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*Labor Politics in the Oil Industry: New Historical Perspectives*

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# Unattainable Paradise: American Labor's Global Activities and the Petroleum Workers during the Cold War Era

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## Trade Union Internationalism

Large international trade union organizations date back to the nineteenth century. Broadly speaking, they emerged between 1890 and 1914, defining themselves on a geographical basis(countries) and in terms of a particular profession or trade[1]. The latter (the International Trade Secretariats) were the oldest form. They were born out of the necessity to share information about working conditions, but equally important were developments such as the viaticum, which guaranteed the same rights to both foreign and local union members, especially with respect to diamond workers and other artisanal craftsmen. National unions of particular professions also wanted to cooperate internationally for another reason, i.e. to prevent wage rates from being adversely affected by international competition or production being transferred to other plants in case of strike action[2]. National federations of trade unions did not start to co-operate until almost two decades later, when the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Secretariats was established[3]. The latter was rather an exchange platform, providing mainly administrative support. It explicitly refused to take cross-border action and promote political views, as it was bowing to pressure from the powerful German trade union movement in particular. There were substantial ideological differences between the European unions and the German trade union movement attempted to smother the political debate by adopting a narrow definition of the role of the international trade union movement.

The international trade union movement disintegrated during the First World War and national unions aligned themselves with their respective governments. A group of unions from allied countries managed to hold several international congresses, hoping that key demands of the labour movement could be met after the war, such as the eight-hour working day and the development of international labour law[4]. This group was joined by the American Federation of Labor(AFL), when the US entered the war in April 1917. It became even more influential, not least because AFL chairman Samuel Gompers was on good terms with the American president Wilson and acted as if he were his representative when performing his international duties[5]. Allied unions now openly expressed their support for the Wilsonian vision of a new world order, which included the establishment of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization(ILO). The first International Labour Conference was held in Washington DC in October 1919 . Preparations for this conference gave efforts to reunite the unions a tremendous boost, which resulted in the International Federation of Trade Unions(IFTU) being founded in Amsterdam, in July 1919[6]. This organization was to play a pivotal role in the international trade union movement in subsequent decades, not least because they controlled the Workers Group which held a virtual monopoly on labour representation within ILO. IFTU had to compete with two rival organizations, a Christian one[7] and a communist one, Profintern,[8] but was not open for collaboration with any of them.

With a few exceptions, such as the International Transport Workers Federation, the International Trade Secretariats(ITS) were much less developed. Lack of adequate resources generally prevented them from finding the right professional staff . Hence, international trade unions were not building on firm foundations: they had a membership of millions, but meagre resources, although the rank-and- file members did experience a sense of belonging to an international community.

## The American Federation of Labor: the Leninist approach.

American trade unions, despite having played an important role in drafting the ILO charter at the end of the war (i. e. Gompers chaired the committee on labour legislation at the peace conference), did not join the international trade union organizations, mirroring the attitude of their government which did not join the League of Nations and opposed ILO membership. AFL resumed its international activities in 1934, after the US joined the ILO under president F.D.Roosevelt. It joined IFTU and immediately started playing a leading role in it, endorsing *American exceptionalism* and thus favouring free and independent unions within a free and democratic society. This view was implemented in the fight against fascism and Nazism in Europe[9]. Hence, outside the existing union structure, special agencies were created to back the action of underground union groups in Germany and Italy from 1934 onwards. They mounted the first 'covert operations', devoid of any financial and organizational transparency. Also, the names of George Meany and Jay Lovestone popped up for the first time, respectively as director and chief executive. During the Second World, more such operations were conducted, as the unions were working closely together with the American secret service, the Office of Strategic Services(OSS). The latter was particularly helpful in assisting Lovestone and his men to divert (relief) aid to other purposes such as support for democratic trade unions in Europe.

After the Second World War, AFL's fight against fascism and Nazism was smoothly replaced by the fight against communism. Communism was a threat to AFL core values, as it simply could not tolerate free and independent trade union movements. Consequently, AFL rejected a British proposal to establish a union international which mirrored the war alliance and would include the Soviet trade unions, i.e. the World Federation of Trade Unions(WFTU)[10], which was to split the international trade union movement at the end of the Second World War. During the final stages of the war, AFL launched a major campaign against WFTU and the Soviet trade unions, pursuing a policy which was widely at variance with official American foreign policy and could be regarded as the start of what would become the Cold War[11]. And as AFL deeds always matched its words, it went looking for the means to continue with its wartime policy, by cooperating with the CIA, the follow-up organization of OSS. The Free Trade Union Committee(FTUC) was used as a tool to intervene directly wherever 'free' reformist unions were pressured by the communist ones. This strategy was first put to the test in France and Italy[12], but as the decolonization process gathered pace in the 1950s and 1960s and new and often shaky regimes came to power, AFL intervened globally and more actively to prevent the latter 'from falling prey to international communism'[13]. As Federico Romero observed they looked at trade unionism as one front of a fundamentally political and strategic warfare in a 'genuinely Leninist matter'[14]

