Between Global Standards and Unequal Treatment

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Between Global Standards and Unequal Treatment

The International Labour Organization and Racialised Labour, 1920s–1950s

By

Fabiana Kutsche

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To the child who always dreamt of becoming a writer.

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Acknowledgments

One of the oldest genealogical documents kept in my family's personal archive is a translated birth certificate of my maternal great-great-grandmother Wilhelmine, born in 1888 in the village that is today Chylice, south of Warsaw. The certificate, issued some time after her birth, lists her parents as illiterate day labourers and bears only the signature of the local pastor. Since then, over the course of several generations, members of my family have slowly but steadily ascended what is perceived as the social and educational ladder. I see the publication of this book, a revised version of my PhD dissertation titled "Between Global Standards and Unequal Treatment. The International Labour Organization and Racialised Labour, 1920s–1950s" and submitted in July 2025, as the most recent step in a long line of academic "firsts" that stretch back more than a century and that I consider important to acknowledge. Since Wilhelmine's birth, family members have gained access to formal schooling and vocational training, becoming craftsmen and skilled workers. Both of my parents, at least in the later stages of their careers, were the first in their families to move into office-based professions. I was the first in my immediate family to attend a *Gymnasium*, the first to obtain the *Abitur*, the first to go to university, to graduate from it and, eventually, to enrol in a PhD programme. Given how hierarchical and discriminatory the German school system continues to be, I recognise how unlikely this "success story" is. While I do not believe academic education to be inherently more valuable than other kinds of training and work, I am deeply grateful to have been given the chance to pursue a path that allowed me to study what I love. The opportunity to immerse myself in history has been a privilege.

This would not have been possible if my mother had not introduced me to the world of books, stories, literature and poetry, and installed in me, from an early age, a love of learning, reading and writing. Equally formative was my father's influence, whose own working life, ranging from helping in pubs as a child, to working in a sawmill and later in the metal industry, offered me insights into realities of labour that I have never experienced myself. From both my parents, I have inherited an appreciation for the importance of trade unions, works councils and class consciousness. I am grateful for the knowledge, stories and experiences they have shared with me. In addition to its focus on class and labour, this study also addresses questions of race. Throughout the main body of this book, I have largely adhered to the conventions of traditional *white* historical scholarship, which typically omit the author's voice and positionality—a methodological choice that is itself open

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for criticism. I therefore want to take this opportunity to explicitly acknowledge that my ability to write about processes of racialisation and racial dynamics has been fundamentally shaped by the work of Black scholars, indigenous scholars and scholars of Color. Over the past decade, their writings have deeply influenced my thinking, particularly in the realms of Critical Race Theory, Decolonial and Postcolonial Theory. That this knowledge was accessible to me, without being a matter of personal survival or identity, is itself indicative of my privileged position as a white academic. Much like many of the white historical actors discussed in this study, I did not have to engage with my own racial identity until I chose to do so in the context of critical self-reflection and political activism—symbolic for the continuous making invisible of whiteness as a supposedly neutral position. The racialisation and racism that this study analyses are thus not confined to the past but continue to structure academia and broader society today and express significant hierarchies of power.

Turning to the more concrete realities of this book, I wish to express my deep gratitude to all those who supported me throughout its development. First and foremost, I would like to thank Ulrike Lindner, my principal supervisor, for her invaluable guidance, honest feedback, encouragement and intellectual support throughout this project. Her insights have shaped this book in essential ways. I am also profoundly grateful to Daniel Maul, whose constructive comments and suggestions, sent from abroad in Oslo, were always encouraging and thought-provoking. I sincerely appreciate the time and care both of you have dedicated to this work. During the successful defence of my thesis at the University of Cologne (Germany) on October 22, 2025, the board members Prof. Dr. Ulrike Lindner, Prof. Dr. Daniel Maul, Prof. Dr. Michaela Pelican and Prof. Dr. Anke Ortlepp offered valuable and kind insights that helped me in the preparation of the final manuscript.

This research was made possible through the generous funding of the Volkswagen Foundation (Grant 96 966) and was conducted within the framework of the international and interdisciplinary research unit "The Production and Reproduction of Social Inequalities: Global Contexts and Concepts of Labor Exploitation". I have learned immensely from my colleagues in this group, including Tu T. Huynh, Jonathan Ngeh, Michaela Pelican, Ulrike Wesch, Meron Zeleke and our external supervisors Anne Kubai, Cynthia Pizarro and Marcel van der Linden. Our monthly discussions, research trips to the United Arab Emirates and Taiwan and collective reflections on why efforts to reduce inequality often end up reproducing it (a suggestion: capitalism is to blame) have been among the most enriching parts of this journey. Thank you for your academic inspiration and for the intellectually

stimulating environment you helped create. Special thanks go to Femke Jovy, Paula Rosenfeld and Greta Nowak, former student assistants and colleagues in our sub-project, whose research support has been truly indispensable.

I am grateful to the archivists and staff at the various institutions where I conducted research. In particular, I would like to thank Remo Becci and Jacques Rodriguez at the International Labour Organization Archives, who consistently made my work in Geneva not only productive but also enjoyable. I am equally thankful to the historians who gave me opportunities to present my work at conferences and colloquia, helping me sharpen my arguments and expand my perspectives. At the University of Cologne, I was fortunate to work in a supportive academic environment. Special thanks go to Juliane Hornung, Yağmur Karakis, Charlotte Mittelstedt, Paul Schrader and Antonia Schweim for making the institute a collegial and welcoming space and for reading and commenting on my work at various stages. Rabea Rittgerodt-Burke at de Gruyter Brill kindly supported the publication process and I would like to express my thanks to her, the blind peer-reviewers and also the editors of the series *Work in Global and Historical Perspective* for accepting my work. The Volkswagen Foundation and the University Library of the University of Cologne both kindly supported the publication of this book financially.

I am deeply thankful to the friends who have accompanied me through different phases of life. In particular, I would like to thank Merle Bode and Paul Schrader, who welcomed me to Cologne in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic when I knew no one. You have been not only wonderful colleagues and fellow PhD candidates but also cherished friends. Your continuous support means everything to me and I truly could not have done this without you. Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to Patrick, who has stood by my side throughout this entire project. Thank you for reminding me of the world beyond academia, for your love, your care and for being my home. And thank you for cooking—without you, I might have survived on muesli alone.

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Acronyms

AITUC	All-India Trade Union Congress
CCTA	Combined Commission for Technical Cooperation in Africa South of the Sahara
CPI	Communist Party of India
GB	Governing Body (ILO)
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ICI	International Colonial Institute
IFL	Indian Federation of Labour
ILC	International Labour Conference (ILO)
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILR	International Labour Review (ILO)
INC	Indian National Congress
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
IPR	Institute of Pacific Relations
ITUF	Indian Trade Union Federation
LAI	League Against Imperialism
LNU	League of Nations Union
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
NRC	Native Recruiting Corporation (South Africa)
NTUF	National Trades Union Federation (India)
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
OEEC	Organization for European Economic Co-operation
PMC	Permanent Mandates Commission (League of Nations)
PMFTU	Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions
PPTUS	Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat
SC	Scheduled Caste (India)
ST	Scheduled Tribe (India)
TAP	Technical Assistance Programme (ILO)
TUC	Trades Union Congress (Great Britain)
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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Introduction

When governmental, employers' and workers' representatives gathered for the twenty-fifth International Labour Conference (ILC) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva in June 1939, twenty years after the organisation had been founded, the geopolitical tensions that would culminate just three months later in Germany's invasion of Poland and thus mark the official beginning of the Second World War were already acutely felt. As early as 1935, Fascist Italy had invaded the Ethiopian Empire and by 1937, Japan's continued military aggression in the Chinese region of Manchuria had escalated into the Second Sino-Japanese War. In consequence of their fascist internationalism, Germany, Italy and Japan had all withdrawn from the ILO by 1939 and thereby sent a clear sign that the ideals of peaceful interwar internationalism, which had been central to the time around the ILO's foundation after the First World War, had failed. Nevertheless, participation at the June conference remained high and the assembly hall in Geneva was filled for what would be the last ILC before the outbreak of the war.

During the discussions surrounding the ILO Director-General's annual report, the Indian workers' representative R.S. Nimbkar took the floor. Nimbkar, a key figure in Bombay's emerging socialist student movement during the 1920s, brought with him nearly two decades of engagement in socialist, communist and labour activism in colonial India. Like many of his comrades, Nimbkar came from an upper-caste Brahmin background and was educated at the prestigious Wilson College in Bombay (now Mumbai). Over the years, he had played a pivotal role in the early trade union movement, had served as Secretary-General of the short-lived Workers and Peasants Party of India (1925–1929) and in 1939 represented the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) at the ILC.[1] In his speech, Nimbkar voiced pointed criticism of the ILO, focusing in particular on its Eurocentric policies and the demographic homogeneity of its conference delegates. Criticising the absence of non-white, colonised and female workers from the organisation's proceedings, he posed a direct challenge to his audience: "Do you hope to solve our problems without greater cooperation from the colonial and native workers and the women of the world?"[2]

1 Kooiman, Dick (1980): Bombay Communists and the 1924 Textile Strike. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 15(29), 1228–1229.

2 R.S. Nimbkar, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 76.

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His remarks targeted two distinct yet intertwined constituencies. On the one hand, they echoed longstanding calls, especially from Indian workers' delegates, for more equitable representation within the ILO, whose staffing, labour standards and policy frameworks had remained largely Eurocentric and racialised even two decades after its foundation. On the other hand, Nimbkar's critique was also directed at his fellow workers' representatives. Noting that, under the ILO's structure and persistent Eurocentrism, only the workers' delegations were seen as potential allies for colonised labour, he expressed disappointment in their failure to advocate for inclusion. Evoking a slogan that had, over the preceding ninety years, become emblematic of global working-class solidarity, Nimbkar insisted:

> For us the slogan "Workers of the World, Unite" has tremendous value. It is for the various working-class organisations of the world to see that the so-called backward workers are represented in this Conference. The proletariat of the world makes no difference theoretically amongst itself as to race, caste, creed or colour, and I hope that this will be put into practice at least in future sessions of the Conference.[3]

This call to action, directed at both the ILO and the global working-class shortly before the beginning of the Second World War, which marks approximately the midpoint of this study's time frame, highlights several issues central to this book.

At its core, the book examines the development and impact of racialised labour policies and discourses within the International Labour Organization between its founding in 1919 and the late 1950s. Established under the Treaty of Versailles, the ILO emerged as an international organisation dedicated to the regulation of labour conditions worldwide, responding to sustained demands from workers' organisations prior to, during and after the First World War.[4] The ILO's central objectives were to define and promote international standards of labour and to collect and disseminate information on global working conditions, while simultaneously positioning itself as an anti-

3 R.S. Nimbkar, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 76. The slogan 'Workers of the World, Unite' was first formulated by French socialist feminist Flora Tristan in 1843, although its widespread popularity is largely attributable to Karl Marx' and Friedrich Engels' publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848. Blomberg, Gisela (1998): Flora Tristan. A Predecessor of Marx and Engels. In: *Nature, Society, and Thought* 11(1), 5–6.

4 Maul, Daniel (2019): The International Labour Organization. 100 Years of Global Social Policy. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter; Geneva: ILO, 4–5. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650723.

communist counter-model to the newly established Soviet Union. Structured as a tripartite institution, the ILO brought together representatives of governments, employers' organisations and trade unions from its member states. It continues to consist of three principal bodies: an International Labor Office as its permanent secretariat based in Geneva, the Governing Body as its executive organ and the annual International Labour Conferences, at which all delegations convene.

This study's understanding of racialised labour draws on the concept of racialisation. In its contemporary usage, the concept originates in anti-colonial and sociological theories of the second half of the twentieth century, including the work of Frantz Fanon.[5] It was further developed within Critical Race Theory, which emerged in the United States in the 1980s as a strand of Critical Legal Studies developed by Black scholars to expose the discriminatory structures embedded in US law.[6] Adapted for use in critical historical scholarship on international organisations, in this book, the concept of racialisation is employed to emphasise that race is not an inherent, biologically determined category, but rather a socially constructed position shaped by historically contingent and globally embedded hierarchies of power.[7] In this process, individuals are ascribed with presumed racial characteristics and transformed into racialised objects—race is done to them. The concept is thus applied in a broader sense, extending beyond the historical study of legal instruments and jurisprudence. By drawing attention to the active nature of racial construction, the concept shifts the analytical focus towards the agents of this process, the racialising subjects. These subjects, who assign and enforce racial difference, often occupy a historically unmarked and thus invisible position. It is this invisibility that scholars of Critical Whiteness Studies seek to address by calling for the systematic analysis of whiteness, not as a neutral or default category, but as a position of power that must itself be made visible and critically scrutinised.[8]

5 Barot, Rohit & Jon Bird (2001): Racialization. The Genealogy and Critique of a Concept. In: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24(4), 611. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870120049806.

6 Brown, Kevin & Darrell D. Jackson (2013): The History and Conceptual Elements of Critical Race Theory. In: Dixon, A.D. & M. Lynn (eds.): Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education. New York, NY: Routledge, 13.

7 Delgado, Richard & Jean Stefancic (2017): Critical Race Theory. An Introduction. New York, NY: New York University Press, 182.

8 Arndt, Susan & Peggy Piesche (2019): Weißsein. Die Notwendigkeit Kritischer Weißseinsforschung. In: Arndt, S. & N. Ofuatey-Alazard (eds.): Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht. (K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv deutsche Sprache. Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk. Münster: Unrast, 192–193.

