

International Trade Secretariats – Origins, Development, Activities*

Peter Rütters

International Trade Secretariats (ITS) are confederations of autonomous, national trade unions of certain branches, industries or employee groups. At present, there are still 10 trade secretariats (cf. table 2) which feel connected in their programs to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), are recognized by it and have representational rights in the congress and the managing board of the ICFTU.¹

The founding story of the trade secretariats goes back to the 19th century.

Founding and Origins

Even before the trade union founding process in Europe was closed on the national level, there were initial international contacts in the last third of the 19th century and first contracts between manual workers' trade secretariats. These relations between national trade secretariats, which initially were mostly bilateral, were at first confined

to travel aid and the reciprocity of membership recognitions; they were first efforts at guiding European labour migration and influencing its effects (strikebreaking, among others) on local/national wage and work conditions. The connections made in the 1870s and 1880s remained instable, partly due to the weakness of the trade unions, partly due to restrictive political conditions (e.g. Sozialistengesetz). Only since 1889, "international federations" of trade and branch unions were founded. This was triggered by workers' congresses in commemoration of the French Revolution Centenary which were held simultaneously (and competitively) by the Possibilists and Socialists /Marxists in Paris and which meeting forums to many representatives of trade and branch unions. Both the congresses of 1889 and the following worker and socialist congresses of the Socialist International (SI) were the starting points of the founding of independent international trade unions: the International Trade Secre-

* *The following sketch is no effort at rendering an overview of the history, development, policy and function of ITS or to treat these various aspects equally. Some aspects, such as the initial phase, the institutionalization, the extension of European to global "Trade Internationals" as well as some areas of action will be considered in brief abstracts. One accent was here placed on the historic dimension (Origins and Development between 1890 and 1945/49) mostly because the stock of publications and archive materials, which are conserved by international trade secretariats in the archive and the library of the FES, represents an amazing – and often not sufficiently recognized – inventory of sources and materials on the history and development of these labour organisations. (This introductory sketch will do without extensive annotations, source and literature notes due its shortness; a small bibliography, which lists some more recent works, but also older standard literature on this topic, should be sufficient to encourage further studies – see the annex of this publication).*

¹ Apart from the "free trade union" trade secretariats – which the following sketch will deal with – where the social democratic /socialist oriented trade unionists were dominantly represented, there have been since the beginning 20s international workers' associations of the Christian trade unions, today's World Confederation of Labour (WCL); in the 1920s/1930s, the Communist Red Trade Union International (RTUI) had 15 so-called "Profintern", International Propaganda Committees, which did not partake of original trade union functions; the organisational and financially independent trade departments of the World Trade Union Confederation (WGB), originating since 1949, and the Labour International which was Communist-ruled since 1949, had most of their members in the Soviet Union and only few relevant branch unions in Western industrialized countries (esp. France and Italy), since 1989, these trade departments as much as the WGB itself have almost completely lost their importance.

tariats.² Although they originated from congresses of the Socialist International in the 1890s, the foundation of an “international trade secretariat” or an “international federation” simultaneously meant the distancing from its political domination and the chance, to unite competing political directions within a trade secretariat. Up to 1914, the scope included not only social democratic / socialist, syndicalist (esp. in France and the Netherlands), and trade unionist (partly anti-socialist, British) trade unions, but in some ITS also contained liberal and Christian trade unions.

Even among the first foundings of trade secretariats, two types can be distinguished: (1) trade unions with manufactural traditions whose interest in international relations was status-oriented – the organisational perspective of most of these ITS was bound to the development of the respective profession; (2) trade secretariats which represented branches or industries; even if the founders’ intention was not the principle of industrial unions, most of these trade secretariats united various professions in one branch; the branch principle was an important prerequisite for an expansive development of the organisation and the chance that the organisation was long-lived.³

Up to the First World War, several dozen trade secretariats developed. At the same time, there were first mergers of existing

secretariats. In 1913, the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which had emerged in the same year from the transformation of the International Secretariat of the National Trade Union Federations, already registered 32 trade secretariats with approx. 4.5 million members⁴ (see table 1) in their “Tenth International Report on the Labour Movement 1912”. The founding of the IFTU was followed by a reciprocal acknowledgement and borderlining of activities of the international federations of professional and branch trade unions and the international organisation of the national umbrella associations.

The possible development and activities of the trade secretariats in this founding phase were very limited. Organisation and membership number growth was limited. Institutionally, the trade secretariats did not have their own secretariats or functionaries. Their activities were in the hands of a resourceful national trade union with numerous members. In view of the organisational development of the German trade unions after the turn of the century, but also in view of the geographical situation of this country, 27 of 32 secretariats (1913) had their seat in Germany, with German associations⁵. Correspondence and other activities for the trade secretariat were handled by functionaries of the association or by the chairman himself,

2 One step ahead were the printers who had invited to a first international congress for 18th to 21st July 1889, which decided in favour of the “creation of a centre for the management of international relations”. Other professional groups and branches such as the miners (1890), the metal workers (1893), the textile workers (1893/4), the cobblers (1893), clothes manufacturers (1893) and lithographers (1896) followed in the next years with their founding congresses. Cf. W. Kulemann: *Die Berufsvereine, Geschichtliche Entwicklung der Berufsorganisationen der Arbeitgeber aller Länder*, Vol. 6, Berlin 1913, pp. 236-305.

3 The detachment of professional trade unions due to industrial structures was expressed on the occasion of the fusion of trade secretariats for bakers, patisseries and related trade colleagues, of brewers and meat workers in the International Union of Federations of Workers in the Food and Drink Trades (IUF) in 1920, in a resolution of the founding congress, which explained the fusion as a reaction to changes in the food industry and the national trade unions, as the progressing “combination of most various food and victuals productions in some large firms becomes ever more apparent and this concentration of the production in a number of states was answered by a unification of workers’ associations from these branches into food workers’ unions”. (*International Union of Federations of Workers in the Food and Drink Trades, Protocol of the talks of the International Congress of Food Workers, Zurich 25.-27. 8.1920, Hamburg, p. 28*). At this point in time, the industrial make of the IUF preceded development on the national level, nevertheless the concept IUF was future-oriented, since it followed a continuity-based organisational principle.

4 Cf. IGB (ed.): *Zehnter Internationaler Bericht über die Gewerkschaftsbewegung 1912*, Berlin 1913, p. 257; also Sabine Hanna Leich / Wolfgang Kruse: *Internationalismus und nationale Interessenvertretung. Zur Geschichte der internationalen Gewerkschaftsbewegung*, Köln 1991, p. 45.

