult to obtain any information at all about the IAR from politicians, who, from Gailly’s point of view, appeared contemptuous of the trade-union movement, which, in turn, made the German absence from the ITURC and the difficulty of formulating a common trade-union policy on the Ruhr even more problematic.⁵⁰

46. The ambiguous meaning in the late 1940s of the concepts “socialization” and “nationalization” are untangled by James C. Van Hook, *Rebuilding Germany: The Creation of the Social Market Economy, 1945–1957* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 54.

47. ITURC, “Minutes of the Meeting and Resolutions adopted”, 15–16 September 1949, introduction, IMF Archive, vol. 1210.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe*, p. 161.

50. ITURC, “Minutes of the Meeting and Resolutions adopted”, 15–16 September 1949, § 1, IMF Archive, vol. 1210.

Krier continued the critique against the absent German trade unionists by telling those of his colleagues who were present in Brussels that the Germans had neglected to send him the information he had requested on the development of the Ruhr question in German politics and public debate – Krier had asked for press clippings from German newspapers about the Luxembourg resolution. After the ITURC meeting in Luxembourg, authorities in the US, Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium had requested copies of the resolution and the ITURC had sent the resolution to the IAR. The Germans and the IAR remained silent. For his part, the French trade unionist Leon Chevalme was convinced that the Germans' attitude would increase anti-German sentiment in France, thereby hampering all future cooperation.⁵¹ The trade unionists gathered in Brussels in the autumn of 1949 felt therefore that German trade unionists' willingness to cooperate had decreased not only significantly, but actually quite suddenly too, considering that the IMF had only recently welcomed them back into the international trade-union community.

The longer the meeting in Brussels went on, the angrier Gailly seemed to become with his absent German comrades. He certainly became increasingly outspoken as the hours ticked by, and memories of the recent world wars surfaced. To the now thoroughly upset Gailly, the Germans had been responsible for both wars, yet even trade unionists acted "towards the Allies as if they had won the war". According to Gailly, the Germans had forfeited their right to control the Ruhr, and he stressed that the whole area must be internationalized. The Germans' demand that they be treated as equals with the Allies even made him fear that Europe was slipping "towards a third war which would be their chance for a fine revenge". If the German comrades were not interested in cooperation, and did not understand their responsibility, Gailly was ready for the international trade-union struggle to go ahead without them and "if necessary, against them".⁵²

Krier then tried to calm the meeting by stressing circumstances that could at least partly explain the Germans' approach. After the Luxembourg meeting, the German trade unions had won significant representation on the Iron and Steel Industry Management Committee, which was the new administrative committee for the Ruhr. That committee was the result of Allied Law no. 75, which stipulated in November 1948 that ultimate ownership would be decided in the future by a democratically elected German government. The German trade unions had obtained four of the twelve seats on the committee, four of the other seats being reserved for the authorities and a further four for industry and banking interests. The committee was subordinate to the military government in occupied Germany, but, in Krier's judgement, the newly won

51. *Ibid.*, § 1 and 3.

52. *Ibid.*, § 3.

codetermination had exceeded the “wildest hopes” of the German trade unionists. Nonetheless, he also underlined that the German comrades would not have been able to win such influence without the demands expressed in the Luxembourg resolution,⁵³ with the clear implication that they should be more grateful.

Krier further speculated that the conflict might have been at least partly the result of linguistic confusion. The original resolution had been written in French, and translations of complicated concepts are always difficult. Britain’s Harry Douglass noted that the translation of the French *gestion* as “management” meant an unfortunate conceptual modification. Douglass suggested “administration” would have been a more appropriate translation and pointed out, moreover, that it was rather unclear what the resolution meant by “internationalization”. In Douglass’s interpretation, internationalization meant a wider form of nationalization, which would mean that, effectively, the international community would force Germany to dispose of the Ruhr. Douglass concluded that “international control” was the correct form of words for the resolution,⁵⁴ but the ITURC had already circulated it so changes were impossible without the embarrassing need to contact all the authorities notified of the original content. Publication of the resolution might therefore appear to have been a hasty decision, but there was little to be done about it now. Nevertheless, Gailly, as President of the ITURC, maintained at the end of the Brussels meeting that the spirit of the resolution should be defended:

Concerning the ownership of industries, a Trade Union principle exists. According to this principle, no industry in any country should any longer be in the hands of capitalists. The English have taken their industries out of the hands of the capitalists. Why shouldn’t they allow the same thing in Germany? This is the position of the Trade Union organizations of Western Europe as a matter of principle.⁵⁵

However, not all trade unionists within the IMF were as radical as Gailly; after all, nationalizing the means of production was not simply “a matter of principle”.

“THE NECESSARY RESOLUTIONS MUST BE TAKEN QUICKLY”

Two months after the Brussels meeting and Arthur Gailly’s vociferous attack on the absent Germans, Gailly was presented with another opportunity to

53. *Ibid.*, § 2. On Law no. 75, see Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe*, p. 162; Van Hook, *Rebuilding Germany*, pp. 240–241.

54. ITURC, “Minutes of the Meeting and Resolutions adopted”, 15–16 September 1949, § 3.

55. *Ibid.*

discuss the Ruhr, this time with Walter Freitag. Indeed, when the IMF Central Committee met in Zurich in November 1949 the conceptual conflicts continued and misunderstandings prevailed. The confusion was obvious when Freitag described a meeting at the US State Department, to which US officials had summoned him during his earlier stay in Washington, DC. Freitag told the Central Committee that the State Department had asked him what the IMF actually meant by “international socialisation”. Freitag had only been able to answer that he did not really understand the term himself; if the State Department wanted a better answer, it must turn to “the Belgian comrades, who are responsible for this expression”.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Freitag also told the other trade unionists that he had used the occasion at the State Department to emphasize an aspect of the Ruhr dilemma that he believed the European trade-union leaders agreed on, namely that it was,

a great difference between the old system, on the one hand, which considered it to be its task to safeguard profits and to guarantee the interest on capital investments, and our plans on the other. We only desire to distribute production more equally, in order that nobody need suffer from want, and that such grave disputes fought out on battlefields, which we have lived through twice already, should not recur again.⁵⁷

Despite the fact that economic coordination was part of the ERP, the State Department was apparently uninterested in any international socialization with real trade-union influence. If Freitag had previously had any doubts about that, he was certainly disabused of them by the time he left Washington. In general, he worried about how the ownership structure in the Ruhr was developing, and how certain aspects of the old situation appeared to be becoming re-established. According to what Freitag had recently heard, a plan had been prepared that would enable “the old proprietors” to retain fifty per cent ownership, “while the other 50 per cent is to fall into the hands of foreign capitalists”. Freitag therefore pointed out that the question of ownership was the main reason German socialists disagreed about what international socialization meant. Finally, Freitag sounded another Cold War warning by reminding his colleagues that West Germany was now a bulwark against the Soviet Union. In October 1949, five months after the Soviet Union lifted its blockade of West Berlin and about a month before the Central Committee meeting in Zurich, the communists founded the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR). If the matter of the Ruhr was to be resolved “in the capitalist sense”, Freitag cautioned, that would “offer the Russians a new, excellent piece of propaganda”.⁵⁸

56. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 November 1949, § 5.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

Clearly, the inter trade-union conflict was not over, for in Zurich it had become obvious that different visions of the future had crystallized. The trade unionists were now discussing nationalization or internationalization of the means of production in the Ruhr in relation to the possibility of improving the general conditions of workers through codetermination and collective agreements with employers. By then, it was equally obvious that the Luxembourg resolution had taken on a life of its own. The discussion was not only about what the ITURC had actually written in its resolution, but also about what different actors had read into the text. In fact, the resolution did not even mention “socialization”, referring only to “internationalization”.