Connecting concepts and insights from Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory with the historical subject of international labour regulation in the first half of the twentieth century, this book interrogates how beliefs about racial difference were intrinsically linked to assumptions about the suitability for capitalist production and articulated in an international context.[9] The study is structured in two parts, the first covering the period from the ILO's inception in 1919 to 1939 and the second from 1940 to the late 1950s, when the organisation dismantled its system of separate treatment for colonised territories. It explores how a wide range of actors connected to the ILO, including its staff, governmental, employers' and workers' delegates, as well as correspondents, supporters and critics, engaged with the relationship between race and labour. While colonial labour forms a central focus, as it most clearly exposed the asymmetries of power underpinning these discussions, the study also considers the role of selected independent member states with predominantly non-white populations in Asia and Africa, such as Japan and China, and the special case of South Africa.[10]

In this context, India features especially prominently. As the ILO's only non-sovereign member state, it occupied a unique position that bridged colonial and non-colonial debates about racialised labour and tripartism, making it particularly suited to sustained analysis across two dedicated chapters. As illustrated by R.S. Nimbkar's 1939 speech, Indian workers' representatives, despite internal disputes over the future political direction of the Indian labour movement, frequently challenged the status quo within the ILO. As one of the earliest countries to gain independence during the global wave of decolonisation following the Second World War, India thus provides a critical case for examining the ILO's evolving approach to race, labour and imperial governance. Overall, the study connects the fields of colonial history and global labour history with histories of knowledge and historical discourse analysis to provide an innovative and critical history of an international orga-

9 For an introduction to the application of postcolonial theories to historical scholarship, see Olaf Kaltmeier (2012): Postkoloniale Geschichte(n). Repräsentationen, Temporalitäten und Geopolitiken des Wissens. In: Reuter, J. & A. Karentzos (eds.): Schlüsselwerke der Postcolonial Studies. Wiesbaden: Springer, 203–214. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-93453-2_16, and Benjamin Zachariah (2013): Postcolonial Theory and History. In: Partner, N. & S. Foot (eds.): The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory. London: SAGE Publications, 378–396. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446247563.n23.

10 For reasons of scope, this study can only address selected regions in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Other examples, such as Latin America, are nevertheless referenced where appropriate throughout the book, for example in later discussions of indigeneity.

nisation in the twentieth century.[11] It also adds to contemporary debates in international, transnational, transimperial and diplomatic history, broadening the understanding of diplomatic actors and highlighting how racialised discourses shaped international relations between colonial powers and beyond.[12]

State of Research

Over the past two decades, a substantial body of literature has examined the international and global historical conditions that shaped the immediate period after the First World War, including the Paris Peace Negotiations of 1919, the Treaty of Versailles and the founding and subsequent histories of the League of Nations and the ILO.[13] Scholarly interest in these topics was further invigorated by the events' centenary in 2019. Frequently referred to as the "Wilsonian Moment", coined after US president Woodrow Wilson,

11 For an introduction to global labour history, see Marcel van der Linden (2008): Workers of the World. Essays toward a Global Labor History. Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004166837.i-472.

12 Hedinger, Daniel & Nadin Heé (2018): Transimperial History. Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition. In: *Journal of Modern European History* 16(4), 430. https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2018-4-429, and Falko Schnicke (2024): Editorial. Expanding, Opening and Pluralizing. New Diplomatic History as a Comprehensive Approach. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 25(2), 15. https://doi.org/10.25365/oezg-2024-35-2-1.

13 On the founding history of the ILO, see Antony Alcock (1971): History of the International Labour Organisation. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 3–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-01136-0, Jasmien Van Daele (2005): Engineering Social Peace. Networks, Ideas, and the Founding of the International Labour Organization. In: *International Review of Social History* 50(3), 435–466. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859005002178, Reiner Tosstorff (2005): The International Trade Union Movement and the Foundation of the International Labour Organization. In: *International Review of Social History* 50(3), 399–433. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859005002166, Olga Hidalgo-Weber (2013): Social and Political Networks and the Creation of the ILO. The Role of British Actors. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 17–31. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_2, Sandrine Kott (2015): From Transnational Reformist Network to International Organization. The International Association for Labour Legislation and the International Labour Organization 1900–1930s. In: Rodogno, D., B. Struck & J. Vogel (eds.): Shaping the Transnational Sphere. Experts, Networks and Issues from the 1840s to the 1930s. New York, NY/Oxford: Berghahn, 239–258. http://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qdg45.18, and Daniel Maul (2020): Die Internationale Gewerkschaftsbewegung und die Gründung der ILO 1919. In: Berger, S., W. Jäger & A. Kruke (eds.): Gewerkschaften in revolutionären Zeiten – Europa 1917 bis 1923. Essen: Klartext Verlag, 143–155.

the year 1919 is now widely recognised as a significant turning point in global history.[14] Yet a comprehensive study of the ILO's role in this context, particularly its entanglements with racialised and colonial power relations, which profoundly influenced the early twentieth century, remains lacking. Key areas such as colonial and anti-colonial activism, racial politics, imperial oversight and the ILO's engagement with non-European countries, especially in Africa and Asia, are still understudied. This book seeks to address these research gaps. The following section therefore outlines several strands of recent scholarship that situate the ILO's relationship to racialisation and colonialism within broader geopolitical and historical contexts. These particularly concern the significance of 1919 in relation to anti-colonial activism and politics of race, the colonial dimensions of the League of Nations and the ILO and India's distinctive role during the peace negotiations and within the emerging international system.

For many nationalist movements in colonised regions, a crucial turning point came with the entry of the principle of political "self-determination" into global discourse in 1918. First articulated by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and soon after popularised by US president Woodrow Wilson in his famous "Fourteen Points" speech, Wilson's words were widely interpreted by nationalists as an endorsement of their aspirations for independence.[15] Although the principle was originally intended only for the former territories of the defeated Central Powers, many in Asia and Africa took it as a promise of broader decolonisation.[16] In reality, however, Wilson's application of the concept excluded colonised peoples, exposing a gap between rhetorical ideals and political practice. At the same time, various anti-colonial movements emerged, cooperated and competed with one another. In both the United States and in Europe, Black activists in the diaspora had

14 Manela, Erez (2007): The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

15 Originally, the idea of "self-determination" had been introduced by Vladimir Lenin during the Russian Bolshevik Revolution but underwent a significant transformation when it was adopted by Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson. Manela, Erez (2007): Dawn of a New Era. The 'Wilsonian Moment' in Colonial Contexts and the Transformation of World Order, 1917–1929. In: Conrad, S. & D. Sachsenmaier (eds.): Competing Visions of World Order. Global Moments and Movements 1880s–1930s. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 126. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604285_5. For a more extensive history of the concept, see Bradley R. Simpson (2025): The First Right. Self-Determination and the Transformation of International Order, 1941–2000. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2–15. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780199944408.001.0001.

16 Manela, Erez (2007): The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4.

begun to form networks promoting Pan-African solidarity and community.[17] Disillusioned with Wilson's conservative stance on race, as shown in his politics in the US, figures like the US sociologist, historian and Civil Rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963) sought to influence international institutions, independently attending the Paris Peace Conference.[18] In contrast, Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) pursued a more radical vision, advocating for the end of European colonial rule and the creation of a unified Africa based on Black racial purity.[19] Although both Du Bois and Garvey aimed to improve the conditions of Africans and the African diaspora, they often fundamentally disagreed on methods and ideology. Ideas of Pan-Africanism did not always align with explicit demands for colonial self-determination.[20]

Similarly, from the 1870s and 1880s onwards, Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism emerged as influential intellectual frameworks among Asian and Arab elites. These ideologies promoted modernising reforms inspired by European models while rejecting the orientalist narratives of inherent Asian or Arab inferiority and other racialised stereotypes.[21] After the First World War, Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic discourses gained renewed traction, further fuelled by the brutality of European warfare, which led some to argue that moral

17 For an introduction, see Hakim Adi (2018): Pan-Africanism. A History. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

18 Simões de Araújo, Caio (2019): Between Race, Nation, and Empire. Tensions of (Inter-) Nationalism in the Early Interwar Period, 1919–23. In: Payk, M.M. & R. Pergher (eds.): Beyond Versailles. Sovereignty, Legitimacy, and the Formation of New Politics after the Great War. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 167. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfc55kd.12, Sarah Claire Dunstan (2021): Race, Rights and Reforms. Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 14–29. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108764971, and Fabiana Kutsche & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Discussing the 'Most Important Question of the 20th Century'. W. E. B. Du Bois and the ILO's Efforts for a Regulation of 'Native Labor' Politics, 1919–1926. In: *ZANJ. The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 8(1–2), 91–93. https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobsoutstud.8.1.0006.

19 On Garvey's biography, see Colin Grant (2008): Negro with a Hat. The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey and His Dream of Mother Africa. London: Jonathan Cape, and Adam Ewing (2014): The Age of Garvey. How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9781400852444.

20 Wagner, Florian (2023): Ermächtigungsfrieden oder Ernüchterungserlebnis? 1919 aus afrikanischer und panafrikanistischer Sicht. In: Leonhard, J. (ed.): Große Erwartungen – 1919 und die Neuordnung der Welt. Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 171. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110653359-008.

21 Aydın, Cemil (2006): Beyond Civilization. Pan-Islamism, Pan-Asianism and the Revolt against the West. In: *Journal of Modern European History* 4(2), 205. https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944_2006_2_204.

leadership should now come from Asia. In this context, concepts of "civilisation" became pluralised, countering the nineteenth-century Eurocentric model based on material progress with more diverse interpretations grounded in cultural, spiritual and ethical values.[22] While some saw the results of the war as a call to strengthen intra-Asian solidarity, others regarded the newly established League of Nations and its affiliated institutions as potential platforms for internationalist reform and for enhancing Asia's global standing.[23]

Across Asia, Japan, the only non-white Allied power, was most directly involved in the 1919 Paris Peace Negotiations. Among the major demands it submitted to the negotiating parties was the inclusion of a racial equality clause in the League of Nations Covenant which sparked considerable debate and was ultimately rejected.[24] Historians have interpreted Japan's racial equality proposal as both a strategic bargaining tool and a limited appeal for equal treatment of Japanese nationals, rather than a universal call for racial justice. Scholars like Naoko Shimazu have emphasised that Japan's goal was to affirm its status as a great power, not to challenge global racial hierarchies—hierarchies Japan itself upheld in its treatment of other Asians.[25] The proposal's failure was further attributed to widespread Western fears of Asian immigration and Japan's relatively weak delegation, composed mainly of bureaucrats, lacking public diplomacy skills and isolated from the press.[26] The rejection of the clause thus stemmed from a mix of geopolitical, racial and procedural factors.

22 Duara, Prasenjit (2004): The Discourse of Civilization and Decolonization. In: *Journal of World History* 15(1), 3. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2004.0006.

23 Aydın, Cemil (2006): Beyond Civilization. Pan-Islamism, Pan-Asianism and the Revolt against the West. In: *Journal of Modern European History* 4(2), 217–219. https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944_2006_2_204, and Erez Manela (2019): Asia in the Global 1919. Reimagining Territory, Identity, and Solidarity. In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78(2), 411–412. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911819000081.

24 Kawamura, Noriko (1997): Wilsonian Idealism and Japanese Claims at the Paris Peace Conference. In: *Pacific Historical Review* 66(4), 512. https://doi.org/10.2307/3642235.

25 Shimazu, Naoko (1998): Japan, Race and Equality. The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919. London: Routledge, 166. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203207178, and Nadin Heé (2012): Imperiales Wissen und koloniale Gewalt. Japans Herrschaft in Taiwan 1895–1945. Frankfurt: Campus, 29–49.

26 Allerfeldt, Kristofer (2004): Wilsonian Pragmatism? Woodrow Wilson, Japanese Immigration, and the Paris Peace Conference. In: *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 15(3), 546. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290490498866, Naoko Shimazu (1998): Japan, Race and Equality. The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919. London: Routledge, 169. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203207178, Naoko Shimazu (2017): A Cultural History of Diplomacy. Reassessing the Japanese 'Performance' at the Paris Peace Conference. In: Zachmann, U.M. (ed.): Asia after Versailles. Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919–33. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 107–109. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474417174-009, and Harumi Goto-Shibata (2020): The League of Nations and the East

For Japan, the episode came to symbolise the limitations of its diplomatic power and fed long-term frustrations with the racial biases of the emerging post-war order that would also reappear in its relation to the ILO.[27]

In sum, the League and the ILO emerged as international organisations that, on the one hand, promised accessibility and an ostensibly equal approach to global political questions, but, on the other hand, not only rejected Japan's proposed racial equality clause but also ultimately disappointed the aspirations of Pan-African, Pan-Asian, Pan-Islamic and other anti-colonial activists who had hoped for a global transformation through the Paris Peace Treaty and the new international bodies. Yet these movements articulated a wide spectrum of discourses, ideologies and positions that came to shape interwar internationalism, and their histories remain vital for understanding the complex intersections of race, empire and global governance in the 1920s and beyond. Although the histories of both the League of Nations and the ILO have attracted growing scholarly attention in recent years, far less is known about how these organisations, particularly the ILO, were perceived by non-European and non-white actors around the world.[28] Conceived as a body through which a variety of actors sought to institutionalise global labour relations, and with labour itself understood as a central force structuring relations between rulers and ruled, colonisers and colonised, the ILO's position within diverse anti-colonial and anti-Eurocentric movements and discourses poses an important research question.

The establishment of the League of Nations also marked the inception of an international system of colonial oversight. Its Mandates System was developed to safeguard the interests of so-called "backward peoples" inhabiting

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Asian Imperial Order, 1920–1946. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 26–28. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4968-7.