5 Cf. 10. *Internationaler Bericht über die Gewerkschaftsbewegung 1912*, Berlin 1913, p. 257.

Table 1: Membership of the various International Trade Secretariats⁶

No.	International Secretariat of	Headquarters	National federations or unions and their membership					Local unions or societies and their membership					Total number of affiliated members		
			No. of unions	No. of countr.	male	female	total	No. of unions	No. of countr.	male	female	total	male	female	total
1	Bakers	Hamburg, Germany	16	13	62301	6380	68681	—	—	—	—	—	62301	6380	68681
2	Barbers, hairdressers	Berlin, "	4	4	4850	—	4850	—	—	—	—	—	4850	—	4850
3	Bookbinders	Berlin, "	13	13	26897	23009	49906	1	1	?	?	?	26897	23009	49906
4	Boot, Shoe and Leather workers	Nuremberg, "	13	13	?	?	105600	—	—	—	—	—	?	?	105600
5	Brewery workers	Berlin, "	9	9	126650	4242	130892	—	—	—	—	—	126650	4242	130892
6	Building Trades workers	Hamburg, "	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7	Butchers, Slaughtermen etc.	Berlin, "	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8	Carpenters	Hamburg, "	6	6	83863	—	83863	—	—	—	—	—	83863	—	83863
9	Carvers	Berlin, "	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
10	Commercial cklers	Amsterdam, Holland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
11	Diamond workers	Antwerpen, Belgium	1	1	9850	—	9850	16	6	5362	—	5362	15212	—	15212
12	Factory workers	Hannover, Germany	8	8	267711	30290	298001	—	—	—	—	—	267711	30290	298001
13	Fur workers	Berlin, "	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
14	Glass workers	Berlin, "	14	14	29020	—	29020	2	2	210	—	210	29230	—	29230
15	Hatters	Altenburg, "	15	15	21867	11046	32913	—	—	—	—	—	21867	11046	32913
16	Hotel, Restaurant workers	Berlin, "	6	6	17295	1209	18504	5	4	2025	—	2025	19320	1209	20529
17	Lithographers	Berlin, "	20	15	35923	—	35923	—	—	—	—	—	35923	—	35923
18	Metal workers	Stuttgart "	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	116003
19	Miners	Manchester, Gr. Britain	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
20	Painters	Hamburg, Deutschland	10	10	72074	—	72074	—	—	—	—	—	72074	—	72074
21	Paviors	Berlin, "	8	8	² .	² .	² .	2	2	357	—	357	² .	² .	² .
22	Pottery workers	Berlin, "	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
23	Potters	Berlin, "	6	6	?	?	15974	2	2	140	—	140	?	?	16114
24	Printers	Stuttgart, "	18	18	137451	—	³ 137451	—	—	—	—	—	137451	—	³ 137451
25	Saddlers	Berlin, "	6	5	18875	1244	20119	—	—	—	—	—	18876	1244	20119
26	State and municipal work.	Berlin, "	10	9	70002	2023	72025	—	—	—	—	—	70002	2023	72025
27	Stone workers	Zürich, Switzerland	⁴ 16	⁴ 16	75000	—	⁴ 75000	—	—	—	—	—	75000	—	75000
28	Tailors	Berlin, Deutschland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
29	Textile workers	Manchester, Gr. Britain	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
30	Tobacco workers	Bremen, Germany	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
31	Transport workers	Berlin, "	43	17	?	?	875256	7	4	?	?	6694	?	?	881950
32	Wood workers	Berlin, "	39	20	?	?	⁵ 393125	2	2	?	?	230	?	?	⁵ 393355

- 1 Including the American Federation with which only mutual agreements exist.
- 2 The particulars at hand are incomplete.
- 3 No details are at hand in the case of the Bulgarian Typographers' Federation which numers 300-400 members.
- 4 In five countries the stone workers belong to the building workers' union.
- 5 The number of membership is missing in the case of five federations.

on an honorary basis. Therefore, trade secretariats had no institutional autonomy. This limitation was also mirrored in the geographical organisation of the trade secretariats. Even though various ITS listed trade unions in the United States as member associations, such as the Miners' and Metal Worker's In-

ternational, and also the professional ITS of bakers, brewers, meat workers, hatters and potters⁷, the exchange of opinions and information, the formulation of common positions, assistance in more serious confrontations as well as the first beginnings of coordinated actions were clearly concentrated

6 Cf. Tenth International Report of the Trades Union Movement, 1912, Berlin 1913, p. 250.

7 Cf. Die Internationalen Beziehungen der deutschen Arbeitgeber-, Angestellten- und Arbeiterverbände, bearb. im Kaiserlichen Statistischen Amte, Abt. für Arbeiterstatistik (= 9. Sonderheft zum Reichs-Arbeitsblatte), Berlin 1914, p. 20) The relation with American trade unions reacted in the first place to the strong immigration into the US; the integration of American trade unions, which often stemmed from the personal relations of American trade unionists to European associations, had the main aim of organising the immigrants.

on the European member associations. A permanent institutionally grounded extension of the organisation was achieved by most of the ITS only since the 1950s. In the founding phase, – and also later on – the development and activities of the trade secretariats were defined by the national actions of their member unions, which blocked the path to organisational autonomy for a long time.

The limits of international activities and international solidarity became apparent at the start of the First World War. It interrupted the further development of the international labour organisations who faced the outbreak of the war without being able to intervene in the spirit of their anti-war programmes. Most member associations had very quickly been integrated in the national war coalitions and were prepared to support the mobilization in their countries, especially since they were offered governmental recognition in return. For the International Trade Secretariats, this integration of the trade unions in the war preparations of the opposing and allied nations became an aggravating circumstance when a restitution of normality was needed after the end of the war. As a consequence, for most trade secretariats the reorganisation and cooperation of the member associations was delayed.

Even though the national unions' and the International Trade Secretariats' lack of power to act in the face of the beginning First World War and the integration especially of the German trade unions into the war policies of the German Kaiserreich – which were felt to be a blatant violation of trade unionist and socialist principles – delayed and hemmed the reorganisation of the trade secretariats in 1919/1920, the ITS soon faced different problems and necessities which limited their

development, their scope of action and their influence. A politicization of the labour movement through the splitting of the workers movement and the establishment of “Richtungsgewerkschaften” (trade unions with specific political or religious orientation) on the national and the international level, the disastrous world economic crisis, the establishment of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes and the outbreak of the Second World War were the main coordinates to influence and once more constrict the development of trade secretariats in the interwar years.

The foundation of new and the fusion of existing trade secretariats took also place between the wars. In the early 30s, there were 29 trade secretariats (1938: 26). Their membership numbered from a few thousand (hairdressers aides 1931: 11,189) up to more than 2 million (Transport Workers International 1931: 2.3 Mill.; Metal Workers International: 1.8 Mill.). With few exceptions (e.g. the ITF⁸), their member associations and their fields of action were limited to Europe; first efforts to extend the space of action towards North and Latin America were foiled by the world economic crisis and the Second World War. Only a few ITS could build up an independent organisation⁹, so that their activities, which in most cases were still handled by the secretariat of a member trade union, were limited to the exchange of information on collective bargaining, working conditions, security of work places, health considerations and support of strikes and solidarity actions here and there. The few initiatives in the interwar years where trade secretariats – especially the ITF – tried to obtain political influence beyond the representation of trade union interests, among others with boycotts, (esp. against the Horthy regime in Hungary, against

8 This definition is valid for the International Transport Workers Federation, which had associations even in the 20s/30s in various extra-European regions, but still remained, like the other ITS, a basically European organisation, Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten: *Gewerkschaftsinternationalismus und die Herausforderung der Globalisierung. Das Beispiel der Internationalen Transportarbeiterföderation*, Frankfurt a.M. 1999, p. 67.