From Gailly’s point of view, the matter was simple. According to him, it was merely a question of delivering the Ruhr’s production capacity “into the service of collectivity under the joint consultation of the German and foreign workers”. Unfortunately, so vague a definition could not remove all doubt, with Secretary Konrad Ilg noting sarcastically, that “Gailly has declared, that the international socialization they are aiming at is not that of the capitalists and militarists. This we can well understand, but we still do not know, what he and his friends actually mean by this expression”.⁵⁹

Ilg belonged to the group who preferred negotiation and agreement with employers to legislation and nationalization. He emphasized that the desired balance between supply and demand in the European coal and steel market, as well as the trade unions’ goal of full employment, was possible only if trade unions, employers, and state authorities all cooperated. Freitag continued that line of argument, stressing his own preference for trade-union codetermination. In addition, the transatlantic broadening of the IMF contributed to the strength of that wing. For Irving Brown, rooted in the business unionism of the AFL, it was a given that “most of us look upon the free contractual agreement between the professional and industrial unions on the one hand, and the employer firms on the other as the best way to the improvement of the economic situation of the workers”.⁶⁰

From the German trade unionists’ point of view, socialization was not the equivalent of nationalization, which, they stressed, risked over-centralization and bureaucratization. If, they warned, “a privileged clan of technocrats rules, the foundation of a new totalitarian system is laid”; the concept of nationalization had unpleasant connotations of contemporary history, in shades of both brown and dark red. German trade unionists preferred synthesis of an economy guided not solely by the search for profit, but by the needs of people “and a State which plans and directs the economic affairs but does not manage them directly”. At the heart of

59. *Ibid.*

60. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 November 1949, § 3.

the German definition of socialization, therefore, was the idea of industrial democracy.⁶¹

That Gailly was tilting at windmills was becoming increasingly obvious. The Cold War hung like a dark cloud over the discussions. Both wings tried to support their arguments by referring to the conflict between social democrats and communists, but international political development gained the less radical line of argument. Gailly emphasized that his fellow trade unionists would not be able to shake his “faith in Socialism”, although he felt simultaneously obliged to stress that actually he was not personally a revolutionary.⁶² As Gailly presented his case, he was genuinely worried that the division between the more radical workers and the top echelons of the trade-union movement, which had seemingly estranged itself from socialism, would drive those workers into the arms of the communists. In Gailly’s eyes, the communist movement’s progress in France and Italy was a case in point.

By that time, transatlantic cooperation within the IMF had developed further with the affiliation of the UAW from the CIO. The lack of consensus among European trade unionists and their resulting difficulties in writing a common Ruhr resolution – or at least one that was not completely emasculated – annoyed Walther Reuther. While the IMF did no more than talk,

the same financial powers, i.e. the cartels which helped Hitler to usurp political power are dominating the Ruhr again. But we must take up the defence against these conditions, if we do not want to live through the same catastrophic times again as those of the last world war. Furthermore, it is important that the Ruhr shall become social property and not the object of exploitation by a few money-makers.⁶³

When the US State Department had summoned Freitag, dissent among the trade unionists limited his agency, and he had been unable to use the occasion to lobby for a common IMF position. While the Central Committee twisted and turned over different concepts, the American trade unions’ ability to influence the Truman administration’s views on European integration likewise decreased. To be able to support their European comrades on the Ruhr, Reuther argued, and to exploit their channels into the corridors of power, “the necessary resolutions must be taken quickly by the unions of workers whose interests are at stake”.⁶⁴

61. “The Reorganisation of the Iron and Steel Industry of Western Germany According to the Military Government Law No 75 and Trade Unions’ Claims for its Socialisation”, attachment to IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 November 1949.

62. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 20–24 November 1949, § 3, IMF Archive, vol. 1202A.

63. *Ibid.*, § 5.