AFL views at that time were similar to those of president Truman. In his Four Point Program(January, 1949), Truman outlined US development policy, which was 'essentially perceived as a transfer of Western ideology towards non-communist Least Developed Countries'[15]. It was further developed by the State Department in the early 1950s. The promotion of a system of advanced industrial relations figured prominently in it, as did the trade union movement, provided it was solid, committed and convinced that it could benefit from such a system. Equally important was the pivotal role of the Labour Department in creating and consolidating a positive social climate. The latter was an essential prerequisite for economic development and prosperity, which, in turn, was the best guarantee against communist-oriented revolutionary movements. The US government started implementing this policy immediately after the war, through aid programmes and funding schemes. However, it did realize that conditions on the ground often required non-state actors to be involved. Direct aid was often a politically sensitive issue, so it was deemed appropriate for local partners to be monitored by organizations which shared the American view on development policy. With respect to the labour movement, these organizations were the International Confederation of Trade Unions(ICFTU), which split from WFTU in 1949, the AFL-CIO, home to the FTUC, and the ILO, under American leadership (David Morse[16]) since 1948. Hence, the unions became even more entangled with US government.  Modeled on the 'Labor desk' example within OSS, several departments within the US Administration set up liaison bureaus which dealt with labour policy issues  and were staffed by AFL-CIO confidants, such as  the Labor Department and subsequent Foreign Assistance Agencies[17], which were responsible for development aid. In 1961, Arthur Goldberg, secretary of Labor and former OSS labor desk boss, appointed an assistant for international Labor Affairs[18]. And Secretary of State Dean Rusk went even one step further by appointing AFL's George Delaney[19] as 'special advisor to the secretary of state , with purview over all international labor activities channeled through State, Labor or Aid'[20], in 1963.  US global action in the field of labour was now directly monitored by a confidant of Jay Lovestone and a close collaborator of George Meany. A situation that was maintained until the mid-1970's.

## An American International Trade Union Secretariat(ITS): ‘Evangelist of oil unionism’[21]

In the early 1950s the Oil , Chemical and Atomic Workers International[22] Union(OWIU)[23] from Denver (Colorado) wanted the ICFTU to examine whether there was a need for an International Trade Secretariat(ITS) for the oil industry. This initiative has to be understood in the context of the above-mentioned US global action in the field of labour. Representatives of the oil unions saw each other at meetings of the ILO Petrol Committee, in Geneva(1950) and Scheveningen(1952). In 1950, IFCTU decided to conduct a survey about the needs of oil trade unions. Results of this survey were discussed at a new conference of the oil unions, in 1952. They got a mixed reception, as British representatives, among others, worried about the financial consequences of yet another ITS, but American and French representatives were in favour, because “the World Federation of Trade Unions has already a section for the petroleum industry”[24]. Also, oil unions were aware of the global nature of the oil industry. And particularly Western unions did not want wage rates to be adjusted downwards. It was important to the IFPW founding fathers that their membership included all workers, ranging from the oilfield workers to the refinery and delivery workers, because all of them were employed by the same multinational companies and “ an international organization must speak with the international industry”[25]. Admittedly, a number of ITS did not function properly. And many unions were profoundly dissatisfied with this, but the Americans argued that those ITS were almost exclusively concerned with European issues, a long-standing complaint within the international trade union movement.

Preparatory work on establishing a new ITS was done in Denver by Loyd Haskins, an American who was appointed as temporary executive secretary. He was assisted by André

Miffre from Force Ouvrière (France). A sufficient number of unions eventually agreed on convening a founding congress,  in Paris, in April 1954.  It was attended by delegates from 14 countries, all representing unions from the oil industry. Representatives from the USA, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia were elected to the Executive Committee[26]. 'Jack' O.A. Knight, the OWIU chairman, was elected chairman, while Loyd Haskins was appointed as general secretary on a permanent basis. From the start it was clear that the Americans would have to bear the brunt of the costs, for many unions from South America, the Middle East and Asia, which were truly interested in such an ITS, could not even pay the travel expenses for their delegates[27]. The statutes laid down a membership fee of 2 dollar cent per month per member, but organizations could negotiate a lower membership fee, as was said in the accompanying note[28].

To establish a new ITS could not be taken for granted , given that the existing International Trade Secretariats covered almost all industrial workers. It was clear from the outset that it could become embroiled in jurisdictional disputes with them, particularly the ones which were representing the transport and chemical workers. No wonder that the IFPW founding fathers clearly identified the unions which were to be represented by it. e. 'free trade unions of all countries/…/ engaged in the production, pipeline transportation, refining, petro-chemical operations and marketing of petroleum and natural gas and the related operations of allied groups'[29]. Nevertheless, this new initiative was perceived as a threat by the ITS of the chemical workers, as the ILO did not fail to notice[30]. And it  did become a real threat in 1963 , when IFPW decided to start representing unions from the chemical industry too, making its intentions absolutely clear by changing its name to the International Federation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers(IFPCW)[31].

In short, potential jurisdictional disputes with existing ITS's and an obvious lack of finance put a huge burden on IFPCW, given that it envisaged membership for poorly organized and often newly-founded unions from the South, while major organizations from the West, such as the British TUC[32], did not want to commit themselves.

### *Mission and modus operandi*

IFPCW was financed by the American trade union movement. It exercised full control over the organization and defined its mission and modus operandi. IFPCW's key objective was 'to share American labor practices and political economy with developing countries' petroleum and chemical unions in the midst of decolonization to empower its affiliates and to battle communist presence among workers in the Third World.'[33] The American model had to be copied, and union leaders from developing nations had to become familiar with it and learn to appreciate it through training, travel and scholarships. IFPCW views were in line with US political objectives in its global fight for hegemony during the Cold War, i.e. the establishment of solid industrial relations. They were close to American exceptionalist views and the mission that the American trade union movement pursued, i.e. to act as 'vital distributors of American principles in a bid to shape the world's social and cultural orders'[34].