9 Lewis L. Lorwin: *Die Internationale der Arbeit. Geschichte und Ausblick*, Berlin 1930, p. 179 f., points out 5 trade secretariats with secretaries and an autonomous secretarial staff.

arms deals to Poland during the Polish-Russian War, against Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany) or with interventions in decisive work struggles such as the British general miners' strike in 1926, showed that international/European trade unions were willing to take action, but the minor effect which these actions eventually had, marked the limits of such interventions and efforts at coordination of the trade secretariats.¹⁰

Since the foundation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1919, the representation and coordination of national branch trade unions in this tripartite institution won some importance for some ITS, although expectations regarding the efficiency at regulating conflicts were often raised too high. Initially at least, trade secretariats such as ITF, MIF and IUF searched enthusiastically for international conventions regarding professional and branch specific problems as well as general problems such as maintenance of industrial health and safety standards, industrial law and social security systems, and the expectation was to establish internationally recognized norms with international agreements (conventions, recommendations), which could then be adopted on the national level. These great expectations, as the trade secretariats had to recognize as early as the 20s and 30s, failed partly because of the tripartite structure of the ILO board, partly because of the reservations of national states against ratifications, without the ILO as an organisation losing its importance for the trade unions and especially for the ITS. Representation and coordination functions of trade secretariats were necessitated by the existence of the ILO and therefore accepted.

With the foundation of the Red Trade Union International (RTUI, 1921), initiated by the

Communist International as political opposition and propaganda instrument against the „Amsterdam“ International, relations intensified between the ITS and the IFTU, where socialist /social democratic trade unions were dominant. The degree of autonomy of the ITS, their representation in the boards of the IFTU and their influence on its policies remained issues of contention, however. Versus the RTUI and the Soviet trade unions, the ITS kept their distance, although there were some initiatives towards integrating Soviet industrial unions during the 1920s and after the Nazi takeover in Germany within some ITS (MIF and IUF, among others). Cooperation of Soviet industrial unions with the trade secretariats – for some time during the 1920s, even the Soviet food workers' union belonged to the IUF – did not occur, though, as their demands and comments were marked by a polemical confrontation attitude against “Amsterdam” (the IFTU) and social democratic trade union functionaries, although the question of joining aggravated relations within the ITS intermittently.

Incisions in the basis of memberships, resources and action of the trade unions were marked by the establishment of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes (in Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain a.s.o.). The Nazi “Machtergreifung” above all withdrew members and resources to a considerable degree from the trade secretariats, which had already been reduced by the effects of the world economic crisis, while simultaneously new challenges – the support of trade union resistance and intensified propaganda against fascism and national socialism – also approached them. With a variety of measures and more or less intense, with a limited range and no accounting for effects, some trade secretariats participated in activities against the NS regime.¹¹

10 CF for ITF activities Koch-Baumgarten: *Gewerkschaftsinternationalismus*, pp. 66-89; for the British general strike and miners' strike, Karl Georg Herrmann: *Die Geschichte des Internationalen Bergarbeiterverbandes 1890-1939*, Frankfurt a.M. 1994, pp. 221-257.

11 Instead of a comprehensive description and for some facets of ITS participation in resistance compare Willy Buschak: *Arbeit im kleinsten Zirkel. Gewerkschaften im Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, Hamburg, 1993; also *Quellen zur Geschichte der deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Siegfried Mielke und Hermann Weber, vol. 5: *Die Gewerkschaften im Widerstand und in der Emigration 1933-1945*, bearb. von Siegfried Mielke und Mathias Frese, Frankfurt a.M. 1999, – the emphasis here is on activities of the ITF and the miners, in which the MIF participated only partly.

The spreading of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes in the 30s having limited the development of the basis of members and the geographical range of trade secretariats, the Second World War reduced the activities of almost all ITS and forced some to stop their activities altogether. The ITF was a prominent exception, other trade secretariats were reduced to correspondence and planning for the postwar period.

After 1945, the existence of branch internationals was put into question by the formation of the WFTU¹² as a politically diverse overall organisation, while the IFTU was dissolved. The organisational ideas of most founding organisations (the British TUC, the US-American CIO, the French CGT and the Central Council of Soviet trade unions were in the lead) presumed that the trade secretariats should be integrated in the new world trade union organisation, while the planned establishment of financially and organisationally independent trade sections in the WFTU did not go undisputed. Insofar as the ITS had not already used the preparation period prior to the foundation of the World Trade Union Organisation to influence its conceptualization, its quick revival now confronted the WFTU with the problem of having to negotiate the prerogatives of the integration and status of the planned “trade sections” within a unifying World Trade Union Organisation with the existing or re-organised trade secretariats, most of which had no majorities for a WFTU integration at the cost of yielding their organisational independence. Basic areas for conflict had become apparent as early as 1946. In September 1948, even prior to the splitting of the WFTU, the marked insistence and autonomy claim of the ITS, the Social Democratic/Socialist orientation of

most leading functionaries in the ITS, the retarding effect of democratic decision-making in the trade secretariats, as well as the WFTU policy to deny autonomy areas to the ITS, led to the final failure of the negotiations about the integration of the trade secretariats.

The failure of WFTU-ITS negotiations in 1948 strengthened the will to stay independent mostly among small trade secretariats such as the Tobacco Workers International, the Hotel and Restaurant Employees’ Union as well as the International Union of Shoe and Leather Workers, which were supposed to fuse with other trade secretariats according to the WFTU plans and now cancelled negotiations for fusions – until changed frame conditions and pressing action necessitated or enforced this step.

The failure of WFTU-ITS negotiations not only led to a more homogeneous member structure in that Communist oriented/dominated trade unions among others in France and Italy cancelled their relations with the trade secretariats, if they had not already done so in 1946/47 during the long-drawn out negotiations, but the failure also led to an ideologically based delineation. A result of the failure – i.e. actually a circumstantial effect of the Cold War – was the loss of traditional geographical organisation areas in Middle and Eastern Europe for more than four decades, while in Third World regions, trade union ambitions and activities of the trade secretariats were at times shaped or at least influenced by the competition with the trade sections of the WFTU which had been founded in 1949.

After the splitting of the WFTU and the foundation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)¹³, the relation between ICFTU and ITS was regulated in the

12 The WFTU had been founded as a politically diverse umbrella organisation in Paris in 1945 but could not bridge the conceptual, functional and political differences between Communist associations and social democratic trade unions; it became a political instrument used above all by the Soviet trade unionists after a short period of time. The splitting of the WFTU manifested once more the rift in the labour movement which had been there since 1917.

13 The ICFTU was founded late in 1949, after the social democratically oriented umbrella organisations had left the WFTU in early 1949.

“Milano Agreement” (1951, revised in 1969 and 1991): The autonomy of the ITS was acknowledged, attachment to one and the same labour movement was proclaimed and the ITS pledged to adopt the general policy of the ICFTU. In most ITS statutes, however, political independence is stressed; various ITS therefore avoided formal ratification of the Agreement of 1951 and of the revision of 1969. The declaration of 1991 which put less stress on the political primacy of the ICFTU, seems to have been accepted for the most part by the trade secretariats.

Institutionalisation

With the foundation of the trade secretariats, small area organisations had come into being which were bound to a ‘managing’ member association and had no institutional autonomy or competences. For most ITS, this organisational limitation corresponded to – although there was a growth in the 1920s – the relatively small number of member associations and the geographical limitation to Europe. As late as the 1920s/30s, extra-European trade unions did not continuously participate in activities of the trade secretariats and were present in the decision boards only sporadically. The global expansion since the 1950s, branch differentiation by fusing of trade secretariats, the ensuing greater number of member associations, a more or less notable conversion of functions and not least the meagre resources, added up to the more intense institutionalisation and “profes-

sionalization“ of the trade secretariats and thereby augmented the organisational autonomy of trade secretariats with regard to the member associations. It became the main task to integrate a more heterogeneous member structure and to have them take decisions on the central (global) level, and to react to changed challenges regarding the conception, organisation and trade union policy.