27 Shimazu, Naoko (2017): A Cultural History of Diplomacy. Reassessing the Japanese 'Performance' at the Paris Peace Conference. In: Zachmann, U.M. (ed.): Asia after Versailles. Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919–33. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 116. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474417174-009. A more positive perspective on the Japan's relationship with the League is articulated in Thomas W. Burkman (2008): Japan and the League of Nations. Empire and World Order, 1914–1938. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 210. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824829827.001.0001.

28 Among the few exceptions already concerned with this question are Ulrike Davy (2023): Decolonizing Equality – The Legacies of Anti-Colonial Struggles at International Labour Conferences, 1920–1940. In: *Human Rights Law Review* 23(3), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngad017, and Fabiana Kutsche & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Discussing the 'Most Important Question of the 20th Century'. W. E. B. Du Bois and the ILO's Efforts for a Regulation of 'Native Labor' Politics, 1919–1926. In: *ZANJ. The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 8(1–2), 79–104. https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobsoutstud.8.1.0006.

former German and Ottoman territories deemed unfit for self-government.[29] By appointing member states as mandatories, the League instituted a new form of international supervision over colonial administration. This system was monitored by the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC) and mandates were categorised into "A" mandates, consisting of former Ottoman territories deemed provisionally ready for independence, "B" mandates, covering Germany's former colonies in East (German East-Africa), West (Togo) and Central Africa (Cameroon), and "C" mandates, which included the Pacific islands and South-West Africa.[30] The League's PMC was composed largely of former diplomats and colonial officials nominated by their respective governments but also included representatives from the ILO. There was considerable overlap between the work of the Mandates Section and the colonial labour section in the ILO. Both departments were heavily engaged in information gathering, identifying reliable sources and interlocutors, monitoring relevant academic literature and participating in scholarly and philanthropic networks. Both drew their experts from a common pool of (often retired) colonial administrators and each was represented on the others' commissions.[31]

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29 Florian Wagner points out the ideological origins of the Mandates System in Pan-Africanist thought. In the late nineteenth century, Pan-Africanist activists in the diaspora had similarly suggested the creation of a central "Negro State" on Congolese grounds, in which they hoped to "civilise" Africans to Western standards. Wagner, Florian (2023): Ermächtigungsfrieden oder Ernüchterungserlebnis? 1919 aus afrikanischer und panafrikanistischer Sicht. In: Leonhard, J. (ed.): Große Erwartungen – 1919 und die Neuordnung der Welt. Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 180–182. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110653359-008.

30 N.N. (1920): The Covenant of the League of Nations. In: *League of Nations Official Journal*, 9. For an overview over the vast literature on the Mandates System, see Michael D. Callahan (1999): Mandates and Empire. The League of Nations and Africa, 1914–1931. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, Zara Steiner (2005): The Lights That Failed. European International History, 1919–1933. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 43–44, Daniel Gorman (2005): Liberal Internationalism, the League of Nations Union, and the Mandates System. In: *Canadian Journal of History* 40(3), 449–477. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjh.40.3.449, Susan Pedersen (2006): The Meaning of the Mandates System. An Argument. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 32(4), 560–582, Mark Mazower (2009): No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations. Oxford/Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 40–51, and Sean Andrew Wempe (2019): A League to Preserve Empires. Understanding the Mandates System and Avenues for Further Scholarly Inquiry. In: *American Historical Review* 124(5), 1723–1731. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhz1027.

31 Pedersen, Susan (2015): The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 52. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199570485.001.0001, and Véronique Dimier (2020): The Mandates Commission, International

When the ILO began addressing colonial labour issues, its approach was inextricably linked to the League's framework and personnel. Especially in the early years, the ILO's colonial engagement must be understood in conjunction with the League's broader imperial architecture, even if this was at times detested by ILO officials. Over time, the ILO gradually built its own institutional relationship with colonial powers. This process was facilitated by the creation of a specialised section concerned with colonial labour that will be discussed later. Several scholarly contributions have situated the ILO's colonial involvement within the wider context of interwar internationalism and the League's institutional legacy.[32] Much of the historiography has focused on the processes leading to the adoption of labour conventions and recommendations tailored specifically to colonial contexts, particularly through collaboration with colonial experts. The work of historians Daniel Maul and Susan Zimmermann has been especially influential in this regard, analysing the 1930 Forced Labour Convention and similar instruments from the late 1930s.[33] At

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Bureaucracies and the Legitimacy Trap. The Use and Misuse of Expertise and Comparisons. In: Bourmaud, P. et al. (eds.): Experts Et Expertise Dans Les Mandats De La Société Des Nations. Figures, Champs, Outils. Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 213–227. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pressesinalco.38512.

32 Zimmermann, Susan (2010): 'Special Circumstances' in Geneva. The ILO and the World of Non-Metropolitan Labour in the Interwar Years. In: van der Linden, M., J. van Daele, M. Rodriguez Garcia & G. van Goethem (eds.): ILO Histories. Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century. Berne: Peter Lang, 221–250, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo (2020): Developing Civilisation? Imperial Internationalism at the League of Nations (1920s–1930s). In: *Histoire Politique* 41. https://doi.org/10.4000/histoirepolitique.385, and Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo (2020): Imperial Internationalisms in the 1920s. The Shaping of Colonial Affairs at the League of Nations. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48(5), 866–891. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2020.1816620.

33 Maul, Daniel (2007): The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present. In: *Labor History* 48(4), 477–500. https://doi.org/10.1080/00236560701580275, J.P. Daughton (2013): ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Interwar Years. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 85–97. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_6, Susan Zimmermann (2016): Night Work for White Women and Bonded Labour for 'Native' Women? Contentious Traditions and the Globalization of Gender-Specific Labour Protection and Legal Equality Politics, 1926 to 1939. In: Kimble, S.L. & M. Röwekamp (eds.): New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 394–427, Susan Zimmermann (2018): Globalizing Gendered Labour Policy. International Labour Standards and the Global South, 1919–1947. In: Boris, E., D. Hoehtker & S. Zimmermann (eds.): Women's ILO. Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present. Leiden: Brill, 227–254. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004360433_011, Christopher Gevers (2022): Refiguring Slavery Through International Law. The 1926 Slavery Conven-

the national level, more comprehensive studies have examined the ILO's relationship with specific colonial powers, most notably Great Britain, Portugal and South Africa.[34] Over the past decade, case studies have increasingly addressed how these colonial labour standards affected colonised populations, with notable research on the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Kenya, Nigeria and the African continent more broadly.[35] Finally, an important strand of more recent scholarship has turned to the discursive shifts towards modernisation and development, which accompanied the era of beginning decolonisation.[36] Particularly significant here are Véronique Plata-Stenger's work on

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tion, the 'Native Labor Code' and Racial Capitalism. In: *Journal of International Economic Law* 25(2), 312–333. https://doi.org/10.1093/jiel/jgac024, Ali Hammoudi (2022): International Order and Racial Capitalism. The Standardization of 'Free Labour' Exploitation in International Law. In: *Leiden Journal of International Law* 35(4), 779–799. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156522000218, and Christopher M. Roberts (2025): Re-Covering Forced Labour. Colonial Foreclosures and Forgotten Potentials. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law Research Paper 2025-1. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5079594.

34 Schweizer, Andrea (2005): Zwischen Rassismus, Markt und Menschenrechten. Das internationale Regime zur Kontrakt- und Zwangsarbeit im südlichen Afrika 1919–1944. Zurich: Chronos, Olga Hidalgo-Weber (2017): La Grande-Bretagne et l'Organisation Internationale du Travail (1919–1946). Une Nouvelle Forme D'Internationalisme. Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, and José Pedro Monteiro (2023): The Internationalisation of the 'Native Labour' Question in Portuguese Late Colonialism, 1945–1962. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05140-1.

35 Kunkel, Sarah (2018): Forced Labour, Roads, and Chiefs. The Implementation of the ILO Forced Labour Convention in the Gold Coast. In: *International Review of Social History* 63(3), 449–476. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859018000524, Opolot Okia (2019): Labor in Colonial Kenya after the Forced Labor Convention, 1930–1963. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17608-2, Sacha Hepburn & April Jackson (2022): Colonial Exceptions. The International Labour Organization and Child Labour in British Africa, c. 1919–1940. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 57(2), 218–241. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094209880 63, and Adewumi Damilola Adebayo (2022): The ILO and the Political Economy of Labour Policy Making in Nigeria, 1930–1960. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 50(2), 348–382. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2021.2020405. More broadly, see Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo & José Pedro Monteiro (2020): International Organizations in Colonial Africa. In: Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.440, and Kevin Grant (2022): The League of Nations, the International Labour Organization, and Slavery in Africa. In: Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.948.

36 For a general overview, see Marc Frey, Sönke Kunkel & Corinna R. Unger (2014): Introduction. International Organizations, Global Development, and the Making of the Contemporary World. In: Frey, M., S. Kunkel & C.R. Unger (eds.): International Organizations and Development. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137437549_1, Eva-Maria Muschik (2022): Special Issue Introduction. Towards a Global History of International Organizations and Decolonization. In: *Journal of Global*

the period between 1930 and 1946, and Daniel Maul's seminal study covering the broader period from 1940 to 1970.[37] Most recently, Amalia Ribi Forclaz has examined the shift towards development in a study on the ILO's handling of agricultural labour.[38]

Colonialism, imperialism and race were thus among the foundational concerns for both the League of Nations and the ILO. Through the creation of specialised research units and expert bodies, these organisations became key sites for the institutionalised production and exchange of knowledge about the living and working conditions in colonial territories. Their policies were shaped by prevailing racialised and racist assumptions regarding the supposed inferiority of colonised populations, as evident in the League's Mandates System and the ILO's colonial labour legislation. Both institutions thus provide important case studies for examining trans- and international debates on colonial governance and racial hierarchies in the aftermath of the First World War. Especially the racialised discourses circulating within ILO bodies and the organisation's specialised colonial structures, such as expert committees and their entanglements with imperial powers have yet to be comprehensively analysed and embedded in wider discussions about formal and informal diplomacies between states, empires and agents from civil society.[39] This is the case both at the micro level and in terms of longer-term continuities from the colonial to the postcolonial period.

History 17(2), 173–190. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022822000043, and Sabine Selchow & Glenda Sluga (2024): Development, International Organizations and International Economic Thinking. A Conceptual Contribution. In: *Yearbook for the History of Global Development* 3, 23–42. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111280356-002.

37 Maul, Daniel (2009): 'Help Them Move the ILO Way'. The International Labor Organization and the Modernization Discourse in the Era of Decolonization and the Cold War. In: *Diplomatic History* 33(3), 387–404. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00777.x, Daniel Maul (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638, Guy Fiti Sinclair (2018): A 'Civilizing Task'. The International Labour Organization, Social Reform, and the Genealogy of Development. In: *Journal of the History of International Law* 20(2), 145–197. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15718050-20021013, and Véronique Plata-Stenger (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323.

38 Ribi Forclaz, Amalia (2025): Cultivating Fields of Progress. Agriculture and the International Labour Organization, 1920s–1950s. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191945014.001.0001.

39 On diplomatic actors beyond governments and formal negotiations, see Falko Schnicke (2024): Editorial. Expanding, Opening and Pluralizing. New Diplomatic History as a Comprehensive Approach. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 25(2), 7. https://doi.org/10.25365/oezg-2024-35-2-1.

When the League of Nations and the ILO were established in 1919, India assumed a distinctive and complex position within the emerging international system. Its participation in these organisations was contested and intersected with broader debates on Pan-Asianism, anti-Western sentiment and internationalism. From the late nineteenth century onwards, Pan-Asian or Asianist ideas had gained traction on the Indian subcontinent, as elsewhere. Japan, in particular, was admired by many Indian intellectuals for its political, technical and economic modernisation. Its victory in the Russo-Japanese War and role in the First World War were viewed as demonstrations of Asian capability and facilitated the spread of Pan-Asian thought in India.[40] But while Japan's advocacy for a racial equality clause at the League of Nations was widely celebrated, it also provoked anxiety regarding the country's imperial ambitions, raising concerns that international protection might be needed against such regional expansionism.[41] At the same time, Indian nationalist leaders, including Mohandas Gandhi and those of the Indian National Congress (INC), supported India's participation in the First World War in the hope that this would hasten the promise of self-rule and a British withdrawal.[42] India's contribution to the war effort was substantial: over one million Indian soldiers served and many more participated as labourers. This participation earned India a place at the 1917 meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet and the expanded cabinet of 1918, which, in turn, led to its invitation to the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919.[43] Through its signature of the Treaty of Versailles, which incorporated the League Covenant, India became formally eligible for membership in both the League and ILO. Nevertheless, this inclusion remained contested, as Article 1 of the League Covenant stipulated that membership was limited to "fully self-governing State[s] or Dominion[s] or Colonies[s]"—a definition that non-sovereign India did not strictly meet.[44] India's international standing was therefore defined by an uneasy tension.

40 For an introduction, see Carolien Stolte & Harald Fischer-Tiné (2012): Imagining Asia in India. Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905–1940). In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54(1), 65–92. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417511000594.

41 Framke, Maria (2011): Vorbild oder Feindbild? Die Wahrnehmung Japans in Indien von 1915 bis 1920. In: *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung* 34, 107, 110–111, 115.

42 Manela, Erez (2019): Asia in the Global 1919. Reimagining Territory, Identity, and Solidarity. In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78(2), 410. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911819000081.

43 McQuade, Joseph (2020): Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy. India at the League of Nations, 1919–1946. In: *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48(2), 268. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1689617.

44 N.N. (1920): The Covenant of the League of Nations. In: *League of Nations Official Journal*, 3.

While officially recognised as a member of the new international organisations, it was yet constrained by the realities of continued colonial subjugation.