In addition to this political issue, there was also an important union issue. US petrol industry paid high wages. The latter were now at risk, as in an economy that was increasingly global American wage rates could be adversely affected by low wages elsewhere. Oil workers in the developing countries earned just a fraction of the income of their American colleagues. Also, this could potentially jeopardize American exports and, ultimately, American economic growth[35]. In other words, by expressing support for these workers, American unions also wanted to meet a long-term objective of the international labour movement, i.e. to maintain their high wage rates[36]. The argument was probably also valid in the case of many other industries, but the important thing was that even in developing countries, in which the economy was often still predominantly rural, the oil industry paid the highest wages, relatively speaking. And as IFPCW chairman Jack Knight believed that 'high-level wages' were a step on the road to a 'high- level economy' , the oil industry in developing countries could be one of the main driving forces for economic growth and, consequently, for developing 'American style' welfare states.

IFPCW thus operated within a framework that was clear and acceptable to the international free trade union movement. ILO too welcomed IFPCW, because it represented a reliable negotiating partner which could participate in the ILO Petroleum Industrial Committee meetings.

### *Institutional issues*

Not until several years later did IFPCW become a fully-fledged organization. It established a global network between 1954 and 1959, with its headquarters in Denver and regional offices in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. And it saw its membership numbers soar. According to a report presented to the third world congress(Amsterdam, 1960) by general secretary Haskins, 34 organizations had joined IFPCW, representing 500.000 members, from 24 countries. By 1966, when the fifth world congress was held in Caracas, IFPCW had again increased its membership, which now totaled almost one million, with 153 organizations, from 78 countries. By 1972, the membership was about 1,2 million.

IFPCW tools included the monthly magazine 'Petro' and the weekly newsletters 'Petrogram' and the 'Union Builder'. Especially Petro, which was published in 5 different languages[37] and distributed in 70 countries, propagated the American way of life. In addition, trade union delegations were invited to Denver for training purposes, and were touring the USA, afterwards. Unlike many other ITS's, IFPCW was much more present on the ground. It provided advice and assistance during strikes, arranged visits to Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, and held seminars for local union officials in Beirut, Kampala and Greece. Wherever IFPCW was present, union staff were being trained in order to 'assume positions of responsibility in their communities'[38]. Annually, the average number of trainees was between 500 and 700 in the 1960s. Most of them came from South America, as the IFPCW focus was unmistakably on that region.

IFPCW was a fairly unique organization within the international trade union movement for other reasons too. Its staff members showed considerable diversity, despite the fact that IFPCW was being led by Americans, and it had an extensive network of local staff and offices. Thus, it tried to tailor its approach to the needs of every region, though strictly following American rules and instructions. Unlike most other ITS's , which concentrated their efforts on the well-known Western trade unions, IFPCW focused almost exclusively on the emerging economies in the South. Also in this respect the latter was quite unique. The British labour attaché in Beirut, R.L. Morris , a key witness in this case, said that IFPCW was 'outward looking, making a real effort to make an impact in the developing areas', contrary to another ITS, which he labeled as 'a European club'[39].

An overview of the IFPCW program of the second half of 1963 reveals the scale of its activities[40]. Leaving aside the costs of its headquarter in Denver, IFPCW expenditures on the ground totaled 272,667 dollars on a yearly basis. In Latin America, IFPCW operated in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and the Caribbean. Regional offices had been established in Bogota, Buenos Aires and the Caribbean. IFPCW cooperated with ORIT and AIFLD to counter WFTU influence in the oil industry in the region, as the latter was considered a‘ prime target’ by WFTU, according to Haskins. In the Near East, IFPCW operated in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan and Aden, but its main operating base was Lebanon, where it maintained close contact with George Sacre, of the Lebanese union of petrol workers. In addition, IFPCW also had a presence in Asian countries such as Japan, Indonesia, India, Ceylon, Burma, the Philippines and Singapore, where its regional office was based. In Africa, IFPCW operated in Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Congo and Congo Brazzaville, Kenya and Southern Rhodesia. Loyd Haskins, Franz Loriaux and Robert Goss were responsible for maintaining regular contact with local organizations. They travelled around the world, providing support and advice on conflict management and collective bargaining.

The annual budget also reflected the fact that the focus was on Latin America. 45% of the resources were being allocated to Latin American projects, while 30% to African ones and only a meager 10% to projects in the Near East. A relatively large amount of these resources were spent on organizing local conferences, and seminars and training courses. Part of the latter took place in Texas. The amount of direct subsidy given to local organizations was rather small. It helped to cover the costs of printing materials, office supplies and other practical items, such as the purchase of a car for the Nigerian Oil Chemical and Allied Workers’ Union. But as these organizations operated in a context in which nearly everything was lacking, they were eager for the American money. They fought for it, and sometimes this was taken literally.

IFPCW thus was the most active ITS, especially in the South. Other less well –resourced ITS’s were particularly annoyed about the way in which an American ITS, funded by the American government, handed out money. They felt IFPCW was ‘competing unfairly’ and were deeply dissatisfied. The potential ‘jurisdictional dispute” with the ITS of the Chemical Industry (ICF), which had arisen at the establishment of IFPCW, escalated when Charles Levinson was appointed as the new general secretary, in 1966. He fiercely opposed IFPCW claims to represent the chemical workers. And he undermined the IFPCW position in the international trade union movement by referring to the support the CIA was allegedly providing to IFPCW foreign programmes. IFPCW was put in a difficult position in a number of countries, as it now came to be identified with ‘American imperialism’. It was significant that two Syrian participants prematurely left a training seminar in Beirut and held a press conference at which they accused IFPCW of ‘imperialism’, because of its links with the American authorities and multinational companies[41].