All ITS (mostly) have four organizational levels with varying size and functions: congress, executive committee, managing committee¹⁴, secretariat. The *congress* as the highest body consists of the delegates of all associated members and will sit (as at present) every four to five years.¹⁵ Changes in statutes, definition of policy guidelines, ratification of the acceptance of new members, fixing the contributions, and the election of the president, the vice president and the general secretary belong to the most important tasks of the congress. The *executive committee* which functions as decision maker in the interim between congresses and convenes once a year, is set up according to a distribution code (statutory). As with the central committee of the IMF, it can contain all member associations, prefer certain national organisations (ICEF/ICEM), have country groups and/or regional groups as basis (IUF); besides, there are regulations to ensure the representation of branch groups and – a recent development – the representation of women by quota¹⁶ in the relevant boards. Due to the extension of the congress period, the executive committee has been conferred important competences of the con-

14 The technical terms for the bodies vary more than shown here, their function however is basically the same, in that there is an organ next to the congress which can confer in short intervals (once a year, in most cases) without a lot of financial and administrative trouble, but which can claim a relatively high legitimacy for its decisions which the congress had earlier on. This other organ, figuring as a President's Board or managing committee or similarly, is supposed to take on administrative tasks, direct and supervise the work of the secretariat and make „day to day policy“ decisions; as it consists of few members, it can meet more frequently; it is more important, though, that the executive used to develop a tendency to assemble more members with progressively less discussion and decisionmaking capability, which in turn leads to the prior debate and consensus-finding sessions of the managing committee where controversial questions are concerned. – Centralisation and participation losses are the consequences.

15 Since the 1950s, the congress periods had been extended for organisation and financial reasons; the loss of participation and gain of functionality was partly compensated by the revaluation and enlargement of sub-committees which have decision competence between the congresses.

16 The gender issue is on the internal agenda of most ITS since the 1980s, in order to push the representation of women in the member associations and within the relevant boards.

gress, such as the acceptance of new members, the fixing of contributions or extra contributions and policy decisions. The *managing board* is a small council of leaders and guides which supervises the secretariat, prepares decisions of the executive committee and the congress, has administrative functions but is also required to sort out controversial basic issues in their first stages. It has this power because next to the general secretary (ex officio member), the president and the vice president belong to it, who usually represent the most important and influential member organisations, even if – in order to reach a global integration – there is a tendency towards the constitution of the board according to regions (continents). The president has representational functions, while activities and political ambitions of the ITS are to a great extent expressed by the long-serving general secretaries.

On the whole, it can be said that the few decision making bodies changed their form only marginally, despite the considerable changes in member structures, of the geographical and the expertise range, of new challenges. Functional and institutional changes in the trade secretariats showed not so much in the reorganisation of the managing boards but in changes in their constitution and competences, which can be characterized as a centralisation of the decision making structures. The basic transformation has taken place in the change from a direct representation of all member associations in the congress and the managing board to a representational system as a result of an increasing number of member associations and geographical and professional expansion. Thus, member associations in toto can only convene in congress, the importance of which was reduced due to the extension of the congress period.

Centralisation of the global decision making structure demanded that integration elements be built in, as a heterogenous member structure developed due to fusions, branch extensions and a growing number of extra-European member associations as a conse-

quence of the efforts at globalisation. One such element was special representation rights for single branch groups in the central organs, another the introduction of regional representation principles in the central organs. As a balance against the centralisation of the decision making structure, most trade secretariats have created regional organisations (some, like IMF and ITF, have only regional offices), as well as expert or branch groups with their own conferences and managing boards, to allow for de-centralisation of processes in decision-making, in determination of guidelines and in activities. Branch oriented decentralisation and regionalisation offer the possibility of continued participation of the member associations in the central decision making processes while taking stock of regional and branch specific interests. These structural principles which result from the ITS development into differentiated and complex organisations, mark the effort of creating a (somewhat unstable) balance between (potentially) centrifugal tendencies of regional and branch interests on the one hand and centralised decision making on the global level, necessitated by functional demands, on the other hand.

Expansion and Integration

The continued existence and competence of trade secretariats depends, among other things, on their ability to keep enough members who are willing and capable of providing the necessary resources. In order to extend the reservoir of members within the geographical and expertise range and in order to fulfil the representation claim, the ITS had to adapt their organisational structure to the demands of a 'global' trade union international. The expansion of the trade secretariats was two-dimensional: sectoral, by extension of the expertise range with the aid of fusions or representational extension, and geographical (after the Second World War) by the joining of extra-European trade unions.

Fusions and sectoral expansion

Most of the trade secretariats developed from an organisation for professions and crafts¹⁷ to an organisation which includes one or more industrial professions¹⁸; the following diagram regarding the history of fusions of the textile, garment- and leather workers' secretariats is exemplary for this process. The foundation of the IUF as a fusion of "trade" secretariats into an association for the "food industry" is an example for this development. On the other hand, the Miners' International, the International Metal Workers' Federation (IMF) or the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) belong to a group of trade secretariats which organised a clearly defined industrial sector since they were founded. Metal and Food Workers' International, just to take two examples, represented industrial sectors which were flexible and adaptable enough for the change from craft branches to branches which were defined by industrialized production methods.

How and when the extension of expertise organisation areas by fusions took place was defined by both external and internal factors: growing demands due to the 'global' expansion, growing demands on representation (ILO, other UN organisations), branch-specific member- and resource weaknesses, and not least fusions on the national level of influential member associations, which demanded or sometimes even enforced adaptation processes of the trade secretariats (e.g. the joining of the International Tobacco Workers

Association to the IUF in 1958). To name but one example for a fusion resulting from an existential crisis, there is the joining, in 1994, of the International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers (IFPAAW) as a branch group to the Food Workers' International¹⁹; this meant an extension of the organisation sector to the farm and plantation workers for the IUF, thus an expertise extension by the whole agro-industrial area, even though it is doubtful whether the gains in terms of memberships²⁰ also improved the basic resources.

The 1995 merging of ICEF (Chemistry Workers International) and the MIF (Miners' International Federation) represents an offensive tackling of foreseeable resource and power problems. For years, the MIF had been facing the structural dilemma of a rapidly decreasing number of members in Western European countries' trade unions, who had carried the trade secretariat organisationwise and financially, while simultaneously there was an increased need for action in Third World organisations and since 1989 in Middle and Eastern European organisations. The merging was supposed to bridge this dilemma and to guarantee an international representation of miners' unions in the frame of organisational and political stability of a trade secretariat carried by national trade unions with a long tradition of international trade union policy. The International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mining and Factory Workers' Trade Unions (ICEM), which resulted from this merger, was joined by the recently reactivated