64. *Ibid.*

THE IMF AND THE SCHUMAN PLAN

Two weeks after North Korea's attack on South Korea in June 1950, the IMF Central Committee gathered in Stockholm. Just as the Czech coup and the Berlin blockade had affected earlier meetings, the war on the Korean peninsula influenced discussions in the Swedish capital. In his opening address, Konrad Ilg once more denounced the communists:

The Russian revolution was, at one time, the great hope of the working classes all over the world. We must ascertain, that the socialist workers of the democratic countries have in world policy, never been so bitterly deceived and disappointed as by bolshevism. Every democratically minded person must be filled with sorrow and resentment by the fact, that once again the lives of healthy youths must be sacrificed in fighting against bolshevist aggression, although the terrible traces of devastation of the last world-war are still visible, and whole populations are suffering through the cold war.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, two months earlier, Robert Schuman had presented his solution to the Ruhr problem. Schuman proposed a supranational integration of coal-fields and steel industries and the following political and public debate rapidly consolidated a dominant narrative stressing the peaceful intent of his plan. The belief was that integrated markets would prevent future wars between France and Germany, but Ilg was less worried about the risk of another war between those two old local belligerents than he was about the only threat to peace he saw, which came from further away – in the East.⁶⁶ Indeed, Ilg found support for his view from the other side of the Atlantic, with Irving Brown emphasizing:

[U]nless we begin to pool and unite the economic and material resources of the West in a free democratic way, it will be united for us under the iron heel of Mr. Stalin and the Russians. [...] Unless Western Europe begins to move in the direction of unity [...] there is no hope for Western Europe being able to withstand the onslaught of the communists and the Russians when they begin to move.⁶⁷

In fact, military coordination was already in place. Twelve states had signed the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949 and economic unity was expected to follow a similar course. In terms just as black and white as those of Ilg's narrative, Brown stressed that the European labour movement had only two choices: it must either show itself willing to help create and sustain democratic unity, or demonstrate that it preferred to live under the communist yoke, practically as prisoners. Although CIO unionists seldom used the same kind of war rhetoric as Brown in their anti-communist statements, Leonard Woodcock from the

65. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 10–15 July 1950, opening address, IMF Archive, vol. 1205.

66. *Ibid.*, § 5.

67. *Ibid.*

UAW similarly maintained that European integration was of global importance, because the potential power of the Eastern bloc depended on fragmentation and disagreement in the West.⁶⁸ The Cold War divide therefore became an incentive for trade-union coordination, among Western European social democrats just as much as between trade unionists on both sides of the Atlantic who defined themselves as anti-communists.

In the meantime, in France, Brown channelled both AFL and US government funds to the non-communist opposition within the CGT. According to Carew, Brown's intervention was not the precise reason behind the split within the CGT, but his efforts certainly facilitated the birth of the rival centre, Force Ouvrière, established in the Spring of 1948.⁶⁹ The split in France also meant that the IMF was able to develop its organizational structure with another anti-communist affiliate, and when, in 1950, the Central Committee discussed the Schuman Plan the most positive response came from its country of origin. In a lengthy speech, Léon Chevalme began with a dominant narrative of the plan as a peace project. He underscored that, for the first time in history, economic coordination between the French and the Germans was now possible, and it would put an end to an age-old enmity. Chevalme was hopeful of the trade unions' chances of influencing that process, stressing the possible channels of approach to the powerbrokers in Paris. According to Chevalme, Jean Monnet had declared quite openly not only that the French government would consult the trade unions, but in fact would positively demand their active participation.⁷⁰

In addition, Chevalme highlighted the Schuman Plan's social objectives of ensuring full employment and eventually raising workers' standard of living. To achieve those objectives, European production would require overall international planning and coordination. He nevertheless admitted that a significant drawback was that the European trade unions were so divided politically. That was certainly the case in France, where the communists bitterly opposed the Schuman Plan, denouncing it as a prolongation of the same American imperialism that, in their view, had been behind the Marshall Plan. Chevalme closed his speech with the words: "Today more than ever we are obliged to have strong trade unions if we want to be successful in influencing the decisions of the Governments."⁷¹