In 1967, IFPCW suffered a new blow to its reputation, as it had clearly made an attempt to influence the result of the internal union elections in Brazil and faced allegations of bribery. The event was widely covered by the media, adding to already existing tensions. Both the Brazilian parliament and the Brazilian minister of labour, ‘who has well-known European sympathies and a fear of American dominance’, were forced to set up a commission to investigate the allegations[42]. The accusation later turned out to be false, but the prevailing image of American union imperialism could not be countered. IFPCW’s credibility had been damaged, its ability to take action was obviously affected, not only on the ground but surely also within the international trade union movement. Atypical in many respects, IFPCW was now becoming increasingly isolated within ICFTU.

In 1969, AFL-CIO disaffiliated from ICFTU and this was not very helpful too. IFPCW was now more purely American than ever before, and member organizations felt increasingly uneasy about its financial links. Several small unions from The Netherlands, Switzerland and France[43] already had resigned their membership, in 1967. Global IFPCW policies were not really affected by it, but it showed that European unions were increasingly alarmed at developments within IFPCW. Awkward questions were increasingly being raised. Who was in charge? Had IFPCW become a mere puppet manipulated by the CIA? Questions which could deal a lethal blow to IFPCW. A merger with ICF seemed to be a possible way out, but relations with Charles Levinson were at an all-time low, as CIA money was obviously intended to be used for training Latin American chemical union officials. In 1975 a failed merger attempt with the ICF provoked the exit of OCAW from the IFPCW[44]. As a result IFPCW could no longer receive funding from USAID sources[45] which in only a few months resulted in the winding up of the organization.

## IFPCW/ICFTU development assistance: a sensible option?

Does foreign assistance make sense in countries where trade unions are under pressure and have difficulty in consolidating their position? And if it does, how does one operate in such countries? National and international trade unions have been facing such questions regularly in their history. And large national federations have seldom revised their views on the issue, despite different contexts. For example, the British TUC, when facing Italian fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, believed that self-financing was the only possibility worth considering in trying to create a strong trade union movement. Expressing solidarity with the victims of dictatorships was, at best, what one could do. American unions, on the contrary, strongly believed in external financing for German and Italian underground groups and unions in exile during the Second World War[46]. The British took a purely trade union perspective, i.e. to build strong trade unions, while the Americans, then as now, pursued a political objective, i.e. to build unions as pillars of democratic regimes and as a counterbalance to political extremism.

Hence, ICFTU too was seen by them as primarily a political project, when it came into existence in 1949 following the rift between reformist and communist organizations within WFTU. And when AFL merged with CIO – an enfeebled organization - in 1955 and AFL-CIO was established, the latter implemented AFL foreign policy. Besides, CIO had never actively pursued foreign policy goals during its short-lived existence. Only OWIU[47] had done so, being the union which had launched the initiative to establish IFPCW and whose activities were initially viewed with an amount of suspicion by the AFL leadership[48].

AFL preferred an independent bilateral approach and established direct links with friendly organizations throughout the world. Others were not supposed to meddle in AFL affairs. Nevertheless, at particular moments in its history AFL did adopt a multilateral approach. Basically, AFL was opportunistic in handling international issues. Usually, the end justified the means.

It took several years for the wounds Inflicted at the end of the war to heal, but after 1955 AFL–CIO played a prominent role within ICFTU. The latter was used as one of the tools to implement its foreign policy, i.e. one that was giving AF-CIO more financial leverage. Adopting a (semi-)multilateral approach was therefore in its own interests. Conversely, multilateralism at least provided other national federations, such as the British TUC, with an opportunity to establish a framework which imposed constraints on increasingly global US activities and which was accepted by the Americans. The British in particular felt particularly uneasy about American activities in regions which (formerly) belonged to the British empire. For strategic reasons president Meany in 1960 accepted to punt an end to the independent international activities of AFL-CIO[49], hence, for almost a decade, ICFTU was to play a pivotal international role, through the International Solidarity Fund(ISF). By international trade union standards, ISF was a powerful tool, because it could mobilize substantial resources and did not fail to secure the support of AFL-CIO, after Omer Becu had been appointed as new ICFTU general secretary in 1960. Becu initially enjoyed the confidence of the Americans. He had been actively cooperating with the labor desk of the American intelligence service OSS during the war. Consequently, he was familiar with programmes which included direct and indirect financing of unions by secret services. And those who had monitored those programmes, such as Arthur Goldberg, George Meany, David Dubinsky and Jay Lovestone, were personally known to him. But for Jay Lovestone and Irving Brown, ICFTU and certainly the British TUC where too soft on communism and they did not want to give up their own operations, 'Yes, keep the shingle, the shadow - ICFTU - but don't give up the substance, an independent American trade union policy and operation relative not only to our American government but to all others governments plus the European unions.'[50]

It did not take long before IFPCW knew of the existence of ISF and tried to finance an important part of its projects through this channel. From 1960 onwards, it successfully applied for funding to the ICFTU. Initially, it received nearly 60, 000[51] dollars in grant money from the ISF, while its total expenditures amounted to approximately 120, 000 dollars. However, from 1963 onwards, questions were increasingly being raised within ICFTU about the scale of IFPCW operations and about the IFPCW presence in countries which had hardly any oil or capacity to refine oil. Expenditures for IFPCW development assistance grew massively and doubled more or less, from 1962 to 1963. ISF board members thus became increasingly cautious about spending so much money on IFPCW projects, as it could prompt other ITS's to ask for a similar amount of funding. Which they actually did.