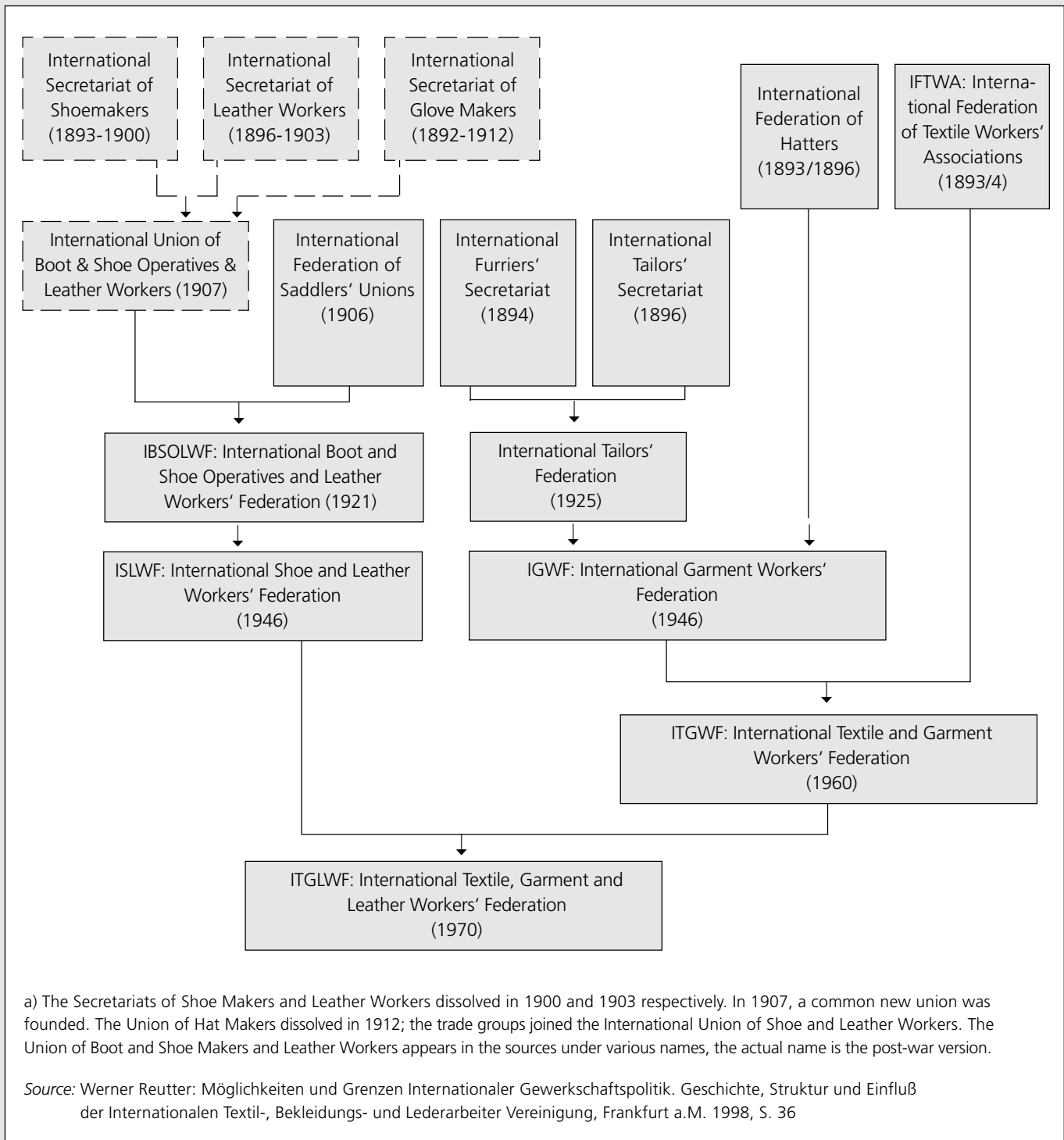
17 A great number of small, craft-defined trade secretariats were very persistent due to their strong professional or branch identity. This turned out to be a hindrance for the reorganisation plans of the WFTU in 1945/48, but also for the ICFTU suggestion of the mid 1950s to concentrate the ITS into 7 organisations. Fusions of individual trade secretariats also fell victim to this conservative identity in that they were delayed or handicapped.

18 The term "industrial profession" is here used in a simplifying manner. The ITS have developed various areas of representation: next to industrial sectors (miners) and professional groups (teachers), status groups (employees) or employers (public service, postal service) serve as demarcation criteria.

19 This fusion renews failed efforts at cooperation of the 1950s: in the 1950s, the IUF had participated in building up the international plantation labourers' activities; in the mid/end 1950s there were considerations and negotiations in view of a merger with the then existing ILF (International Landworkers' Federation). Prior to the foundation of the International Plantation Workers' Federation (IPWF, 1957) and jointly with the merger of IPWF and ILF 1959, a participation of the IUF was also debated, but eventually turned down due to considerable financial burdens which in turn would have resulted in dependence from the ICFTU. – Cf. ICFTU, *International Trade Secretariats*, Brussels 1962, pp.54 ff.

20 From 1993 to 1997, the number of associated organisations has moved from 233 (in 89 countries) to 343 (in 112 countries), the number of members has increased to 2.6 million from 2.4 million.

Chart: Development and Fusions of Trade Secretariats of Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers^{a)} (1892-1970)



a) The Secretariats of Shoe Makers and Leather Workers dissolved in 1900 and 1903 respectively. In 1907, a common new union was founded. The Union of Hat Makers dissolved in 1912; the trade groups joined the International Union of Shoe and Leather Workers. The Union of Boot and Shoe Makers and Leather Workers appears in the sources under various names, the actual name is the post-war version.

Source: Werner Reutter: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen Internationaler Gewerkschaftspolitik. Geschichte, Struktur und Einfluß der Internationalen Textil-, Bekleidungs- und Lederarbeiter Vereinigung, Frankfurt a.M. 1998, S. 36

Table 2: Merging Process and Members of the International Trade Secretariats 1951/52 und 2000/01 (in 1.000)

	1951/2			2000/1		
	M	U	C	M	U	C
Textile Workers (IFTWA/ITGLWF) ^{a)}	1.318	17	15	] 10.000	220	110
Shoe and Leather Workers (ISLWF/ITGLWF) ^{a)}	290	21	12			
Garment Workers (IGWF/ITGLWF) ^{a)}	810	19	14			
Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW)	1.974	55	20	11.000	283	124
Metalworkers (IMF)	6.623	24	16	23.000	193	101
Food Workers (IUF) ^{b)}	730	28	15	] 10.000 resp. 2.515 *	333	120
Tobacco Workers (IFTW/IUF) ^{b)}	93	9	9			
Hotel, Restaurant and Bar Workers (IUF) ^{b)}	166	13	11			
Land Workers (ILF/IUF) ^{b)}	1.072	29	15			
Plantation Workers (IUF) ^{b)}	1.004	13	13			
Chemical, Energy and General Workers (ICEF/ICEM) ^{c)}	1.142	35	17	] 20.000	404	113
Miners (MIF/ICEM) ^{c)}	2.556	22	22			
Diamond Workers (UADW) ^{c)}	12	7	7			
Commercial, Clerical, Technical Employees (FIET/UNI) ^{d)}	1.470	28	16	] 15.500	900	140
Arts, Media and Entertainment (ISETU resp. MEI/UNI) ^{d)}	-	-	-			
Graphical Federation (IGF/UNI) ^{d)}	541	39	18			
Postal, Telegraph and Telephone branches (PTTI/CI/UNI) ^{d)}	1.118	45	29			
Public Services (PSI)	1.738	40	22	20.000	500	140
Transport Workers (ITF)	4.604	152	51	4.743	571	135
Teachers'/Education International (IFFTU/EI)	670	10	9	24.000	304	155
Journalists (IFJ) ^{e)}	-	-	-	249	94	77

M = Members (in 1.000)
U = Unions
C = Countries

a) Merging of IFTWA and IGWF (1960) and with ISLWF (1970), into ITGLWF.

b) With the exception of the French union, the IFTW members merged into IUF in 1959; merging of IUF and Hotel and Restaurant Workers' in 1961. Land Workers and the Plantation Workers' Federation (founded in 1957) merged in 1960; merging with IUF in 1994. Plantation Workers: Figures as of 1958.

c) Merging of MIF and ICEF into ICEM in 1995; Merging with Diamond Workers in 2000.

d) The International Secretariat for Arts, Mass Media and Entertainment Trade Unions was founded in 1965; after the merging with FISTAV in 1993 it was renamed Media and Entertainment International (MEI) in 1995; which was succeeded by the merging of MEI, IGF, FIET and the Communications International (former PTTI) into the Union Network International (UNI) in 2000.

e) Founded in 1952 as a secession of the „International Organization of Journalists“, founded in 1946.

f) Except for IFJ (figures as of 1994) figures date of 2000 and 2001, respectively.