Internally, India's colonial status and its perceived potential for self-rule were equally central to political debate during a period of constitutional reform. The Government of India Act of 1919, commonly referred to as the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, introduced a system of dyarchy that promised to grant Indian elites an expanded role in governance. Under this arrangement, provincial governments assumed responsibility for areas such as education, public health, public works and agriculture, while control over the military, finance and foreign affairs remained firmly in British hands.[45] Presented as a step towards the "progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire", Montagu's initiative sought to foster a form of political tutelage among Indian elites.[46] Notably, the language of "self-government" was omitted from the Act—an exclusion that drew criticism from Indian nationalists, most prominently Mohandas Gandhi.[47] In this context, Gandhi repurposed the Wilsonian principle of self-determination, which had been widely invoked during the peace negotiations, to advance his own demands for Indian *swaraj* (self-rule). While until the 1930s, Gandhi's conceptualisation of *swaraj* did not necessarily entail a complete break with the British Empire, his critique underscored the contested and divergent interpretations of self-determination circulating during the interwar period.[48] In this way, debates over India's future unfolded both within domestic constitutional reforms and in the broader international arena.

Throughout the interwar period, India's position in the League remained contested. While granted quasi-sovereign rights in external League matters, India lacked internal autonomy and was required to follow the British government's directives, with its delegations led by British officials until 1929.[49] Its complex political geography, comprising directly ruled British India and indi-

45 Legg, Stephen (2016): Dyarchy. Democracy, Autocracy, and the Scalar Sovereignty of Interwar India. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 36(1), 45. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-3482111.

46 N.N. (n.d.): Government of India Act, 1919. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 3.

47 Ghosh, Durba (2019): Whither India? 1919 and the Aftermath of the First World War. In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78(2), 391. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911819000044.

48 Grant, Kevin & Lisa Trivedi (2006): A Question of Trust. The Government of India, the League of Nations, and Mohandas Gandhi. In: Douglas, R.M., M.D. Callahan & E. Bishop (eds.): Imperialism on Trial. International Oversight of Colonial Rule in Historical Perspective. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 30.

49 Grant, Kevin & Lisa Trivedi (2006): A Question of Trust. The Government of India, the League of Nations, and Mohandas Gandhi. In: Douglas, R.M., M.D. Callahan & E. Bishop

rectly governed Princely States, further complicated India's international status. Although the League delegation included representatives from the Princely States, British officials often argued for their exclusion from League conventions on the grounds of developmental "backwardness". As a result, the image of Indian unity presented internationally marked deep internal divisions.[50] Over time, Indian nationalist leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, criticised the League as an imperialist tool, citing India's unique status as the only non-self-governing member and the League's failures during international crises.[51] However, recent scholarship has emphasised the importance of informal and transnational forms of engagement, such as the League of Nations Union in India and petitions submitted by Indians, arguing that the relationship between India and the League retained more complex and meaningful than previously assumed.[52]

Although some research exists on India's standing in the League, India's relationship with the ILO remains a notably understudied area of historical research.[53] While some references to India appear in broader studies of the ILO's colonial engagement, these are often limited in scope. Several older accounts summarise key moments in India's ILO history, though they tend to lack critical analysis and are sometimes authored by ILO staff, thereby serv-

(eds.): Imperialism on Trial. International Oversight of Colonial Rule in Historical Perspective. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 26.

50 Legg, Stephen (2014): An International Anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's Princely Geographies. In: *Journal of Historical Geography* 43, 106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2013.03.002, and Amritha V. Shenoy (2018): The Centenary of the League of Nations. Colonial India and the Making of International Law. In: *Asian Yearbook of International Law* 24, 6–9. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004437784_002.

51 Nehru, Jawaharlal (1934/2003): Glimpses of World History. New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund/ Oxford University Press, 683. See also Stephen Legg (2014): An International Anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's Princely Geographies. In: *Journal of Historical Geography* 43, 100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2013.03.002, Maria Framke (2017): India's Freedom and the League of Nations. Public Debates, 1919–1933. In: Zachmann, U.M. (ed.): Asia after Versailles. Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919–33. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 126, and Joseph McQuade (2020): Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy. India at the League of Nations, 1919–1946. In: *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48(2), 275. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1689617.

52 McQuade, Joseph (2020): Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy. India at the League of Nations, 1919–1946. In: *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48(2), 278, 282. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1689617.

53 Apart from the literature cited already, the most recent contribution on India in the League is Thomas Gidney (2025): An International Anomaly. Colonial Accession to the League of Nations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781009584432.

ing more as primary than secondary sources.[54] A handful of scholarly articles offer introductory overviews and some examine the ILO's influence on labour law.[55] Significant contributions come from economist Jayasankar Krishnamurty, whose work provides foundational insights into the history of Indian staff at the ILO.[56] Beyond this, the ILO features more prominently within the broader and comparatively rich field of Indian labour history, which lies outside the scope of this review and will instead be discussed throughout the book.

As a result, India represents a compelling yet understudied case within the international system of the interwar period. Positioned at the intersection of British imperial control, aspirations for international participation and the influence of Pan-Asian and anti-colonial thought, India offers a dynamic lens through which to examine the entanglements of colonialism and internationalism. Its unique status as a member of both the League of Nations and the ILO afforded India rare access to forums where knowledge about the conditions of colonised peoples was produced, an opportunity largely unavailable to other colonised societies at the time. This involvement enabled India to contest dominant Western narratives about colonised peoples and to advocate for more equitable forms of international representation and participation.

54 Birla, L.N. & P.P. Pillai (1946): India and the ILO. Oxford: Oxford University Press, N.N. Kaul (1956): India and the International Labour Organisation. Delhi: Metropolitan Book Co, S.N. Dhyani (1977): International Labour Organisation and India. In Pursuit of Social Justice. Delhi: National Publishing House, Preeta Joshi (1985): International Labour Organisation and its Impact on India. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, B.D. Rawat (1990): India in ILO. Jaipur: RBSA Publishers, and P.A. Sangma (ed.) (1995): India in ILO (1944–1968). Noida: National Labour Institute, and ILO (2019): India and the ILO. Chronicle of a Shared Journey, 1919–1929. Geneva: ILO.

55 Rodgers, Gerry (2011): India, the ILO and the Quest for Social Justice. In: *Economic and Political Weekly* 46(10), 45–52, Madeleine Herren (2013): Global Corporatism after the First World War – The Indian Case. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 137–152. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_9, and Jibran S. Anand (2019): India, Labour, Organisation. A History of the ILO, 1919–1935. In: *Labour & Development* 26(1), 23–48. On law, see, for example, Kamala Mathur & N.R. Sethi (1969): Tripartism in Labour Policy. The Indian Experience. New Delhi: Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations, and Kamala Sankaran (2011): Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. India and the ILO. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 68–74.

56 Krishnamurty, Jayasankar (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 53–61, and Jayasankar Krishnamurty (2023): Pioneers in Indian Labour Studies, 1900–1930. In: *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 66, 961–974. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-024-00475-8.

Research Aims

Building on the research gaps identified above, the book pursues a threefold research agenda. First, situated at the intersection of international, transnational and transimperial history as well as the history of international organisations, this actor-centred study offers the first comprehensive analysis of the ILO's colonial policies, its interactions with imperial powers and its deep entanglements with colonial networks from its founding through the era of decolonisation. It addresses significant research gaps in the existing literature by uncovering the ILO's close and sustained engagement with British colonial and philanthropic circles, highlighting the influence of both state and civil society actors. The analysis examines how colonial interests shaped various bodies within the organisation, traces the ILO's shifting role within imperial governance and identifies both convergences and tensions among the actors concerned. It further conceptualises information-gathering practices, the establishment of expert bodies and international conferencing as key diplomatic strategies, while foregrounding the cooperation between international bureaucracies and expert networks in the first half of the twentieth century.

Second, this study provides the first in-depth examination of the ILO's relationship with India, bridging institutional perspectives with insights from Indian labour history. To establish the necessary context, it also contributes to Indian labour historiography by offering a systematic account of the development of national trade union organisation in India from its founding in 1920 to independence in and after 1947. By focusing on a wide range of actors, the book demonstrates how Indian workers' representatives forged Pan-Asian connections and how the ILO served as a platform where workers from both dependent and independent Asian regions challenged the organisation's Eurocentric orientation. In doing so, it enriches the broader relational history between Asia and the ILO and provides a multi-perspectival analysis of the organisation's engagement with racialised and colonised labour.

Third, moving beyond the confines of institutional history, the book systematically traces the historical development and enduring influence of racialised labour discourses and bodies of knowledge about colonial labour, thereby contributing to scholarship on historical discourse analysis and the history of knowledge.[57] While this book does not undertake a systematic historical discourse analysis, it draws on the concept of discourse developed by French

57 On the overlaps between these disciplines, see Marianne Sommer, Staffan Müller-Wille & Carsten Reinhardt (2017): Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Wissensgeschichte. In:

philosopher Michel Foucault.[58] In this understanding, forms of thought, speech and knowledge are organised within discourses, displaying regularities in their arrangement and maintaining patterned relationships with other modes of expression. For Foucault, discourse forms part of a broader discursive practice that extends beyond immediate, rule-governed and formally regulated utterances. Discourses are not merely descriptive but productive and constitutive of reality, and discourse and power are intrinsically intertwined.[59]

Drawing further on historian Sandrine Kott's conceptualisation of international organisations as both social spaces and epistemic communities, the ILO is analysed as a site in which divergent perspectives on race, colonialism and labour converged, and in which knowledge was collected, produced and disseminated.[60] While recent historical scholarship has increasingly engaged with the origins and persistence of colonial knowledge formations in fields like agriculture, food, education and health, colonial labour as a domain of knowledge remains significantly understudied.[61] Moreover, international organisations have rarely been approached as sites of knowledge production —a gap that appears all the more pressing in light of what has been described as the twentieth-century "scientisation of the social".[62] Seeking to address these desiderata, this book demonstrates how racialised discourses were

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Sommer, M., S. Müller-Wille & C. Reinhardt (eds.): Handbuch Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2–18.

58 For an introduction, see Michel Foucault (1970/2005): The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. London/New York, NY: Routledge Classics.

59 Landwehr, Achim (2008): Historische Diskursanalyse. Frankfurt/New York, NY: Campus, 73, 78.

60 Kott, Sandrine (2018): Towards a Social History of International Organisations. The ILO and the Internationalisation of Western Social Expertise (1919–1949). In: Jerónimo, M.B. & J.P. Monteiro (eds.): Internationalism, Imperialism, and the Formation of the Contemporary World. The Pasts of the Present. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 49. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60693-4_2.

61 See, for example, Joseph Morgan Hodge (2007): Triumph of the Expert. Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, Helen Tilley (2011): Africa as a Living Laboratory. Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950. Chicago, IL/London: The University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226803487.001.0001, and Damiano Matasci (2023): Internationaliser l'éducation. La France, l'UNESCO et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945–1961). Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion.

62 Raphael, Lutz (1996): Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen als methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderung für eine Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 22(2), 166–167. It remains challenging to conceptualise international organisations as sites for knowledge production. As such, they combine elements of fieldwork, scientific collection, libraries and historical archives. Heé, Nadin

used to scientifically explain labour behaviours and industrial dynamics. Over the course of the roughly forty-year research period, the study identifies broader discursive shifts, from overtly colonial stereotypes to a more "modernised" vocabulary centred on development, productivity and industrialisation, highlighting the interconnections between race, empire, labour and global capitalism.

In combining these research aims, the work also contributes to broader interdisciplinary research on the production and reproduction of social inequalities, specifically in the form of epistemic inequalities. Drawing on insights from Postcolonial Theory, epistemic inequality and epistemic violence are understood as processes in which certain actors or groups are denied the authority to "define the concepts and parameters of (in)equality" and "to access and produce knowledge".[63] The ILO, as a powerful international organisation involved not only in standard-setting but also in the global production and circulation of knowledge about labour, offers a key site for analysing such inequalities. By critically examining who gained access to the ILO's knowledge production mechanisms, whose voices were included or excluded, who was recognised as an expert and how categories such as race and gender shaped these processes, the study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that interrogates the enduring effects of Eurocentrism, racism and colonialism in shaping epistemic inequalities.[64] The case of the ILO's engagement with racialised and colonial labour demonstrates how such epistemic asymmetries contributed to the differential treatment of various groups of workers throughout the period under study and beyond.

Concepts and Terminology

As outlined above, the concept of racialisation is used to emphasise the active nature of racial construction within global hierarchies of power. In this book, processes of racialisation are closely intertwined with, mostly European, colonialism. The term "colonising powers" is employed to underscore the deliber-

(2017): Postkoloniale Ansätze. In: Sommer, M., S. Müller-Wille & C. Reinhardt (eds.): Handbuch Wissenschaftsgeschichte. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 89.

63 Lindner, Ulrike & Michaela Pelican (2025): Durable Inequalities in Exploitative Labor Situations in the Global South. In: *ZANJ. The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 8(1–2), 5. https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobsoutstud.8.1.0003.

64 Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. (2018): The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation in the 21st Century. Towards Epistemic Freedom. In: *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 40(1), 30. https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v40i1.268.

ate and active nature of political domination and subjugation by imperial states. In contrast, the terms "colonised subjects" or "colonised workers" highlight that colonial rule was imposed upon populations without their consent. This terminology is not intended to deny the agency of colonised individuals or collectives, who, as this study will demonstrate, played active roles in global debates on labour and colonial governance whenever possible. Postcolonial theorists have stressed the reciprocal nature of colonial encounters. While colonialism undoubtedly transformed the colonised territories, it also reshaped the colonisers and their institutions.[65] Nonetheless, within many of the contexts examined in relation to the ILO, it is predominantly the colonising powers who were authorised to speak, define and represent. The term "colonial" is used to denote the broader system of relations structured around this dynamic of domination.