Questions were also raised about the efficiency of this form of development aid. Especially, the British TUC rejected an 'external' approach and pointed to the potentially corrupting effects of financing unions which could not survive by themselves[52]. The Americans, however, continued to believe in a top-down approach, despite the fact that there was evidence on the ground to suggest otherwise . Even IFPCW had to admit that 'in many of these countries the leaders do not really represent a trade union, but have set themselves up as the leaders with the followers still to be developed.'[53] The main lesson to be learned from this was that IFPCW had to provide more training courses for staff people. Haskins said in his report: 'The people in leadership need training from the ground up and they know little or nothing of the operations of a union or union administration in any form. It has been necessary that small subsidies be paid to these unions in order that they can keep body and soul together and have some semblance of a trade union.'[54] This is also what IFPCW figures suggest: limited material assistance, in combination with training and consultancy, provided by regional representatives, based in regional offices.

These events need to be set in the context of growing American dissatisfaction about the way in which ISF and the ICFTU leadership operated. Meany and his supporters were annoyed about the too 'soft' attitude international organizations took towards communism. ICFTU expansion came to an end in 1964, when the British TUC and the American AFL-CIO jointly opposed a strong ISF, although for different reasons. The Americans argued they had yet to see substantial results from multilateralism in the fight to contain communism in

Africa. They resolutely opted  for establishing bilateral relations again. Probably, this decision was not unrelated to the generous funding that was provided by the American government, through the Alliance for Progress Programme. The latter poured millions into development policy in Latin America. By comparison, ISF means were utterly insignificant. No labour movement was capable of mobilizing such an amount of resources.

The strained relationship between AFL-CIO and ICFTU leaders was further escalating after 1965. Eventually, the Americans left ICFTU in 1969. The consequences of this decision for the International Solidarity Fund and IFPCW were considerable. To be an ‘American ITS’ ceased to be an asset. Moreover, in the mid-sixties it was revealed that American unions had been massively funded by the CIA to  mount their foreign operations. It caused quite a scandal in the USA, but also within ICFTU, as the latter too had been funded – to a limited extent – by one of the cover-up agencies of the CIA. Hence, American development programs were increasingly viewed with suspicion. But, for the time being, the ICFTU leadership decided not to produce a  political response, but a formal one. As IFPCW and ISF were still questioning each other’s competencies, it put new requests for ISF funding on hold, from 1966 onwards. This represented a serious setback for IFPCW, prompting the latter to reconsider its policy on the ground, though not preventing it from further establishing its global network.

IFPCW  was now more financially dependent on AFL-CIO than ever before, while the latter largely depended on public funds itself. Moreover, transparent management of these funds was severely hampered by the fact that the Americans fiercely defended the concept of ‘Free Trade Unions’, rejecting any government intervention. That is why they became entangled in  web of cover-agencies and fake foundations.

Dependency of American public funds and ‘territorial’ rivalry with existing ITS proved a lethal cocktail to IFPCW, in 1975. However the exact circumstances for the sudden closing of their activities remain unclear[55].

Nevertheless, we need to ask ourselves whether any results had been achieved in those twenty years and how IFPCW activities had been perceived on the ground. Looking at these issues from a broader perspective: how was the IFPCW model, based on modernization theories which assume that labour can play a crucial role in a gradual development process, put into practice? How was it received in the South, in different economic, social, cultural and religious contexts? And did people in these regions identify with the bipolar image of the world during the Cold War? Today we know, from previous research on American trade union intervention in Latin America, that the agency of local partners played a crucial role in modifying models that were imported from abroad and in playing one model off against another for their own benefit. Hence, Federico Romero was quite right to ask ‘whether the Cold War paradigm is at all useful as an analytical tool’[56]. We will try to explore this issue by presenting the case of the oil workers union during the strikes in Aden, in 1956 and 1960.

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## A question of agency? Aden Petroleum Workers,1955-1963

Aden was a small British colony until 1968. It managed to grab the news headlines regularly for almost a decade in the early 60’s, because of its strategic position and its unstable political situation. Its economy was rural, until a number of western companies established themselves at the port of Aden, following the nationalization of BP in Iran, in 1951. Aside from shipping through that port, the main industrial activity was oil refining. Both British Petroleum and Shell had premises in Aden and hired local workers, expats as well as migrant workers from Pakistan and India. Major international powers, emerging Arab nations(Egypt), international organizations and trade unions (communist and free) focused their attention on Aden for geopolitical and economic reasons. Class, nationalism, ethnicity and religion produced an explosive cocktail, whose potential impact threatened to go far beyond little Aden.

Aden and the entire Arab world was for IFPCW providing a unique opportunity. Unlike in Asia and South America, where IFPCW was accepted by the major oil concerns and could therefore fully support the ‘democratic’ trade union movement, ‘the operating companies in the area jealously safeguarded their traditional isolation, and the local governments feared trade union development of any sort.'[57] There was no well-established tradition of collective bargaining and AFPCW tried to negotiate agreements with the headquarters of the oil concerns as well as with the local management in order to install some western form of industrial relations. The local unions were, of course, fully ignorant about the latter. And again, that was why IFPCW attached supreme importance to training.

British rule in Aden consisted of a governor presiding over a limited number of ministers, and a strong police force. The latter included a highly active intelligence service, which closely monitored even the smallest of organizations and used repressive tactics whenever necessary. From the early 1950s onwards, Aden saw the development of a burgeoning trade union movement, which adhered to ICFTU. Most of the unions were established after 1952, while action was taken from the mid-fifties onwards. It often resulted in protracted conflicts, such as the one which involved the BP oil refinery and the BP Refinery Employees Union, led by Abdullah Ali Ubaid. The latter was affiliated with the Aden TUC, which initially included 25 trade unions and had an estimated membership of about 25, 000.