Notably, certain members of the Central Committee proved themselves ignorant of the true implications of the Schuman Plan. Walter Freitag confessed to only sketchy knowledge of it, but still speculated in rather negative terms that, "before the economy of two different countries can be combined, the question of currency must be settled". Without a currency agreement it would not be possible to compare real wages and living standards among

68. *Ibid.*

69. Carew, *American Labour's Cold War Abroad*, pp. 37, 50.

70. IMF, Proceedings of the Central Committee Meeting, 10–15 July 1950, § 5.

71. *Ibid.*

workers in France and Germany. Freitag even admitted that the Schuman Plan and the problem of the Ruhr gave him “a very uneasy feeling”. For Freitag, it was unbearable to think that the old proprietors from the 1930s should regain their old power:

The German workers know too, that Hitler would have never come to power, if the magnates of the Ruhr had not put their millions at his disposal. [...] But to tell the German workers, that the old owners of the Ruhr would get back their mines and enterprises and that the former situation would be re-established, would make the German workers feel, that they were betrayed by the Military Government and by their own trade unions, and that they must therefore try to follow another direction. This would mean, that they would then follow father Stalin.⁷²

Clearly, to avoid giving the communists any unnecessary advantage in West German politics, the democratic socialists had to act. If the fear were to be realized that the old ownership structure were restored, then, as Freitag stated, “we shall have to appeal to the workers for opposition”.⁷³

While Freitag questioned the Schuman Plan, Britain’s Lincoln Evans was utterly sceptical. He immediately opposed supranationalization, pointing out that British trade unions would never agree to negotiate British wages with a supranational European High Authority such as that suggested. Quite simply, such an arrangement would erode trade-union power. While other Central Committee delegates affirmed the potential social dimension of the plan, the British saw only a low-wage threat from the Continent. Evans enlarged upon Freitag’s remark about different conditions for workers on opposite sides of the Vosges, stressing the width of the problem if Britain were included in the integration process. Evans could not see “how the conditions of wages and working hours of German and French iron and steel workers are going to be brought up to the level of the British iron and steel workers”. Rather, there was a danger that British wages would be gradually depressed to continental levels. Evans maintained that even if they wanted to deal with the Schuman Plan out of ideological considerations, the trade unionists could not from a strictly international point of view:

Because, after all, our first loyalty is to our own members in the organisation which we represent. [...] when you come to this basic question, as to where the final authority shall lie for the purpose of determining the standard of life, we all have feelings of nationality in us. Before we are internationalists we are Americans, Britisher [sic], Germans etc.⁷⁴

More clearly, it would probably not have been possible to formulate the priority of national interests over international trade-union cooperation and

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Ibid.*

74. *Ibid.*

coordination, at least not in an arena that the trade unionists had, after all, constructed themselves to fill ideological internationalism with actual practice. Because, Evans supposed, the suggested plan would conflict with what he defined as the interest of his national organization, he could not give it his support; European integration would probably be of no value to Britain.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Geoff Eley describes the international situation in 1945 as a time of “enabling indeterminacies”.⁷⁵ Labour representatives believed that, from the ashes of war, it would be possible to build a new society based on equality and democracy. By the end of the war, faith in the possibility of international answers to general economic questions was deep.⁷⁶

On the one hand, openness to a new future characterized the discussions within the IMF. In the late 1940s, trade unionists still thought it possible to sway the process of European integration towards including a social dimension – a European economy in full employment was certainly high on the agenda. They likewise considered the future administration of the Ruhr as an open matter potentially to be influenced by trade-union argumentation. The IMF was united by the aim of great trade-union influence on production in the Ruhr, and a Western Europe where social matters generally trumped the generation of profit. Trade unionists tried to use the international organization as a platform to accomplish structural change, to the benefit of trade-union affiliates both in their own countries as well as in other countries concerned.

Nonetheless, different ideas – based on different national interests – about a reinvented Europe opposed one another. For example, trade unionists discussed international socialization of the Ruhr against a German vision of cooperative solutions within the framework of the nation state.