Additionally, throughout this text, the concept of Eurocentrism is employed both as a descriptor used by historical actors and as an analytical framework. In the former sense, the term appears in critiques articulated at the time, most notably by Indian workers' delegates at the International Labour Conferences, who condemned the ILO's disproportionate focus on European labour issues and its persistent neglect of Asian contexts. Analytically, the term draws on the definition advanced by Egyptian economist Samir Amin in the late 1980s, who used it to characterise a worldview that situates Europe at the conceptual and normative centre of global history and development.[66] In relation to the ILO, Eurocentrism refers to the organisation's structural and epistemic orientation towards Europe, which, despite its ostensibly global mission to improve labour conditions, often resulted in the marginalisation of non-European realities. It will be considered to which degree such biases reflected an unexamined internalisation of European superiority by the ILO's staff and stakeholders, or whether they were the outcome of deliberate strategies that instrumentalised universalist ideals while pursuing regionally or ideologically constrained agendas.

The ILO's Eurocentrism cannot be understood in isolation from broader systems of power, particularly racialisation and colonialism. Central to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European imperial rule was the presumption of the inherent superiority of European political institutions, economic models, scientific knowledge and moral values. These ideas were not

65 As argued by Homi K. Bhabha (1994): The Location of Culture. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551.

66 Amin, Samir (2009): Eurocentrism. Modernity, Religion, and Democracy. A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

only grounded in notions of Europeanness but were deeply entangled with ideologies of whiteness. As European settler colonialism extended these ideals beyond the geographic boundaries of Europe, most visibly in North America, Eurocentrism itself came to encompass a broader, transnational logic. Thus, critique of Eurocentrism also applies to non-European but ideologically aligned states such as the United States. The binary division of the world into "the West" and "the East", or, as Stuart Hall has argued, "the rest", further illustrates how Eurocentric and white supremacist values shaped global hierarchies of living and development.[67] As will be shown, the ILO's institutional practices and policy frameworks were deeply embedded in, and at times actively reproduced, these ideological constructs.

Lastly, throughout this book, the terms "native labour" and "indigenous labour" are employed primarily as historical rather than analytical categories and therefore presented in quotation marks. The designation "native labour" was commonly used by ILO and colonial officials, particularly up to the Second World War, to refer to the work performed by racialised and frequently colonised labourers. As will be demonstrated, such terminology was seldom adopted by the workers themselves, who more often articulated their identities in geographical, national, political or racial terms. This discrepancy underscores the extent to which the figure of "the native" constituted a European construct, imposed hierarchically and externally within international bureaucratic discourse.

The interpretive complexity of the term is further complicated by the multilingual environment of the ILO. In the organisation's other applied languages, "native labour" was translated as "travail indigène" (French), "trabajo indígena" (Spanish) and "trabalho indígena" (Portuguese).[68] These translations evoke contemporary connotations of indigeneity that do not necessarily correspond to the historical meaning of "native" in the English context. Accordingly, the book refrains from analytically substituting "native labour"

67 Hall, Stuart (1992/2018): The West and the Rest. Discourse and Power. In: Morley, D. (ed.): Stuart Hall. Essential Essays. Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 141–184. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002710-009, and Michael Wintle (2024): Eurocentrism. In: Warf, B. (ed.): The Encyclopedia of Human Geography. Living Edition. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25900-5_128-1.

68 For contemporary examples of the use of these concepts, see, for example, Lopo Vaz de Sampaio e Mello (1910): Questões Coloniais. Política Indigena. Porto: Magalhães e Moniz Lda, Bibliothèque Coloniale Internationale (1929): Le régime et l'organisation du travail des indigènes dans les colonies tropicales. Brussels: Etablissements généraux d'imprimerie, Álvaro Eugénio Neves da Fontoura (1942): O trabalho indígena de Timor. Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, and Pierre De Briey (1945): Les Migrations des Travailleurs indigènes au Congo belge. In: *International Labour Review* 52(4), 370–387.

with "indigenous labour", recognising the limitations in determining indigeneity in its contemporary analytical meaning within the studied context.[69] Archival sources suggest that colonial administrations themselves often deployed "native" as a broad and imprecise category, rather than in reference to specific ethnic groups with distinct territorial or cultural claims.[70] Instead, the term "native labour" primarily functioned through logics of racialisation and colonial subjugations, designating those considered racially other, governed by imperial powers and systematically excluded from political sovereignty. By contrast, "labour", when used without further specification, remained racially unmarked, revealing the implicit assumption of whiteness as the normative standard.

Sources

The availability and selection of source material inevitably shape the findings of this study. As Ann Laura Stoler has famously argued, colonial archives are structures by absences, silences and biases, reflecting the epistemologies and power relations of the colonial state.[71] In the context of the ILO's engagement with racialised and colonial labour, it is often the subjects most frequently discussed whose own voices are least preserved, both in contemporary debates and in archival records. However, this study focuses not on the lived working conditions of labourers per se, but on how these conditions were perceived, discussed and constructed by the actors surrounding the ILO. These discourses were largely shaped by Eurocentric asymmetries of power within the organisation and were dominated by white European staff, experts and delegates.

69 Rodríguez-Piñero, Luis (2005): Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime (1919–1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4–8. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199284641.001.0001.

70 On international organisations and indigeneity in the contemporary sense, see Lee Swepston & Anna Torriente (2002): Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. In: ILO (ed.): International Labour Standards. A Global Approach. Geneva: ILO, 98–120, Luis Rodríguez-Piñero (2005): Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime (1919–1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199284641.001.0001, Alexandra Xanthaki (2007): Indigenous Rights and United Nations Standards. Self-Determination, Culture and Land. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511494468, and Maivân Clech Lâm (2018): Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. In: Weiss, T.G. & S. Daws (eds.): The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 619–634. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803164.013.34.

71 Stoler, Ann Laura (2009): Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, especially 31–35.

This does not imply that counter-voices are entirely absent from the sources, but rather that their presence and the degree to which dissent against the ILO's policies was recorded and archived, was contingent upon the very structures of access and preservation shaped by the institution's own biases.

Accordingly, this work draws on a broad range of written sources. At the core of the analysis is material produced and preserved by the ILO, primarily accessed through the ILO Historical Archives in Geneva. These include records from various departments of the International Labour Office, such as the colonial sections, the diplomatic division, special event files, as well as cabinet documents of successive Director-Generals and individual staff files. Complementing these are published sources generated by the ILO itself, including proceedings of the annual International Labour Conferences, the meetings of the Governing Body, articles from the *International Labour Review* (ILR) and a range of monographs and reports. Most of the ILO source material was produced in English or French. A second body of material is drawn from the tripartite structure of the ILO, particularly from governmental and workers' representatives, such as records from the British Government (British National Archives Kew) and trade unions. Additionally, files consulted in India, primarily in the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library in New Delhi, offer key insights into the perspectives of Indian workers' delegates, like N.M. Joshi, and the broader history of Indian trade union bodies, like AITUC. While AITUC's official correspondence was largely conducted in English, the author's linguistic limitations inevitably shape the scope of this study. The New Delhi archives also contain substantial material on the Indian labour movement in Hindi, which, regrettably, could not be included in the analysis. In addition, the study incorporates sources from civil society organisations and individuals who engaged with the ILO, including the archives of the British Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and the British colonial expert Frederick Lugard (Bodleian Library Oxford). Finally, writings by ILO staff and affiliated experts, many of whom were academics who also published publicly, have also been consulted.

Structure

This book is structured in two main parts. Part 1 comprises Chapters 1 to 4 and covers the period from 1919 to 1939, during which European colonialism largely remained firmly entrenched. It is the more extensive section of the study, reflecting the book's focus on colonial labour at a time when colonial rule was largely unquestioned and structurally embedded in international

governance. Part 2, consisting of Chapters 5 to 7, is shorter and examines the years from 1940 to the late 1950s, addressing the transformed geopolitical circumstances of the Second World War and its aftermath, as well as the onset of decolonisation.

Chapter 1 traces the historical processes that led to the formal integration of colonial labour into the institutional framework of the ILO, culminating in the establishment of its Native Labour Section. It examines the interplay of internal and external influences, ranging from the broader Genevan institutional landscape, especially the League of Nations, to the influence of colonial governments and civil society organisations on the ILO's decision to institutionalise this field. The chapter explores how inter- and transnational actors received, produced and circulated knowledge about colonial and racialised labour and situates these processes within the broader discursive landscape of interwar imperial governance. Chapter 2 focuses on the emergence of the ILO's first expert body dedicated to colonial labour, namely the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, established in 1926. It analyses the committee's internal discussions and the racialised assumptions embedded in its deliberations. Particular attention is paid to the biographies and intellectual profiles of the committee members, offering a critical reflection on the epistemic foundations of colonial labour expertise and the hierarchies that shaped the production of knowledge within this context. Chapter 3 shifts the focus to the annual International Labour Conferences. By analysing reoccurring themes, tropes and arguments in the conference proceedings concerning racialised and colonial labour, this chapter reveals commonalities and differences between the tripartite national delegations, highlighting the influences of nationality, race and belonging to either governmental group, employers' or workers' representatives. In doing so, it provides a global counterpoint to the more specialised work of the ILO's Native Labour Section and expert committee discussed in the previous chapters. Chapter 4 examines the case of India as a lens through which to explore the impact of racialising discourses on the ILO's engagement with Asian labour. It investigates the triangular relationship between the imperial Government of India, the country's emerging trade union movement and the International Labour Office. The chapter highlights a diversity of voices, both supportive and critical of the ILO, and analyses the different strategies employed by competing factions within the Indian labour movement to navigate or resist imperial and capitalist constraints.

Mirroring the structure of Part 1, Chapter 5 focuses on the International Labour Office's evolving engagement with racialised and colonial labour in the context of the post-Second World War international order. Building on existing scholarship on the ILO's post-war colonial policy, the chapter

expands the analysis by placing particular emphasis on race. It traces the transformation of the Office's colonial section, during this time initially known as the Dependent Territories Division and later renamed the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section, within the broader institutional framework of the newly founded United Nations (UN). Particular attention is given to the Office's engagement with the Caribbean and, increasingly, the African continent, which became focal points of its post-war activities. Especially during the 1950s, the ILO's colonial work shifted markedly towards Africa, with other colonial regions receiving comparatively little attention, possibly due to the accelerating processes of decolonisation in Asia. Africa emerged as the ILO's primary arena for colonial labour policy, where the organisation became entangled in growing tensions with colonial governments, each seeking to assert hegemonic control over the regulation of labour standards and practices on the continent. Chapter 6 examines the successor to the interwar colonial expert committee: the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories, which met between 1947 and 1957. Alongside an analysis of the racialising discourses evident in the committee's deliberations, a central focus of this chapter is the increasing external criticism directed at the committee's all-white composition. These challenges, mostly voiced by trade unionists, eventually led to the inclusion of a small number of Black experts and by the end of the period under review, the committee had been transformed into a tripartite body, aiming to ensure more equitable representation in both racial and class terms. The chapter explores the implications of this institutional transformation for the production of knowledge on colonial and racialised labour as well as the evolving definitions of expertise within the ILO. Chapter 7 analyses the impact of the Second World War on the Indian trade union movement and explores how the war accelerated existing plans to direct greater ILO attention towards Asian labour. It follows the implications of Indian independence in 1947 for Indian labour, with a particular focus on the First Asian Regional Labour Conference, convened by the ILO in the same year. The chapter concludes by assessing the ILO's shift towards technical assistance and economic development during the 1950s, highlighting the role played by Indian labour in shaping and participating in these postcolonial development agendas. The main text is supported by additional biographical material on the ILO's colonial experts, which can be found in the appendix.

PART 1

CHAPTER 1

The International Labour Office and Racialised Labour, 1920–1939

When the International Labour Office was established in 1919 as the permanent secretariat of the International Labour Organization in Geneva, its early policies, priorities and institutional structures were naturally embedded in and influenced by larger colonial discourses about race and labour. Through processes of racialisation, essentialisation and objectification, populations in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean had long been cast as inherently different from white Europeans in European discourse.[1] These depictions reflected common orientalist and racist ideologies, shaped by broader intellectual developments in racial sciences and the humanities that developed since the nineteenth century.[2] From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, a variety of racial theories gained prominence in Europe, finding wide reception among politicians, administration, authors, publicists and colonial enthusiasts.[3] These ideas also permeated the everyday life and culture of the imperial metropoles, becoming embedded as common assumptions and forms of knowledge among

1 Comparable processes of racialisation occurred in other regions and among different racialised groups. This focus does not deny the diversity, complexity or historical specificity of racial differentiation and discrimination. Rather, it reflects the particular forms of racialisation that were most prominent in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European colonial discourse and that were most strongly represented within the work of the ILO, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters. For the construction of the "Orient" as a discourse within European scholarship, literature and culture, which reveals the systematic ways in which Asia was essentialised and objectified, see Edward Said (1978/2019): Orientalism. London: Penguin Modern Classics.

2 This study follows the perspective advanced by historian Helen Tilley, who persuasively challenges the notion that "colonial science" can be treated as fundamentally distinct from "real science" and diagnosed through its supposed distortions. While the term "science" remains contested even today, this study treats texts produced by university-trained scholars of the time as scientific, even when their claims have been discredited or revealed as morally compromised. For similar reasons, the term "experts" is used to describe these individuals, as they were regarded as such within the historically racist and classist systems of education and knowledge production in which they operated. Tilley, Helen (2011): Africa as a Living Laboratory. Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950. Chicago, IL/London: The University of Chicago Press, 10. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226803487.001.0001.

3 Lindner, Ulrike (2011): Koloniale Begegnungen. Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880–1914. Frankfurt: Campus, 297.