*) Statements according to IUF: Exekutive, 25.-26.4.2001. Unterlagen und Protokoll, Punkt 4 a/27.

Sources: Werner Reutter: Internationale Berufssekretariate – Restposten nationaler Gewerkschaftspolitik oder globaler Akteur?, in: Ulrich v. Alemann/Bernhard Weßels (Hrsg.): Verbände in vergleichender Perspektive. Beiträge zu einem vernachlässigten Feld, Berlin 1997, S. 142, und dessen Aktualisierung.

Diamond Workers' Trade Secretariat in November 2000. This is another case where the fusion was unavoidable due to the higher demands following the reactivation.

The restructuring of the trade secretariat of teachers' unions in 1993 had another dimension. The ICFTU-close Teachers' International (IFFTU) and the liberal-conservative World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) merged – politically diverse – into the Education International, EI, a strong organisation with some 24 million members. This merger came through only because after the breakdown of the Eastern Bloc and the increasing insignificance of Communist trade union organisations on the national as well as international level (here: World Federation of Trade Unions and its international trade union associations), the political divergence had lost its fervour and meaning.

The merging of four trade secretariats – PTTI/CI, FIET, IGF and MEI – in 2000 into UNI (Union Network International) was not motivated by foreseeable organisational problems. It represents the experiment of actively shaping the globalisation process instead of only reacting to it. Following the first congress of this new trade secretariat in Berlin in September 2001, the question still remains whether this merger really will reach a new quality of international intervention ability.

Fusions resulted in a broadening member and (often) resource basis and in rationalised organisation, which contributed to the trade secretariats being able to continue their existence and activities. A growing heterogeneity of the member structures went with the fusions, which prompted specific integration measures such as organisation of branch structures and – at times – exclusive representation rights in the decision making bodies. Another effect – which as yet cannot be eva-

luated – is the “loss of identity” occasioned by the conglomeration of branches²¹ (see table 2).

Globalisation

One of the most important changes to influence the structure and policy of the trade secretariats was the extension of the organisation range after the Second World War.

There are various reasons and prerequisites for this postwar change: (1) The technical development in the communication and transport systems is not the most spectacular feature in the establishment of global contacts. (2) A vital impulse went forth from the Cold War and the global confrontation of two blocs, which revived the competition for influence between the social democratic or socialist trade unions and the Communist movements of the interwar years and spread to the Third World. Predominantly the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) started regional activities in the early 1950s to defeat Communist trade union influences, and demanded that the trade secretariats share conceptions, financial burdens and personnel. However, most of the trade secretariats were not able to comply, neither organisationally nor financially. Therefore, the hesitant regional activities of ITS of the 1950s tended to be rather without concept. Initially, the ITS only reacted to expectations of individual member associations and to diverse external demands, before they began developing their own systematic regional policy from the 1960s/70s onwards. (3) A further precondition for the global expansion of the trade secretariats was the decolonialisation process, which was accompanied by the founding of numerous trade unions, which often needed supportive programs. (4) The spreading of economic relations around the world market and the interrelated expansion

21 When trade secretariats with relatively clear representation areas and outlines disappear, and when ITS conglomerates emerge so that participation and shaping chances are diminished for those trade unions who used to be pillars of organisation and finances, the traditional and loyal attachment of European member trade unions to trade secretariats may diminish and their preparedness to mobilize may lessen (seeing that there is an alternative for the European area, the ETUC and its „trade union committees“).

of multinational companies (MNC) is a further impulse for the regional activities. Ever since the 1950s, several trade unions had used such phenomena as arguments to motivate regional activities. Still, multinational companies were not taken on as challenges by the trade secretariats till the 1960s, while they played no part in the initial internationalisation.

The geographical extension of the organisational areas resulted in the accession of very heterogeneous trade unions, whose resources and radius for activities, organisational status and autonomy were divergent. The fields of activity and the organisational structure of the trade secretariats underwent great changes in the three decades of the regional expansion, what with the fact that trade unions in Third World countries were often unstable, weak in members, with minimal financial resources and threatened by state interventions and needed, above all, support programs in order to build up their own organisation and assert basic trade union rights. The geographical extension of the organisational area put the trade secretariats to the task of integrating a heterogeneous membership and to have them participate in decision making processes. In the long run, efficiency and continued existence of the trade secretariats depended on their ability of managing this global extension and answering to the needs for organisation and support.

Growing numbers in members and the globally extended range led to a regionalisation of the organisations of most trade secretariats (cf. the following table 3, which gives an impression of the regional distribution of members for the mid 1990s). While some ITS have not continued extending their regional offices in Latin America, Africa and Asia, which had been in existence since the 1950/60s, any further (IMF, ITF), other trade secretariats have created regional structures (with a congress, a board, regional secretariat, sometimes even its own financing), in order to be able to deal with specific regional problems and interests and to establish close cooperation of members

and control regional activities. However, some of their regional organisations (in America and Asia) gave individual trade secretariats (FIET, ITGLWF) reason for concern at some point, as they show the tendency of centrifugal development and have succeeded in escaping control of their central secretariats.

The formation of European regional organisations contrasted with this development. It was initiated by the institutional frame of the EU (although there are participating organisations from all Western European countries present in most European Industry Federations. Cooperation with the ETUC strengthened autonomy tendencies of various European regional organisations in relation with the ITS (especially metal workers' and food workers' international) and was (is) quite often full of friction, seeing that the existence of the European organisational structure is a potential threat to the financial basis and the range of action of the ITS and could be an attractive organisational alternative to the ITS for the European member organisations.

Resources

The ITS work is financed mainly by regular contributions from the attached trade unions. In addition, the congress (as well as the managing board/executive committee) can decide on special contributions. Part of the regular contributions of some ITS who have intensified their work in the Third World is reserved for this area (25-30 %) by the constitution. This already shows that the ITS as a rule are financed through the member-strong industrial trade unions of Europe, North America and Japan.

Still, the intake normally covers only administrative work, expenses for the statutory assemblies and congresses as well as publications. Extensive training and organisation programs in the 1960s and mostly since the end of the 1970s in Third World countries, legal aid, industrial safety and health care programs, not least extensive solidarity actions (in case of trade union rights' violations

Table 3: Regional Member Structure of International Trade Secretariats

International Trade Secretariats	Total			Europe (West)			Europe (East)			North America			Latin America/ Caribbean			Africa			Asia/Pacific		
	M	O	C	M	O	C	M	O	C	M	O	C	M	O	C	M	O	C	M	O	C
EI (1993)	17.868	232	130	4.112 ^a	67	23	...	21	11	2.898 ^b	19	23	1.497	25	16	1.767	44	35	7.594	52	26
IFBWW (1994)	6.014	182	91	2.733	48	17	932	12	7	5	1	1	759	29	18	509	42	28	1.076	50	20
MIF (1993)	1.894	63	53	423 ^c	18	11	489	10	8	75	2	2	67	6	5	434	17	17	406 ^c	11	10
IMF (1992)	18.052	160	62	6.703	40	23	2.353	8	6	2.170	11	2	2.210	31	18	396	27	15	4.220	43	18
ITGLWF (1994)	5.973	178	83	2.149	41	19	258	4	4	382	4	2	925	55	19	606	34	22	1.662	40	17
IUF (1993) ^d	2.390	233	89	1.516	76	24	44	11	6	394	12	2	104	51	23	36	26	15	296	57	19
PSI (1994)	16.075 ^e	379	113	7.801	98	23	960	25	9	1.788	8	2	1.665	64	31	1.144	85	26	2.681	99	22
PTTI (1992)	4.301	242	112	1.603	62	21	174	7	6	924	6	2	272	76	32	217	38	29	1.111	53	22
FIET (1993)	11.000 ^f	400	115	6.300 ^f	140	34	...	...	...	2.600 ^f	93	32	...	...	...	700	91	33	1.400	76	32
IFJ	249	94	77	120	30	22	43	18	16	15	4	2	18	10	14	20	15	14	33	17	14

M = Members (in: 1.000)
O = Organisations
C = Countries

(a) Incl. members of trade unions in Middle and Eastern Europe.