On the other hand, in the late 1940s, the enabling indeterminacies were less undetermined. As the Cold War developed, the slope of the playing field changed. The IMF supported “free trade unionism” in opposition to communist “state unionism”, but, in the new “atomic age”, the potential military value of the Ruhr became somewhat obsolete.⁷⁷ From the reformist IMF’s perspective, and in the new postwar security context, European integration in line with the Marshall Plan and the Schuman Plan appeared to be a potential anti-communist bulwark. Market integration in Western Europe seemed to be part of a necessary defence against the threat from the East. In the longer run, it was believed, such integration could secure peace.

75. Geoff Eley, “Europe after 1945”, *History Workshop Journal*, 65:1 (2008), pp. 195–212, 207.

76. Silverman, *Imagining Internationalism*, pp. 1–5; Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, pp. 79–89.

77. Cf. Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe*, pp. 300, 348–349, 360, 372.

Although the international political context hindered a pan-European trade-union movement, as illustrated by the demise of the WFTU, the Cold War strengthened the perceived need to unite the democratic socialist movement in the West. The spectre of communism, and the greater strength of the Cold War rhetoric, promoted a geographically and ideologically more limited form of international cooperation. Western trade-union cooperation extended its reach no further than the Iron Curtain in the East, and created a sharp dividing line against communist organizations in France and Italy. Against the communist threat, the social democrats – or at least the anti-communists – gathered their defences by trying to build stronger unity within what they considered their own camp.

That the IMF allowed the metalworkers' unions from the West German sectors to rejoin the organization in 1948 was part of that ambition, while the communist threat trumped perceptions that de-Nazification had stalled. After the CGT split, the IMF could likewise coordinate its policies with a reformist trade-union organization in France. By extension, the trade-union truce between former Allies and Germans was a precondition for IMF support of a Western European market integration that included the Ruhr. That integration-friendly policy was likewise endorsed by the new, strong, and anti-communist North American affiliates of the IMF, which generally supported the US drive for more integrated European markets.

When politicians presented first the Marshall Plan and then the Schuman Plan, it became clear to the IMF representatives that they had to consider two different forms of narrative circulating in the current context. Firstly, they must study the actual content of each plan and contemplate the ensuing public debates on the plans, presented by politicians many of whom stood politically somewhere to the right of the labour leaders. The trade unionists created counternarratives emphasizing the goal of a socially more equal Western Europe in full employment, with trade unions holding power in all production-related matters. Just as the Cold War stimulated international cooperation among reformist trade unionists, the European integration project too insisted on international coordination of and response from the labour movement.

Secondly, the IMF was then obliged to respond to communist criticism directed at all the plans of European integration. It required a delicate balancing act. While the reformist trade unionists had to act against the communists' "capitalist-conspiracy narrative", they dared not construct a counternarrative that the rank and file might consider too employer-friendly. Part of the IMF's balancing act was the need to stress the importance of preventing those capitalists who, according to the labour leaders of the late 1940s, had paved Hitler's way to dictatorship from regaining their former power in the Ruhr.

Nevertheless, it was not easy for the IMF to unite around a general European-integration policy, or even a specific policy for the Ruhr. The interests trade unionists expressed at the international level were often connected

with overall economic and political circumstances in different nation states, and certain trade unionists had in mind national security concerns too.

For example, Frenchman Chevalme seemed to be considering France's structural lack of coal when he argued in favour of European integration; representatives of the Benelux countries supported market integration with reference to their fear that trade and industry in their countries might be destroyed if an independent West Germany regained a free hand to exploit the great potential of the Ruhr. Freitag opposed supranationalization just when the autonomy of West Germany was far from clear; Evans was equally sceptical but mostly because wages on the continent were lower than those in Britain. While the pronouns "us" and "we" in the trade-union narratives at international level rhetorically encircled the reformist and organized metal-workers' collective as a whole, it was usual for more or less implicit national dividing lines to cut through the narrative.