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white European populations.[4] In Britain, Germany, France and other European colonial metropoles, racial thinking was profoundly influenced by the work of Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882), who advanced a biologically deterministic theory positing three distinct human races in perpetual conflict. He asserted the inherent superiority of the white race, whose expansionist tendencies were contrasted with the supposed isolationism and stagnation of others.[5] The theories of Charles Darwin (1809–1882) were similarly coopted for colonial purposes. His principle of a "survival of the fittest" was invoked to legitimise European dominance. In Britain, Francis Galton (1822–1911) extended Darwin's ideas into the doctrine of social Darwinism, further entrenching notions of racial hierarchy and civilisational superiority.[6]

Simultaneously, the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology, historically intertwined, gained prominence in the last decades of the nineteenth century. While not always in agreement with the views of racial scientists, these fields were similarly invested in questions of race and colonialism. Polygenist theories, which posited fundamentally different origins for various racial groups, gained traction. Black Africans, in particular, were often classified as "cultureless" and inherently incapable of reaching European levels of civilisation. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, anthropology largely subscribed to evolutionary models of human development. Human history was imagined as unfolding in distinct "stages of development", ranging from so-called barba-

4 Among the key forums through which colonial cultural and racial sentiments and propaganda were displayed to the wider public were colonial and ethnological exhibitions, advertisements and objects of mass entertainment and popular culture, such as literature and games. For an introduction, see John M. Mackenzie (1999): The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain. In: Brown, J. (ed.): The Oxford History of the British Empire. Vol. IV. The Twentieth Century. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198205647.003.0009, Tony Chafer & Amanda Sackur (eds.) (2002): Promoting the Colonial Idea. Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403919427, Matthew G. Stanard (2011): Selling the Congo. A History of European Pro-Empire Propaganda and the Making of Belgian Imperialism. Lincoln, NE/London: University of Nebraska Press, Patrícia Ferraz de Matos (2013): The Colours of Empire. Racialized Representations during Portuguese Colonialism. New York, NY/Oxford: Berghahn, and Oliver Simons (2017): Kolonialismus als Kultur. In: Göttsche, D. et al. (eds.): Handbuch Postkolonialismus und Literatur. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 168–171. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-05386-2_30.

5 Lindner, Ulrike (2011): Koloniale Begegnungen. Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880–1914. Frankfurt: Campus, 301.

6 Lindner, Ulrike (2011): Koloniale Begegnungen. Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880–1914. Frankfurt: Campus, 302–303. For the evolution of racial theories in Portugal, see also Patrícia Ferraz de Matos (2013): The Colours of Empire. Racialized Representations during Portuguese Colonialism. New York, NY/Oxford: Berghahn, 23–36.

rism to modern civilisation. Societies were positioned along this imagined timeline, enabling direct comparisons between cultures and justifying hierarchical classifications. Each stage was associated with specific characteristics, such as forms of economic and political organisation, religious belief systems and presumed psychological capacities, including emotional and impulse control.[7] The belief that less developed or "backward" cultures required guidance in their civilisational advancement became a central justification of the imperial "civilising mission".[8]

Assumptions about civilisational difference were also applied to the field of labour, where the interests of colonial administrations and imperial capital clashed with the survival strategies of colonised peoples living under conditions of exploitation and coercion. By proclaiming a specific "laziness" or indolence of racialised workers, European colonial discourse constructed elaborate justifications for subjecting colonised workers to inferior working and living conditions, sharply distinguishing their treatment from that of white workers in sovereign European states.[9] These notions of racialised inefficiency and idleness transcended national and even continental borders, emerging

7 Pernau, Margrit (2011): Zivilität und Barbarei. Gefühle als Differenzkriterien. In: Frevert, U. et al. (eds.): Gefühlswissen. Eine lexikalische Spurensuche in der Moderne. Frankfurt: Campus, 243–247. See also Britta Baumgarten, Dieter Gosewinkel & Dieter Rucht (2011): Civility. Introductory Notes on the History and Systematic Analysis of a Concept. In: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 18(3), 289–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2011.574684, and Holger Nehring (2011): 'Civility' in History. Some Observations on the History of the Concept. In: *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 18(3), 313–333. https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2011.574681.

8 For various aspects of the history of civilising missions, see Harald Fischer-Tiné & Michael Mann (eds.) (2004): Colonialism as Civilizing Mission. Cultural Ideology in British India. London: Anthem Press, Boris Barth & Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.) (2005): Zivilisierungsmissionen. Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert. Konstanz: UVK, Carey Watt & Michael Mann (eds.) (2011): Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia. From Improvement to Development. London: Anthem Press. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9780857288301, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo (2015): The 'Civilising Mission' of Portuguese Colonialism, 1870–1930. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137355911, Riccardo Bavaj & Martina Steber (eds.) (2018): Zivilisatorische Verortungen. Der Westen an der Jahrhundertwende (1880–1930). Berlin: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110529500, and Boris Barth & Rolf Hobson (eds.) (2021): Civilizing Missions in the Twentieth Century. Leiden: Brill.

9 Assumptions about the "innate laziness" of racialised Others even predate the onset of formalised European colonialism in Africa and Asia. For the case of (West) Africa, see Klas Rönnbäck (2014): The Idle and the Industrious. European Ideas about the African Work Ethic in Precolonial West Africa. In: *History in Africa* 41, 135–140. https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2014.4, Klas Rönnbäck (2014): 'The Men Seldom Suffer a Woman to Sit Down'. The Historical Development of the Stereotype of the 'Lazy African'. In: *African Studies* 73(2), 211–227. https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2014.921368, and Cassandra Mark-Thiesen (2017):

from centuries of cross-cultural encounters and the global expansion of European empires.[10] Labour in the colonies was thus not only perceived as qualitatively different, but also as necessitating distinct and often exploitative legal and administrative frameworks. The International Labour Office's treatment of racialised and colonised labour must be seen in this context.

To explore the influence, persistence and transformation of existing colonial labour discourses on the International Labour Office, this chapter traces the historical processes that led to the formal incorporation of colonial labour studies into the ILO's organisational framework. Sub-chapter 1.1 examines the ILO's entanglements with the colonial work of the League of Nations, while also foregrounding the interventions of Black anti-colonial activists who sought to influence the ILO towards adopting more progressive positions on colonial labour regulation. Particular attention is paid to the ILO's close alignment with British colonial circles, which, more than has been acknowledged in existing scholarship, played a formative role in shaping the establishment of the ILO's Native Labour Section. Sub-chapter 1.2 follows the activities of this section after its creation in 1927 under the direction of Harold A. Grimshaw, highlighting the ILO's engagement with a broad array of colonial and humanitarian actors. During this period, the bureaucrats of the Office increasingly positioned themselves as a centre of expertise on colonial labour issues. The section also explores the significance of field missions to

African Women and the 'Lazy African' Myth in Nineteenth-Century West Africa. In: Bänziger, P.-P. & M. Suter (eds.): Histories of Productivity. Genealogical Perspectives on the Body and Modern Economy. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 42–56. For Southeast Asia, see Syed Hussein Alatas (1977): The Myth of the Lazy Native. A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism. London: Cass, and exemplary for the construction of "primitive" workers in a specific industry, see Jayeeta Sharma (2009): 'Lazy' Natives, Coolie Labour, and the Assam Tea Industry. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 43(6), 1287–1324. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X08003831, Anisha Bordoloi (2015): Creating the 'Primitive'. A Study of British Colonialism and Migrant 'Coolies' in the Tea Plantations of Assam Valley, 1860–1900. In: *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 5(9), 812–815. https://doi.org/10.7763/IJSSH.2015.V5.562, and Prithiraj Borah (2021): Colonial Construction of the 'Lazy Native' and Formation of Assam's Tea Industry. In: Lepcha, C.K. & U. Lal (eds.): Communities, Institutions and Histories of India's Northeast. London: Routledge, 65–79.

10 For the trope's legacy in the twentieth century, see also Randall M. Packard (1993): The Invention of the 'Tropical Worker'. Medical Research and the Quest for Central African Labor on the South African Gold Mines 1903–36. In: *The Journal of African History* 34(2), 271–292. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700033351, and Ann Whitehead (2000): Continuities and Discontinuities in Political Constructions of the Working Man in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa. The 'Lazy Man' in African Agriculture. In: *European Journal of Development Research* 12, 23–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810008426764.

colonial territories, focusing in particular on Deputy Director-General Harold Butler's 1928 visit to South Africa as a case study in the ILO's emerging field-based knowledge production. The shorter sub-chapter 1.3 analyses the period between 1929 and 1939 under the leadership of C.W.H. Weaver. It argues that during this decade, the Native Labour Section shifted its focus and adapted to a changing colonial environment, reflecting broader transformations within the imperial order and the League of Nations system. Taken together, the chapter demonstrates the extent to which the ILO, despite its universalist aspirations, was deeply embedded in colonial networks of power and knowledge. It explores how international actors received, produced and circulated knowledge about colonial and racialised labour and situates these processes within the broader discursive landscape of interwar imperial governance.

1.1 The Institutional Origins of Colonial Labour Policy at the ILO, 1920–1926

In the early years of its existence, the International Labour Office, functioning as the organisation's secretariat and encompassing a range of administrative and expert divisions, focused primarily on issues deemed relevant to white, Western industrial workers. Alongside managing an extensive repository of labour legislation, the Office housed scientific and statistical departments. Despite the ILO's stated commitment to international representation, its recruitment practices for a considerable period reflected prevailing Eurocentric power dynamics. By 1921, most staff members were British, French or Swiss nationals.[11]

At the same time, however, the founding of the League of Nations and the ILO coincided with a period of intensified international networking among various movements seeking to challenge the hegemonic dominance of Europe and the West. Among them, Pan-African, Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic Movements were at their peak. While many of these movements ultimately envisioned an alternative world order, one that centred perspectives beyond the Eurocentric, they nonetheless placed hope in the newly established international organisations that emerged after the First World War and sought to advance their aims through collaboration with them. It was from one such

11 Maul, Daniel (2019): The International Labour Organization. 100 Years of Global Social Policy. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter; Geneva: ILO, 41. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650723.

initiative that the ILO took its first tentative steps into the politics of racialised and colonial labour.

1.1.1 A Pan-African Intervention

In late August and early September 1921, the Second Pan-African Congress convened in London, Paris and Brussels.[12] While Pan-African ideas had circulated since the early twentieth century, the term "Pan-African Congress" refers specifically to a series of four meetings held between 1919 and 1927 in European metropoles and New York. Organised by Black activists, these congresses sought to build connections across the African diaspora and collectively resist racism and, in part, colonial exploitation. Following the 1921 meetings, a group of US activists travelled to Geneva to attend the League of Nations' Assembly.[13] They were centred around the figure of historian, sociologist and Civil Rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963), a graduate of Fisk and Harvard Universities and a co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In Geneva, Du Bois met with representatives of philanthropic and international organisations, including Albert Thomas and Gustav Spiller of the ILO, using the occasion to advocate for international cooperation and racial equality. During his stay, he also drafted a memorandum articulating his hopes for the League of Nations. This document, along with the resolutions adopted at the Pan-African Congress a few weeks earlier, was later submitted to League Secretary Eric Drummond.[14] The petition called for improved treatment of colonised workers and proposed a scientific study of "native labour questions", ideally to be conducted by Black researchers.

In response, the ILO's inaugural Director-General, Albert Thomas (1878–1932), a moderate French socialist politician widely regarded as "the personifi-

12 The ideas of this section have been examined in more detail in Fabiana Kutsche & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Discussing the 'Most Important Question of the 20th Century'. W. E. B. Du Bois and the ILO's Efforts for a Regulation of 'Native Labor' Politics, 1919–1926. In: *ZANJ. The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 8(1–2), 79–104. https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobsoutstud.8.1.0006. For a detailed report on the congress, see Jessie Fauset (1921): Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress. In: *The Crisis* 23(1), 12–18.

13 Fauset, Jessie (1921): Impressions of the Second Pan-African Congress. In: *The Crisis* 23(1), 16.

14 Du Bois, W.E.B. (1921): The Negro and the League of Nations, draft article, UMASS Amherst, Du Bois Papers. Partly published as W.E.B. Du Bois (1921): Manifesto to the League of Nations. In: *The Crisis* 23(1), 18.

cation of class cooperation", wrote to Du Bois a month later.[15] He assured him that "the principle of the equality of races in the matter of protection which it pretends to afford laborers" was of utmost importance to the ILO. Thomas expressed admiration for the Congress' resolution and pledged to establish a section in the Office dedicated to the study of "native labour", despite the organisation's budget being "naturally [...] still limited". For the moment, a member of the ILO's Scientific (later Research) Division would begin research on Black and "native" labour conditions and was instructed to maintain contact with Du Bois and anti-slavery activists.[16] With this proposal, Thomas sought to bridge the Pan-African demands for racial equality articulated by Black activists from the diaspora with those of the predominantly white anti-slavery milieu, which had shaped European discourse on colonialism from a humanitarian perspective since the eighteenth century. This effort therefore reflects the ILO's attempt to reconcile rivalling agendas within the emerging international order. It also highlights the contrasting approaches to colonial labour that competed for influence within international organisations during the early interwar period: one grounded in racial representation and lived experience, the other rooted in reformist efforts ultimately reinforcing a racialised hierarchy between white saviours and racialised subjects.

As Thomas' reference to anti-slavery activists suggests, the formal abolition of chattel slavery in the nineteenth century served as an important reference point in Western European discourse on colonialism and labour.[17] The gradual process of abolition can be explained neither solely by humanitarian ideals and the efforts of pressure groups nor exclusively by material interests and imperial ambitions. Rather, it must instead be understood in relation to broader economic developments and the shifting moral frame-

15 Maul, Daniel (2019): The International Labour Organization. 100 Years of Global Social Policy. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter; Geneva: ILO, 36. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650723.