The trade union took strong action for the first time in March 1956. It went on for more than a month and started on March 3 when three employees of a company run by the British were fired. Within a couple of days, this prompted other workers to go on strike, in Aden port and the BP and Shell oil refineries. The situation worsened from March 19 onwards as serious riots broke out and the police used live ammunition against protesters. Several of them were injured and one was shot dead. The strike which appeared to be an industrial conflict at first, gradually developed into a wider conflict with political and religious undertones, also due to police intervention. The Egyptian leader Nasser criticized the British and urged the Yemenites to resist the latter. It also became clear that close links had been established between a number of union leaders and the United National Front, a new nationalist political movement. The strike generated mixed demands; some of them were purely industrial (higher wages, more decent accommodation, compensation for loss of Income during the strike); some of them were nationalist(against British rule, no prospect of independence in the governor's speech, restrictions on immigration from Italy and Pakistan); and others were religious( adoption of the Muslim weekend, flexible working hours during Ramadan, celebration of Islamic holidays). Although some trade union demands were fully met( pay rises up to 20 per cent), the situation in the colony continued to be tense. The authorities tried to get it under control by introducing an industrial relations policy aimed at providing social harmony, which was seen by the governor as ' vital to the colony's well-being'.[58] Help from the British TUC was therefore also requested, as the latter could train and advise Aden trade union leaders. The ICFTU, on the other hand, was expected to shield the Aden TUC from WFTU influences. According to the governor's report to the British government[59], wages for the lowest categories of workers were too low and this is what had triggered strike action. The governor also emphasized that newly-built accommodation was the main reason why wages of these workers could no longer cover basic needs. Workers had moved to more decent houses, with modern amenities like water and electricity, but they could not pay their higher rent. Likewise, better schools were now available to them, but school fees were raised, etc.

A second big wave of strikes was sweeping Aden in November 1959. It came to an end in March 1960. Protests were directly aimed at the BP oil refinery. Trade union leader Ubaid urged union members to prepare for a protracted conflict, as 'the company was exploiting their country'. Again, demands were mixed (economic, political, religious), i.e no discrimination of local workers concerning access to health care, the supply of free water and electricity, and recognition by BP of local religious holidays. Ubaid was not really appealing to working-class interests when talking about these issues; it was all about the discriminating treatment of native workers: ’British employees paid nothing for electricity and each one gets 10,000 gallons of free water for their gardens and for washing their dogs, but the company refused to supply free water and electricity to its other employees’.[60] This second wave of strikes attracted even more international attention than the previous one. IFPCW sent an adviser to Aden, i.e. Franz Loriaux, who was supervising projects in the Middle East and Asia. Loriaux mediated between the oil union and the BP management. He realized that BP really wanted to reach a compromise and according to him working conditions in the refinery were reasonable, even to American standards. The only problem was, a collective agreement was lacking. The BP management was ready to accept an independent mediator and willing to start talks about a collective agreement once the strike had ended. However, BP trade union officials, supported by ATUC, rejected such proposals. According to Loriaux’s report, the ATUC general leader Asnag threatened to call for a general strike, as he was ranting at BP, the British and the government. He was quoted as saying the following:’ Si les gens souffrent de la faim, laissez-les. Peut-être est-ce dont ils ont besoin pour qu’ils prennent vraiment conscience de leur situation’.[61] Loriaux realized that the BP union was facing relentless pressure from the ATUC nationalist leadership. Despite decent working conditions, strike action was inevitable, as ATUC felt that such action at BP was all too rare and through BP they wanted to hit the colonial authorities. Strike action was in line with pan-Arab nationalism. The latter made no distinction between companies and governments, economic and political demands. The chief of the British secret police came to the same conclusion in February 1962. In a report, he noted that ATUC and its leader Asnag pursued a nationalist agenda: 'It may well be their intention to damage the economy of Aden however much labour itself may suffer in consequence'.[62]

The fact that this strike, as the previous one, took place during Ramadan was equally noteworthy. It had made Loriaux pretty desperate and he suggested that the next envoy to Aden would get an assistant, because ' les Arabes sont debout toute la nuit et dormant pendant la journée au cours de cette période, tandis que les Brittaniques maintiennent leur horaire normale. Je finissait par travailler le jour et la nuit.'[63]

The IFPCW representative also thought he noted a 'lack of sincerity' on the part of local union leaders. He was under the impression that they were using his presence to demonstrate to the Aden authorities that they could mobilize Western support. It was particularly helpful to them that they called upon the international free trade union movement and not upon their pan-Arab network, although they felt much closer to the latter from an ideological point of view. Thus, Loriaux came to the conclusion that the Aden trade union was characterized by a kind of ideological ambivalence, as it was connected both to pan-Arab nationalism and the international free trade union movement. Loriaux did not fail to see that it held mutually contradictory beliefs.