(b) Incl. members of trade unions in the Caribbean.

(c) No figures available on members of trade unions in Russia (2), in the Ukraine (1), and in Kazakhstan (1).

(d) Not taken into account are trade unions which were principally accepted but which have not yet met the formal requirements for membership. This includes especially plantation and agricultural workers' trade unions which became IUL members after the dissolution of the Plantation Workers' International. These are 55 trade unions in total, most of which are in Asia and Africa.

(e) Apart from national organisations 4 trade unions are associated with PSI (containing some 36,000 members), which represent employees in international organisations.

(f) Member figures were only available in millions; figures for Europe (West) include those for Europe (East), figures for North America include those for Latin America.

Abbreviations:

EI: Education International

IFBWW: International Federation of Building and Wood Workers

MIF: Miners' International Federation

IMF: International Metal Workers' Federation

ITGLWF: International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation

IUF: International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations

PSI: Public Services International

PTTI: Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International

FIET: International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees

IFJ: International Federation of Journalists.

or human rights' violations or in conflicts with multinational companies) are not covered by the intake through contributions, so that trade secretariats have to depend on donations or special contributions. With regard to the training, organisation, legal aid and safety programs, the ITS would not be able to do all these without generous financial support (and personnel support) from national trade union -friendly and trade union foundations, such as DANIDO, LO/TCOs Bistandnämnd (Council for trade union cooperation), FES (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung), AIFLD (American Institute for Free Labor Development) et al.

Areas of action

Connected to the organisational extension of the trade secretariats were changes in their activities which exceeded a structured exchange of information and experiences quite soon afterwards. An important impulse and new challenges went out from globalisation, as often the weak trade unions in Third World countries needed active help for building their organisations and training their functionaries and members. The establishment of international governmental organisations, especially of the ILO, founded in 1919, necessitated representational and coordination efforts of the trade secretariats, as basic rules of international social security and labour legislation were being erected – as in the ILO example. Growing world economic interdependence which confronted national trade unions in the form of multinational companies (MNC) had been inducing some ITS since the 60s to build up specific coordination structures to influence the company policy and to support trade unions in case of conflicts. At length, globalisation confronted the trade secretariats with more limitations to trade union and human rights; in these cases, the trade secretariats tried again to intervene, more or less systematically, in order to keep their member organisations going.

– *Organisation and training programs*

The joining of trade unions from Third World countries created the challenge for the ITS to promote and support their organisational development. For trade secretariats, training and organisation programs have the following functions: (1) to improve the development and capabilities for action of the attached organisations in order to broaden the member structure at the basis, (2) in a somewhat limited measure, to influence the organisational structure and the political and trade union policy orientation, (3) to augment the attractiveness and importance of the trade secretariats.

However, due to their organisational and financial situation, most ITS were not in a position to keep up extensive programs on a long term basis on their own. In the 1950s, when the first member associations from Africa, Asia and Latin America were accepted by the ITS, support was limited to donations, financial aid for the payment of part-time organisers, or reimbursements of travel claims when trade union functionaries took part in training courses. In the 1960s, the ITS were able to put their organisation programs on a broader basis when the ICFTU placed special funds at their disposal. But the numerous projects had to be reduced soon afterwards, as the ICFTU stopped funding. While the regional activities of some of the ITS could draw on ICFTU funds, their own sources were however more important.

Extensive training and organisation programs which run for several years and are continued up by differentiated follow-up courses, have been offered by some ITS since the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s and have been considerably upgraded since then. The necessary resources – which amounted to more than the normal contribution intake of the ITS could afford – are being financed externally, mostly by a Swedish development aid fund which was accessible via the Scandinavian member asso-

ciations. The core of these successful programs was a longterm, specified and problem-oriented basic training for the members with the aim of having the organisations building their own training departments.²²

Continuity and expansion of programs and projects ever since the start of such training and organisation activities imply that there is a danger of becoming dependent, not only for the individual trade unions. This – latent – danger is also there for the ITS, as they are not in a position to finance these extensive programs from their own contributions, if need be. Thus, the programs signify first and foremost that the upkeep and the requirements for activities of most trade secretariats are directly or indirectly improved.

– *Defense of trade union and human rights*

Securing and expanding, defending and implementing trade union rights, are the central demands and tasks of international trade union organisations.²³ These demands represent core targets of trade union existence. They allow for the formation and ongoing work of independent trade unions, democratically supported by organised workers, independent and free from the influence of governments, employers and companies. They have an underlying justification, irrespective of current social and legal systems and economic and social conditions.

Marring trade union rights, missing or negligible social acceptance of labour organisations as well as restrictions and prohibitions from the state have accompanied trade unions and the international labour organisations since they were founded. Traditionally, the claim of ‘international solidarity’ belongs to the defense of trade union rights in their programs and policy, even though the chances for intervention and success thereof have been doubtful.

An important reason for this deficit in influence lies in the specific character of many trade union and human rights’ violations. The spectrum ranges far and includes unjustified notice given to trade unionists, playing for time or denying of wage negotiations, and the non-acknowledgement of trade unions; there are state restrictions imposed on organisational matters, there is control and regimentation of trade unions, intrusion in the right to industrial action; regimentation of national and international confederations of trade unions as well as the prohibition and repression of associations also number among them, as well as the persecution, arrest and assassination of trade unionists. This list goes to show that international labour organisations can hardly be expected to offer effective protection to their member associations or to prevent state repression.

Nevertheless, they had to approach questions of trade union and human rights and respective demands for intervention more intensively since the 1960s and 70s. The organisational requirement for this approach was the joining of trade unions from Africa, Asia and Latin America, which confronted all trade secretariats with the problem of massive restrictions of trade union rights. Growing expectations that the trade secretariats should intervene corresponded with developments that allowed them, at least in selected cases, to build an effective intervention strategy.

The chance of a more or less successful intervention in cases of trade union rights’ violations depends on two factors: (1) the actors and the conflict level (state/government or company/firm) and (2) the dimension of the conflict. The less specific a conflict and the violation of trade union rights, the less chances for trade secretariats to successfully intervene and support a member association.