16 Albert Thomas to W.E.B. Du Bois (October 11, 1921), UMASS Amherst, Du Bois Papers.

17 The role of slavery in the historical recourses of capitalism is described by Cedric J. Robinson (1983/2020): Black Marxism. The Making of the Black Radical Tradition. London: Penguin Modern Classics, 101–120. For different regions, see also Leonardo Marques (2020): New World Slavery in the Capitalist World Economy. In: Yazdani, K. & D. Menon (eds.): Capitalisms. Towards a Global History. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 71–94. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199499717.003.0003, Suzanne Miers & Richard Roberts (eds.) (1988): The End of Slavery in Africa. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, and Alessandro Stanziani (2019): The Abolition of Slavery and the 'New Labor Contract' in French Equatorial Africa, 1890–1914. In: Stanziani, A. & G. Campbell (eds.): The Palgrave Handbook of Bondage and Human Rights in Africa and Asia. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 227–245. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95957-0_11.

works through which these developments were interpreted.[18] Building on the legacy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionist movements, early twentieth-century anti-slavery activists founded various societies, such as the Swiss *Bureau International pour la Défense des Indigènes* and the British Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society.[19] Following the legal abolition of slavery, these organisations redirected their attention towards wider concerns about living and working conditions in the colonies, particularly in Africa.

By 1921, the British Anti-Slavery Society was led by the evangelical missionary John H. Harris (1874–1940).[20] Under his leadership, the society operated as a traditional pressure group, lobbying Parliament and the Foreign and Colonial Offices and engaging in public grassroots campaigns.[21] The Swiss *Bureau International*, founded in 1913 and headed by René Claparède (1863–1928), emerged from a transnational coalition of British, French, Swiss and German organisations originally formed to address colonial abuses in the Congo.[22] Together, these groups represented a well-established humanitarian lobby with strong ties to national governments, trade unions and international organisations. While influential in advocating for reforms and improved conditions for colonial subjects, they did not call for an end of colonial rule or self-

18 Cooper, Frederick (1980): From Slaves to Squatters. Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925. London/New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 24. See also Seymour Drescher (1986): Capitalism and Antislavery. British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective. Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-07000-8, and the contributions in Marcel van der Linden (ed.) (2011): Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labor Relations. The Long-Term Consequences of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004188532.i-556.

19 From here onwards referred to as Anti-Slavery Society.

20 Oldfield, Sybil (2004): Harris, Sir John Hobbis. In: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40721.

21 Grant, Kevin (2005): A 'Civilized Savagery'. Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884–1926. New York, NY: Routledge, 142, and Amalia Ribi Forclaz (2011): 'The Breath of New Life'? British Anti-Slavery Activism and the League of Nations. In: Laqua, D. (ed.): Internationalism Reconfigured. Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars. London: I.B. Tauris, 95–97.

22 In the early twentieth century, the so-called "Congo scandal" exposed the violent labour practices employed by private companies operating under the patronage of King Leopold II of Belgium. Among the most prominent figures in mobilising public protest across Europe were John H. Harris and his wife Alice. Ribi Forclaz, Amalia (2015): Humanitarian Imperialism. The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880–1940. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 37–39. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198733034.001.0001. For the history of the Swiss *Bureau International*, see Emmanuelle Sibeud (2014): Entre Geste Impériale et Cause Internationale. Défendre les indigènes à Genève dans les années 1920. In: *Monde(s)* 2(6), 24–29. https://doi.org/10.3917/mond.142.0023.

governance.[23] Instead, they typically operated within a paternalistic framework, viewing colonised populations as in need of guidance and protection by white Europeans. As such, their demands differed markedly from those of Pan-African activists like Du Bois. Still, for the International Labour Office, particularly in its formative years, anti-slavery activists represented a central source of information and exchange on colonial matters. Even before Albert Thomas' encounter with W.E.B. Du Bois, ILO official Gustav Spiller had reached out to the British Anti-Slavery Society to request information on "native labour" across various colonies. Following a joint meeting aimed at securing the group's active collaboration with the ILO in April 1920, the Office received an informational memorandum from the British activists.[24] The document offered an overview of colonial labour practices and outlined prevailing perceptions of colonised workers.[25]

When Thomas also signalled interest in a cooperation with W.E.B. Du Bois in 1921, the latter emphasised how, in his opinion, the ILO's work for colonial labourers would particularly benefit from being conducted by a Black officer who would also be able to understand the racial aspects central to the problem. He argued:

> There are, however, rather pressing reasons for appointing a colored man to this position. First, because a colored man would bring a certain difference of point of view which no white man would have, and secondly, because of the tremendous influence on the colored world which the appointment of a colored man would have.[26]

He proposed four possible candidates: Isaac Béton, Paul Panda Farnana, Dr. George E. Haynes and Ruth Fisher. Du Bois concluded his letter with a personal note: "I may add with some diffidence that if the position was of the sort I concern it should be, and I am qualified for it I might be glad to consider

23 Kutsche, Fabiana & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Discussing the 'Most Important Question of the 20th Century'. W. E. B. Du Bois and the ILO's Efforts for a Regulation of 'Native Labor' Politics, 1919–1926. In: *ZANJ. The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 8(1–2), 87. https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobsoutstud.8.1.0006.

24 Gustav Spiller to Travers Buxton (April 1, 1920), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-5 (Jacket 1). Unfortunately, it has not been possible to reconstruct Spiller's career at the ILO, as his personal file is missing from the archives. However, available evidence suggests that his affiliation with the organisation was brief. Spiller had previously met W.E.B. Du Bois in the context of the First Universal Races Congress, held in London in 1911. See W.E.B. Du Bois to Royal Meeker (November 1, 1921), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-3.

25 John Harris to Gustav Spiller (June 21, 1920), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-5 (Jacket 1).

26 W.E.B. Du Bois to Royal Meeker (November 1, 1921), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-3.

myself".[27] This remark underscores the importance Du Bois attributed to racial representation and the positionality of researchers. For him, it was evident that the knowledge produced by an international organisation such as the ILO would inevitably be shaped by the racial identity of its officials. By drawing attention to the whiteness of the majority of ILO staff, Du Bois challenged the notion that the organisation operated from a neutral standpoint. Race, whether explicitly acknowledged or not, profoundly shaped global knowledge and policy, particularly in a field as deeply racialised as colonial labour.

The candidates suggested by Du Bois, despite sharing the same racial identity, differed significantly in their personal profiles and biographies. The first two, Isaac Béton and Paul Panda Farnana, had first-hand experience of life under French and Belgian colonial rule. Both had left their home countries at a young age to pursue academic education in the colonial metropoles. Isaac Béton (?–?), born in Guadeloupe, studied at the University of Paris and went on to become one of the first Black teachers in the French secondary education system. Paul Panda Farnana (1888–1930), originally from the Belgian Congo, attended the School of Horticulture and Agriculture in Vilvoorde, followed by further training at the Higher School of Tropical Agriculture at Nogent-sur-Marne, France.[28] Both were also active participants in Pan-African politics. In 1921, Béton served as Secretary-General of the Pan-African Association and Secretary of the Second Pan-African Congress. He later became editor of the journals *Imperium* and *Le Colonisé*, and was an active member of *Amitiés Africaines*, a society dedicated to providing medical support to Africans.[29] Panda Farnana, after serving in the Congolese Volunteer Corps (*Corps de Volontaires Congolais*) during the First World War, became involved in the *Union Congolaise* and played a key role in organising the Brussels session of the Second Pan-African Congress in 1921.[30] Together, Béton and Panda Farnana exemplified the highly educated African diaspora in Europe.

27 W.E.B. Du Bois to Royal Meeker (November 1, 1921), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-3.

28 W.E.B. Du Bois to Royal Meeker (November 1, 1921), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-3.

29 Cook, Mercer (1939): The Race Problem in Paris and the French West Indies. In: *Journal of Negro Education* 8(4), 676, and Christian Filostrat (2008): Negritude Agonistes. Assimilation against Nationalism in the French-speaking Caribbean and Guyane. Cherry Hill, NJ: Africana Homestead, 108.

30 Tshitungu Kongolo, Antoine (2011): Visages de Paul Panda Farnana. Nationaliste, panafricaniste, intellectuel engagé. Paris: L'Harmattan, 53–56. See also Didier Mumengi (2005): Panda Farnana. Premier universitaire congolais (1888–1930). Paris: L'Harmattan. In later years, Du Bois publicly voiced a more critical view on Panda Farnana: Du Bois, W.E.B. (1925): The Negro Mind Reaches Out. In: Lock, A. (ed.): The New Negro. An Interpretation. New York, NY: Albert and Charles Boni, 389–392.

In contrast, the other two candidates proposed by Du Bois, George E. Haynes (1880–1960) and Ruth Anna Fisher (1886–1975), were US citizens. Both were highly educated: Haynes held a master's degree from Yale University and later served as Director of the Department of Social Science at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, while Fisher earned a BA from Oberlin College and also studied at the Canadian Academy of Music.[31] Both were actively engaged in philanthropic and social work. Haynes co-founded the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (later National Urban League) and Fisher worked for the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in New York City. Of the two, Haynes, whom Du Bois described as "one of the best trained American Negroes for scientific and economic work", appeared particularly well suited for a position at the ILO, having already conducted research on and engaged with racialised labour relations.[32]

In sum, all four candidates had received their education at European or US universities and brought with them a range of additional qualifications that would have been valuable for the institutionalised study of colonial labour relations. They also possessed substantial expertise on race relations, grounded in their lived experience of racism. However, this form of first-hand knowledge, the experience of living as a Black person under systems of white supremacy, was largely unacknowledged within the prevailing, white-dominated institutional frameworks in which race was typically rendered visible only in reference to non-white subjects. Although Albert Thomas' interest in Du Bois' perspective may well have been sincere, there is no record of how the individual candidates were received and none of those proposed were seriously considered for a position within the ILO. As will be shown later, this Pan-African intervention did serve as a catalyst for the ILO's increased attention to colonial and racialised labour conditions. Nonetheless, the Black experts recommended by Du Bois remained excluded from participating in the ILO's early knowledge production in this field, providing an example for the power of racial relations shaping the situatedness of knowledge famously brought for-

31 Carlton-La Nay, Iris (1983): Notes on a Forgotten Black Social Worker and Sociologist. George Edmund Haynes. In: *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 10(3), 531, 534. His research thesis was published as George Edmund Haynes (1912): The Negro at Work in New York City. A Study in Economic Progress. New York, NY: Columbia University. For more biographical information on Fisher, see Sylvia Lyons Render (1975): Afro-American Women. The Outstanding and the Obscure. In: *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 32(4), 306–321.

32 W.E.B. Du Bois to Royal Meeker (November 1, 1921), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-3.

ward by feminist philosopher Donna Haraway.[33] Instead, the task of developing the Office's colonial politics was assigned to a white ILO official, Harold Grimshaw.

1.1.2 Harold Grimshaw and the Permanent Mandates Commission

Harold Atheling Grimshaw (1880–1929) joined the ILO in May 1920. Raised in the village of Calverley near Leeds, Grimshaw earned a BA and MSc from the University of London and initially worked as an elementary and secondary school teacher before taking up a lecturing position at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He was also privately active within the British trade union milieu. Upon his entry into the ILO, Grimshaw was appointed Assistant Chief of Section in the Administrative Department and promoted to Chief of Section in the Diplomatic Division by January 1922. The biannual staff reports from these early years attest to the high regard in which he was held by his superiors, highlighting the quality of his work, his initiative for the Office even in his free time and his cordial, loyal relationships with both colleagues and subordinates.[34]

Grimshaw's personal and professional background suggests a strong alignment with British Fabianism, a form of middle-class socialism that advocated for social democracy and democratic socialism through gradualist and reformist means. Fabianist ideals were particularly influential within the British trade union movement and institutions such as the LSE, which had been founded by the Fabian Society in 1895 and was envisioned as a training ground for reformed colonial administration rooted in political science.[35] Through Grimshaw's appointment, Fabianist colonial thought, characterised by a general acceptance of imperialism but a commitment to moderate reform, found its way into the ILO's approach to colonial policy. The selection of Grimshaw

33 Haraway, Donna (1988): Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. In: *Feminist Studies* 14(3), 584. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

34 Staff reports of Harold Grimshaw, ILO Archives, P 131. See also N.N. (1929): Calverley Man Dies at Geneva. Mr. H. A. Grimshaw. Expert on Labour Questions. In: *Leeds Mercury* (August 7, 1929), 1.

35 The institutional history of the LSE is described by Ralf Dahrendorf (1995): LSE. A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science 1895–1995. Oxford: Oxford University Press, and a more critical view on the LSE's entanglements with the British Eugenics movement is provided by Shikha Dilawri (2019): Eugenics and the Academy in Britian. Confronting Historical Amnesia at the LSE. In: Decolonising LSE https://decolonisinglse.wordpress.com/2019/09/12/eugenics-and-the-academy-in-britain-confronting-historical-amnesia-at-the-lse/ (last accessed: August 4, 2024).

therefore reflects the Office's broader aim of extending its reformist orientation to colonial matters. While Fabianist approaches were more critical of labour exploitation than those typical of the British upper middle-class colonial administration, they nonetheless remained embedded in an overarching support for empire and the civilising mission, framed through the lens of social science and administrative reform.[36] These views became visible when Grimshaw first began to address colonial labour questions in his function as a representative to the League of Nations' Permanent Mandates Commission.