This view carried even more weight after the 1960 strike movement had ended and the Arab Federation of Petrol Workers(AFPW) was established in Cairo, on January 19 1961. AFPW joined ICATU( International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions), under the leadership of Anwar Salma, the Egyptian IFPCW vice-president. According to the British intelligence service in Aden, the decision to establish AFPW had been a side issue at an IFPCW seminar. The thing that made AFPW statutes so noteworthy was that they were the same cocktail of class, nationalism and religion. Under the slogan 'God is the patron for success', AFPW expressed its belief in pan-Arab nationalism as ‘a strong bulwark against imperialism, exploitation, reaction, deviation and bias’. And the key aim was: ‘To unite the ranks of Arab Petroleum workers, support the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions by all possible means, spread the spirit of Arab nationalism among the ranks of workers, keep informed of events in the Arab world and support national liberation movements in order to achieve freedom, independence and social welfare in all parts of the Arab homeland.’ [64]

The trade unions in Aden suffered severe repression after the 1960 strike. Their leaders, such as Ubaid, were sentenced to many months in jail. This repression radicalized the Aden trade unions, the nationalist fervor intensified and the extreme National Liberation Front gradually managed to secure key positions for itself within the trade unions and the petrol union in particular. Ubaid, having left prison, was sidelined too and replaced by more radical nationalist figures.

The free trade union movement and IFPCW were faced with a dilemma when ICATU and AFPW were established. On the one hand, they had to keep supporting the latter in a attempt to prevent WFTU and communism from having control of the entire Arab region. On the other hand, it was clear that unconditional loyalty to the international free trade union movement may not be expected from them. Loriaux’s mission had provided proof of this. The Aden trade unions resolutely refused to take sides. On the contrary, they communicate openly with ICFTU and IFPCW about their communist contacts. They accepted invitations from the German Democratic Republic and Yugoslavia, and were present at WFTU solidarity conferences in 1964 and 1968, and at a conference of Mediterranean and Black Sea Oil Workers in Cairo, in 1968. At the same time, they became involved in IFPCW initiatives and responded positively and regularly to IFPCW sponsored invitations for representatives to come to London, Brussels and Geneva. On these occasions, they asked for and received political, financial and material support, for example to furnish their new premises in Aden.

Thus, ATUC views were in line with pan-Arab nationalism. The latter also drew support from the labour movement and the oil workers in the Middle East. It was a development which was plain to see and easy to understand by contemporaries, both in the labour movement and in government. Less attention was, however, given to the religious aspect. Islam was not initially perceived as a potential revolutionary movement, despite the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the person of Anwar Salama and others[65]. The Aden trade union movement held both nationalist and Islamic views and beliefs. And there was a link between both elements, as was also shown in the discourse of trade union leaders.

Although more research is necessary, the history of labour internationalism in the Petroleum sector during the cold war seem to confirm the ‘site-specific’ character of labor ideology, strategies and policies and questions the usefulness of the cold war paradigm as analytical tool[66].

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[1] Michel Dreyfus, ‘The Emergence of an International Trade Union Organization (1902-1919), in: A. Carew, Michel Dreyfus, Geert Van Goethem, Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *The International Confederation of Trade Unions*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000, pp. 27-71

[2] Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays Toward a Global Labor History*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp.259-283.

[3] Suzan Milner, *The Dilemnas of Internationalism, French Syndicalism and the International Labour Movement, 1900-1914*, Berg: Oxford, 1990

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[4] Reiner Tosstorff, 'The International Trade-Union Movement and the Founding of the International Labour Organization', in: *International Review of Social History*, 50 (2005), pp. 399-433.

[5] Elizabeth McKillen, *Making the World Safe for Workers. Labor, the Left, and Wilsonian Internationalism*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013

[6] Geert Van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International: The World of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913-1945*, Ashgate: Alderschot, 2006.

[7] Patrick Pasture, *Histoire du syndicalisme chrétien international: la difficile recherche d'une troisième voie,* Paris : l'Harmmattan, 1999.

[8] Reiner Tosstorff, Profintern : die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920-1937, Paderborn [etc.] : Schöningh, 2004.

[9] Geert Van Goethem, "From Dollars to Deeds", in: Robert Antony Waters and Geert Van Goethem (eds.), *American Labor's Global Ambassadors. The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013., p. 12

[10] Anthony Carew, The Schism within the World Federation of Trade Unions: Government and Trade-Union Diplomacy, in: *International Review of Social History*, vol. 29(1984) no.3, p. 297-335

[11] Geert Van Goethem, 'Labor's Second Front: The Foreign Policy of the American and British Trade Union Movements during the Second World War', in: *Diplomatic History*, (34) 4, 2010, pp 663-680.

[12] Federico Romero, "Transnational Labor in the Cold War", in: Waters & Van Goethem, p. 272

[13] Robert Antony Waters and Geert Van Goethem (eds.), *American Labor's Global Ambassadors. The International History of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

[14] F. Romero, "Transnational Labor in the Cold War", in: Waters & Van Goethem, o.c., p. 271

[15] G. Leclerc, ' A brief History of International Development: Models and Foreign Aid', in: G Leclerc and Ch. A.S. Halle, *Making World Development Work: Scientific Alternatives to Neoclassical Economic Theory*, University of New Mexico Press, 2007, p. 43

[16] D. Maul, "The 'Morse Years': The ILO 1948-1970, in: Jasmien Van Daele, Magaly Rodriguez, Geert Van Goethem, Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century,* Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 365-400.

[17] The Foreign Operations Administration (FOA) was established in 1948. It was replaced by the International Cooperation Administration (ICA) in 1955, which merged with USAID in September 1961.

[18] George L.P. Weaver, the former assistant to CIO boss James Carey, who maintained frequent contact with Jay Lovestone en Irving Brown. Weaver became special assistant to David Morse(ILO) in 1969.

[19] On Delaney see: Robert Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge, 1996 , p. 482

[20] Robert Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, 1996: Cambridge University Press, p. 482

[21] IFPCW president Jack Knight in Business Week, 24 February 1960, p. 115

[22] International Unions , in the US, have a membership of both Americans and Canadians.