22 Cf. IUL, Tagung der Exekutive, Geneva, 12.-13.4.1978, Unterlagen des Sekretariats, III/e.

23 Cf. ICFTU, Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights, Brussels 1985 ff.

To defend trade union rights, the trade secretariats have various means and methods at their disposal. Approach, efficiency and chances of success depend on the conflict level and the potential lobby. Next to protest resolutions aimed at a critical public opinion there are calls for boycotts, court appeals to the ILO committee for the freedom of association, various measures (protest, boycott, strike) aimed at the attitude of multinational companies. Interventions with multinational companies have proved to be relatively efficient – at least for the IUL – when the reason for the conflict was limited both locally and with regard to the subject matter. However, limits to their work are not only imposed on the trade secretariats by the conflict level of the trade union rights violation, but also by the resourcefulness and mobility of their member associations.

For individual conflicts – especially the fight against the apartheid policy in South Africa – some trade secretariats were able to mobilize amazing resources and to win the ongoing support of their member associations for the trade unions. Still, this very example of the long and multi-faceted campaign for the South African trade unions did not only show the possibilities the trade secretariats had at their disposal for mobilization, but also their limitations. The prerequisite for such an intensive engagement was a very special conflict constellation – which will hardly turn up again in a similar way and with a similar mobilization effect.

– *Counter power to multinational companies*

As the trade secretariats are “opponent-free” organisations on the international level, that is, as there is no organisation comparable to national employers’ associations to be opposed, multinational companies seemed to be welcome substitutes for agreements on tariffs which individual ITS attained to on the international level.

For most trade secretariats, dealing with multinational companies became more and more important with the growing number of

MNC in almost all economic sectors since the early 1960s. Even in the early 1960s, some ITS developed suggestions for international agreements and international tariff regulations. The formation of so-called company committees for some MNC since the early 1970s was a further effort for counter power, which in practice resulted in the occasional conference or exchange of information, though. Systematic information work was of more relevance, as it led to a comprehensive “MNC directory” made by the IUF, for instance, and laid the groundwork for concrete support of individual member associations, e.g. on the occasion of tariff conflicts.

Although counter power-ideas of the 1970s did not turn out to be realistic trade union policy perspectives, several ITS such as IMF, IUF, ICEF and some others won certain intervention capabilities with the MNC. This required the conflicts to be local and the relevant member associations to be influential and prepared to mobilize in the respective company. Actions were successful when conflicts concerned the work relations and tariff policy in branches. A formative MNC policy such as the tariff policy of the member associations on the national level has been out of reach for the trade secretariats so far. Some ITS succeeded in obtaining high mobilization results and somewhat surprising influence when MNC conflicts touched basic trade union and human rights (locally fenced-in).

The formation of “European Works Councils” and similar company-related consultation groups since the mid/end 1980s – promoted by the 1994 EU-regulation re. “Euro Works Councils” – seemed to imply that the trade union company structures called for in the 1970s had been created at last. The limited competence of these groups, even though it exceeds information and consultation levels and leads to framework agreements (e.g. on equal treatment regulations or qualification programs), goes to show that they are far from counter power, but groups which are supposed to channel conflicts by way of information and consultation.

Despite such limitations and changes in MNC policy, this field of action continues to have central importance for many ITS. It denotes their capability for action, coordination and intervention. Multinational companies play a marginal role for such ITS as the miners' international and the trade secretariat of textile, garment and leather workers (ITGLWF). The MIF has been dealing with the problem that the MNC posed for the representation of trade union interests, since the early 1970s. While MNC played no part for the European coal mining, most trade unions in ore mining were not able to establish initiatives or activities in the miners' international as ore mining is ruled by few companies with their mining done in Third World countries. The negligibility of the MNC problem also resulted from a pronounced state regimentation of mining which also included production and work conditions. Seeing a growing engagement of energy companies in coal mining and an increased concentration process in ore mining, representatives of the UMWA (United Mine Workers of America) demanded that MNC-activities be expanded when the IBV congress took place in Harare in 1989. Their implementation – apart from the fusion with the ICEF – was not carried out systematically. Still, the MIF succeeded in intervening in local tariff conflicts in multinational company outlets by mobilizing member associations and above all by publicity campaigns. Such actions were an exception for the MIF, however. – The ITGLWF, to give a second example, gained some public notice in spectacular conflicts in the 1970s (Farah and J.P. Stevens), but the specific structures of the branches – relatively small companies and little presence and economic weight in the industrial countries – prevented MNC activities of the textile and garment workers' international from becoming a central field

of action, as was the case with food and metal workers' internationals respectively.²⁴

– *International organisations: the ILO*

The representation and coordination of member associations in relations with international governmental organisations (IGO) constitute a task for international trade union organisations, which had been delivered – with various degrees of intensity – by ITS since the foundation of the International Workers' Organisation (1919) and the League of Nations. This task became more extensive after the Second World War with the founding of specialised international organisations. As early as the 1950s and 1960s, however, one could see that most ITS did not have personnel and material resources at their disposal which would have enabled them to lobby on a grand international scale. It was decisive for a concentration on a few international organisations that most of them have little competence and functions on the one hand, and complex and slow decision making processes to show for on the other hand, and that their representation structures do not offer national and international trade union organisations the chance for efficient lobbying. So the representation of most ITS interests is limited to a few international organisations.

Since the 1920s, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has been the centre of attention for many ITS regarding their representation in organisations. The programmatic aim of “Global promotion of social justice through the improvement of living and working conditions, creation of new professional activities and recognition of fundamental human rights” makes the ILO a forum for an international representation of employee concerns.²⁵ The tripartite structure of this UN organisation is favourable to this aim, as

24 Cf. re. ITGLWF: Werner Reutter: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen Internationaler Gewerkschaftspolitik. Geschichte, Struktur und Einfluß der Internationalen Textil-, Bekleidungs- und Lederarbeiter Vereinigung, Frankfurt a.M. 1998, p. 284-310.

25 G. Unser, Internationale Arbeitsorganisation/IAO, in: U. Andersen, W. Woyke (eds.), Handwörterbuch Internationale Organisationen, 2. Aufl., Opladen 1995, p. 149.

representatives of governments sit next to employers and trade unionists in most groups, and the agenda of the ILO includes the creation of international norms (by conventions and recommendations) of the labour law and social policy kind, as well as the development of international technical cooperation and scientific research, documentation and information on labour.

Next to efforts at the passing of conventions and recommendations, some ITS tried to use the ILO capacities for such specific problems as work safety, research into the prevention of accidents, occupational hazards, and so on.

While industry-related tasks of the ILO have lost their importance for some time, its function as political and trade union policy forum gained importance. Most trade secretariats cherish this function above all when they officially call on the ILO in cases of violations of the freedom of association in ratifying countries of ILO conventions. The ILO has no effective sanctions at its disposal to counteract such violations; however, the propaganda effect is enormous, as it repeatedly states the universal validity of trade union and human rights.

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Differences in trade union policy conceptions, in social frame conditions of national trade union policy, the indisputable autonomy of the member associations, these are the outlining factors for the ITS' powers of integration and action, although they have won some organisational autonomy since the 1950s, at least. The ITS obtained creative influence in Third World countries by means of their training and support activities, above all. Their long term perspective there is improving the representation of trade union interests on the national and international level, by promoting (if possible) industrial trade union structures and by strengthening their organisational acting powers. For trade unions in industrial countries, ITS structures matter mostly due to their information services and sometimes due to their coordinating role (in MNC interventions, mostly). Both imply that present ITS information and coordination activities are relevant above all to trade unions in Third World countries and (albeit weaker) to trade unions in Middle and Eastern Europe. So far, trade secretariats have not had indispensable lobby functions for most trade unions in industrialized countries, however: traditional solidarity still seems to be their underlying motif for membership, disposal of resources, mobilization and intervention activities.