[23] OWIU was established by American and Canadian organizations from the oil industry, in 1918. It merged with the United Gas, Coke, and Chemical Workers in 1955, changing its name into the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union( OCAW). The latter operated both in the US and Canada.

[24] Report of the Conference of the Trade Unions organizing employees in the oil industry, 13 October 1952 ( Handwritten verbatum (IISG, ICFTU archive, nr. 1814a)

[25] ICFTU, Minutes conference employees Petroleum Industry, 13 October 1952, (IISG, ICFTU 1814a)

[26] O.A. Knight (USA), W.F. Van Tilburg (Netherlands), Luis A. Perdomo (Columbia), Loyd A. Haskins (USA), André Miffre (France), Anwar Salama (Egypt), Vilas M. Gandhi (India), Giulio Russo (Italy).

[27] Letter from Loyd Haskins, Temporary Executive Secretary International Federation of Petroleum Workers , to Jay Krane, Chief of Service Regional Activities ICFTU, Brussels, 11 March 1954 (IISG, ICFTU archive, nr. 1814a)

[28] Circular from Loyd Haskins, General Secretary IFPCW, Denver, 21 May 1954 (ILO, RL 0-3-101)

[29] Constitution International Federation of Petroleum Workers, (IISG, ICFTU archive, nr.1814b)

[30] Handwritten internal note from W. Rodgers, Workers Relations Service ILO, 8 August 1954 (ILO, RL 0-3-101)

[31] Henceforth, we use this acronym.

[32] In 1963 the smaller oil unions also resigned their membership.

[33] B.K. Williams, *Labors' Cold War Missionaries: The IFPCW's Transnational Mission for the Third World's Petroleum and Chemical Workers, 1954-1975,* in: Labor: Studies in Working-class History of the Americas, (7) 4, 2010.

[34] B.K. Williams, o.c., p. 48

[35] Interview with Jack Knight, Business Week, 24 February 1960

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[36] Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, Brill: Leiden, 2008, p. 260
[37] English, French, German, Spanish and Arabic.
[38] IFPCW, Summary of Activities, 1965-1967 (IISG, ICFTU – 1879a)
[39] Note from R.L Morris, Labour Attaché British Ambassy Beirut, 27 December 1968 (National Archives, LAB13/2260)
[40] IFPCW, Report on Regional Activities, 1 July – 31 December 1963 (IISG, ICFTU 1816g)
[41] B.K. Williams, o.c. , p. 63
[42] Internal memo from G.E. Salmon, 16 January 968 (National Archive, LAB 13/2260)
[43] IFPCW Summary of Activities, 1965-1967 (IISG, ICFTU 1879a)
[44] AFL-CIO, RG1-xx
[45] USAID sponsored from 1962 on the three regional development institutes of AFL-CIO: AIFLD (Latin America), AAFLI (Asia) and AALC (Africa). IFPCW worked as subcontractor for all three. After the closure of IFPCW the contracts where taken over by Glass Bottle Blowers (UMD, AFL-CIO RG 18-007)
[46] Geert Van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International,* pp. 193-227.
[47] OWIU was affiliated with CIO. It merged with the United Gas, Coke and Chemical Workers' Union in 1955 and changed its name into OCAW.
[48] Memo mr. Rodgers, ILO representative (ILO, Z/12/9/5)
[49] Report on Executive Board Meeting ICFTU, 28 June 1960 (UMD, AFL-CIO Lovestone Files, Box 12)
[50] Irving Bown to JayLovestone, 8 september 1956 (UMD, AFL-CIO Lovestone Files, Box 12)
[51] Letter from O. Becu to L.A. Haskins, 27 March 1961 (IISG, ICFTU 1815d)
[52] A. Carew, "Towards a Free Trade Union Centre: The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (1949-1972), in: A. Carew, Michel Dreyfus, Geert Van Goethem, Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick, Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *The International Confederation of Trade Unions*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000, p. 287
[53] L.A. Haskins to Omer Becu, Denver 8 August 1961 (IISG, ICFTU 1815d)
[54] IFPCW, *Report of Activities*, 3th World Congress, Amsterdam, 1960
[55] The decision the end the IFPCW activities was made during a meeting of the AFL-CIO International Committee in February 1974 of which the minutes are not in the AFL-CIO archives at Maryland Univeristy.
[56] F. Romero, 'Transnational Labor in the Cold War', in: Waters & Van Goethem, p. 278

[57] Note of a conversation between R.L Morris, British Labour Attaché, and Curtis Hogan, IFPCW Assistant Secretary-General, Beirut, 23 October 1968 (National Archive, LAB 13/2260).

[58] Secret memo of the Aden governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15 March 1957 (BL,IOR/R/20/B/2397)

[59] Secret telegram nr. 422 (National Archive, FCO8/376)
[60] Report by H. Conway, police, to Security Liaison officer, Aden, 7 March 1960 (BL,IOR/R/20/B/2885)
[61] Report Franz Loriaux, 16 March 1960 (IISG, ICFTU 4932)
[62] Report by H. Conway, police, to Security Liaison officer, Aden, 2 February 1960 (British Library, IOR/R/20/B/2885)
[63] Idem
[64] Statutes of the Arab Federation of Petroleum Workers, (British Library, IOR/R/20/B/2894)

[65] Edmund Burke and Ira M. Lapidus, *Islam, Politics, and Social Movements*, London: University of California Press, 1988, p. 239

[66] F. Romero, o.c. p. 278