The League's PMC was tasked with overseeing and reviewing the activities of the mandatory powers in the former Ottoman and German colonies, which had been reclassified as mandates. The commission was composed primarily of former diplomats and colonial officials appointed by their respective governments but also included a representative from the ILO. In its first year of existence, in 1921, the ILO successfully lobbied for revisions to the PMC's annual questionnaires to the mandatory powers, ensuring the inclusion of specific questions related to labour conditions.[37] In doing so, the ILO aimed to obtain first-hand information about labour practices in colonial territories to which it otherwise had limited access. When Harold Grimshaw succeeded the ILO's initial representative to the PMC in July 1922, this was his first act of representing the Office in colonial questions. At the same time, he initiated closer ties with philanthropic organisations rooted in the anti-slavery movement, underscoring the ILO's dependence on reformist civil society actors for information.[38] In September 1922, Grimshaw officially introduced himself to John Harris of the Anti-Slavery Society, requesting that future correspondence be sent to his private address and expressing confidence that their collaboration could be "mutually useful".[39] In response, Harris sent several

36 Laid out in detail in George Bernard Shaw (ed.) (1900): Fabianism and the Empire. A Manifesto by the Fabian Society. London: Grant Richards. For an overview of the role of British internationalist civil servants after the First World War, see Amy Limoncelli (2025): Britain and the International Civil Service. Empire, Internationalism and Expertise in the Twentieth Century. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 4–12. http://doi.org/10.4324/9781032646596.

37 N.N. (1921): Appendix XVIII. Report of Director presented to the Conference. In: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 941–942.

38 G. Fleury to William Rappard (July 27, 1922), League of Nations Archives, R7-1-16362-248. Before, this position had been filled by ILO official William Martin.

39 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (September 30, 1922), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

recent publications from the society and arranged a meeting in Geneva for December 1922 with Grimshaw and William Rappard of the PMC.[40]

Grimshaw's growing involvement in colonial labour questions culminated in the third meeting of the PMC in July and August 1923, for which he prepared a memorandum on slavery in the mandated territories. This document drew on both information provided by the Anti-Slavery Society and his own research. While the precise scope of the ILO's representative role within the PMC had previously been contested between Albert Thomas and the League of Nations, Grimshaw's expertise on labour relations now proved of considerable value.[41] His memorandum appears to mark both his first in-depth engagement with colonial labour policy and the ILO's initial formal contribution to the field. Presented on Friday, July 20, 1923, the report offers insight into the Office's earliest conceptualisations of colonial labour and its underlying assumptions about racialised labourers.[42]

The seventeen-pages long memorandum was divided into two main sections: "slavery" and "labour". In the first part, Grimshaw examined the continued existence of slavery in various forms and outlined possible measures to suppress it. While he acknowledged that significant progress had been made in curbing the slave trade and the use of enslaved labourers, he maintained that slavery persisted in certain cases.[43] To explain this, Grimshaw pointed to financial debt as the principal factor sustaining bonded labour. He argued that many enslaved individuals were incapable of managing their money responsibly, often spending it on gambling or alcohol, and thus remained trapped in systems of debt bondage. This stereotype of colonised workers' supposed financial irresponsibility was widespread and combined both racist and class-

40 John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (October 9, 1922), John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (December 11, 1922), both Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466. For more information on the relationship between Rappard and Harris, see Amalia Ribi Forclaz (2011): 'The Breath of New Life'? British Anti-Slavery Activism and the League of Nations. In: Laqua, D. (ed.): Internationalism Reconfigured. Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World Wars. London: I.B. Tauris, 98–99.

41 William Rappard, Minute Sheet (October 3, 1921), League of Nations Archives, R7-1-16362-248.

42 N.N. (1923): Permanent Mandates Commission. Minutes of the Third Session held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th, 1923. Geneva: League of Nations, 17.

43 Grimshaw's interpretation reflected the historical realities. While European colonial powers had tried to end the large-scale raiding, trade and export of enslaved people from Africa to improve their colonial administrations, they remained uninterested in the freeing of enslaved people. Miers, Suzanne (2004): Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues 1890–1939. In: Miers, S. & M.A. Klein (eds.): Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 21.

ist assumptions. While elsewhere it served to justify withholding or rationing wages, here it functioned to shift blame for continued unfreedom on the enslaved themselves, absolving broader structural conditions and colonial complicity.[44]

In contrast, domestic slavery was regarded as a more ambiguous and elusive phenomenon, difficult to define in legal or moral terms. As Grimshaw observed, "[e]xactly what domestic slavery may mean when expressed in terms of human suffering [wa]s not easy to estimate. Nor d[id] it seem less difficult to define the status of a domestic slave, the dividing line between slavery and freedom being at times nebulous."[45] Nevertheless, he concluded that domestic servitude did not necessarily entail "worse suffering for the individual than would freedom under prevailing economic conditions". According to Grimshaw, freedom was not always considered desirable by the enslaved themselves, and while mandatory administrations could offer support, "the next steps appear[ed] to lie largely with the slaves themselves".[46]

This reasoning reflects a broader pattern in British colonial discourse. While slavery in its classical form had been widely condemned as morally reprehensible since the late nineteenth century, British colonial governors and administrators often regarded the transition from enslavement to free wage labour as a difficult and uncertain process.[47] In their view, it frequently required a fundamental change of mindset. Whereas slavery was believed to instil passivity, dependence and a lack of initiative, wage labour was idealised as autonomous, self-improving and dignified.[48] Crucially, this "dignity of free labour" was not understood as inherent in the act of labour itself, but rather as something that had to be acquired through a process of moral and economic

44 Similar arguments were often applied by the global temperance movement, highlighting the intersection of racist and class-based forms of discrimination as tropes employed by colonial governments, employers and humanitarian activists. See Chapter 3.1.1.

45 Grimshaw, Harold (1923): Comparative Statement Concerning Matters Appertaining to Labour and Slavery in Territories Under Mandate (Annex 5). In: Permanent Mandates Commission. Annexes to the Minutes of the Third Session held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th, 1923. Geneva: League of Nations, 264.

46 Grimshaw, Harold (1923): Comparative Statement Concerning Matters Appertaining to Labour and Slavery in Territories Under Mandate (Annex 5). In: Permanent Mandates Commission. Annexes to the Minutes of the Third Session held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th, 1923. Geneva: League of Nations, 265.

47 Cooper, Frederick (1980): From Slaves to Squatters. Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925. London/New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 32–33.

48 Cooper, Frederick (1980): From Slaves to Squatters. Plantation Labour and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925. London/New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 26.

education. Within this framework, domestic servitude was construed as a potential form of protection, with formerly enslaved individuals viewed as not yet ready for the responsibilities of freedom.

Accordingly, the persistence of slavery was largely attributed to factors presumed to lie within the agency of the enslaved persons. Debt, for instance, was typically portrayed as a consequence of individual irresponsibility rather than structural inequality. The reference to alcohol and gambling evoked moral failings rather than social or psychological vulnerabilities, reinforcing a narrative of personal deficiency.[49] Only extreme poverty was acknowledged as a plausible rationale for remaining in servitude. It is notable, then, that slavery was conceptualised as something categorically different from (free) wage labour, despite the evident overlap in exploitative conditions. This distinction reveals how the contemporary understanding of slavery rested less on the realities of labour dependency and more on legal status and moral discourse, suggesting that slavery was imagined as a fundamentally different institution rather than one end of a broader continuum of coercive labour relations.

The second half of the memorandum discussed labour outside of slavery. Referring to the ILO's framework, Grimshaw summarised, the mandatory powers had noted that the existing labour conditions in B and C mandates were not yet conductive to the application of ILC standards. Nevertheless, he expressed hope that other mandatory powers might follow the example of Tanganyika, whose administration had pledged to base future labour legislation on ILC standards, as these embodied the "collective experience and wisdom of the industrial States of the world" with due regard to the "native habits, customs and prejudices". In this context, Grimshaw underscored the relevance of Article 421 of the Versailles Peace Treaty, which allowed for flexible implementation of ILO conventions and recommendations in colonies and other non-self-governing territories.[50] This marked the point in the memorandum where Grimshaw most clearly assumed the dual role of labour expert and official representative of the ILO. In the following sections, Grimshaw

49 The arguments advanced about colonised populations closely mirrored the philanthropic discourse concerning white working-class culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. White workers, too, were depicted requiring moral reform and "civilisation" at the hands of the upper classes. For the British case, see Gareth Stedman Jones (1974): Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900. Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class. In: *Journal of Social History* 7(4), 468.

50 Grimshaw, Harold (1923): Comparative Statement Concerning Matters Appertaining to Labour and Slavery in Territories Under Mandate (Annex 5). In: Permanent Mandates Commission. Annexes to the Minutes of the Third Session held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th, 1923. Geneva: League of Nations, 266.

addressed a wide range of issues. Regarding the future economic development of the mandated territories, he predicted the emergence of conditions similar to those in industrialised Europe, including urban population concentration and the rise of factory labour. Both required the careful attention of the administrations and the PMC.[51] He observed that forced labour was, in most instances, officially restricted to essential public services. However, he raised concerns about the forced relocation of workers to regions with different climates, which often resulted in declining health and elevated mortality rates. Further aspects covered in the memorandum concerned the employment of indentured labour, penal sanctions for contract breaches and administrational supervision.

Grimshaw's memorandum, though concise, encapsulated many of the racialised and paternalistic assumptions prevalent in early twentieth century discourse on colonial labour. Notably, such assumptions circulated not only among colonial administrators but also within progressive and labour-oriented circles, including the British trade union milieu to which Grimshaw belonged. While he was acutely aware of the limitations of his report, as it was based on incomplete League documents, it nevertheless provides a valuable window into contemporary knowledge about labour conditions in colonial and mandated territories as well as the frameworks through which such conditions were interpreted. Grimshaw's conduct during the third session of the PMC further reflected his commitment to labour oversight. Though always remaining friendly, he emerged as an inquisitive and persistent voice within the commission's debates. He frequently requested further information, particularly in instances where potential abuses were suspected, and he challenged attempts by representatives such as the British Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, William Ormsby-Gore, to downplay or dismiss problematic practices.[52] In doing so, Grimshaw positioned himself as a critical intermediary between the ILO's reformist ideals and the political realities of imperial governance.

Following the third PMC session in July and August 1923, Harold Grimshaw was asked by Albert Thomas to prepare a general article on the topic for the *International Labour Review* (ILR). The Anti-Slavery Society also expressed

51 Grimshaw, Harold (1923): Comparative Statement Concerning Matters Appertaining to Labour and Slavery in Territories Under Mandate (Annex 5). In: Permanent Mandates Commission. Annexes to the Minutes of the Third Session held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th, 1923. Geneva: League of Nations, 268.

52 N.N. (1923): Permanent Mandates Commission. Minutes of the Third Session held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th, 1923. Geneva: League of Nations, 140, 156.

interest in disseminating the content in the form of a pamphlet.[53] In subsequent correspondence, Grimshaw explained that additional material was still needed to develop the article, as Thomas had requested a more substantial treatment that went beyond the official documentation of the PMC. Grimshaw had already reached out to the eminent British colonial administrator Frederick Lugard (1858–1945), who was also a member of the PMC, and asked for his informants used in his classic work on British colonialism, *The Dual Mandate*, but had so far remained unsuccessful, because "he [Lugard] indicated that one at least of the authorities he quote[d] ha[d] now been to some extent discredited".[54] Grimshaw therefore turned to John Harris, requesting his expert assistance in reviewing the draft at a later stage.

Although neither the ILR article nor the pamphlet publication appear to have materialised, the episode sheds light on the process through which knowledge about colonial labour conditions was generated and circulated. It was well understood within the ILO that the reports submitted by the mandatory powers were incomplete at best and, at worst, deliberately misleading. Grimshaw himself admitted to Harris that his memorandum was "as a description of the state of affairs in these areas [...], markedly incomplete", but he also expressed scepticism about alternative sources, describing them as "more or less suspect".[55] During this time, the Office's work on colonial labour conditions heavily relied on the epistemic authority of figures such as Lugard or Harris, who provided both first-hand experience and access to informal net-

53 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (August 23, 1923), John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (October 10, 1923), both Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466. A search in the ILR revealed that the article was not published.

54 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (August 23, 1923), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466. Lugard's *The Dual Mandate* (1922) is typically regarded as the canonical expression and justification of the principle of "indirect rule", a system of colonial governance through local elites that, although long practiced by imperial powers, was systematised and promoted by Lugard during his tenure in Nigeria. Though often portrayed as a more liberal form of colonial governance, indirect rule entrenched coercive structures, reinforced traditional hierarchies and systematically excluded emerging local elites. Lugard, Frederick Dealtry (1922): The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa. Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons. Critically analysed by Lamont DeHaven King (2016): The Civilizing Mission and Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria. A Contradiction. In: *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 4(8), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v4i8.1688, and Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò (1999): Reading the Colonizer's Mind. Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism. In: Babbitt, S.E. & S. Campbell (eds.): Racism and Philosophy. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 157–186. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501720710-010.

55 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (August 23, 1923), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

works of colonial information. Grimshaw's outreach reflects the Office's dependence on British channels of expertise, a result of both his own professional and ideological background and of Britain's self-presentation as a leader in humanitarian imperial governance.[56]

In the years that followed, these personal and institutional connections deepened and expanded across national boundaries. Archival sources show sustained correspondence not only between Grimshaw and Harris, but also with Abbe Livingston Warnshuis (1877–1958) of the International Missionary Council in New York, and with René Claparède and Edouard "Ed" Junod of the Swiss *Bureau International*. Although Grimshaw maintained warm and collegial relations with Harris—evident in a letter of December 1924 that included detailed political commentary and friendly personal remarks—, his attitude towards the Swiss *Bureau International* was considerably less favourable.[57] After attending one of its meetings in September 1925, Grimshaw reported dismissively that "the meeting was rather a poor one, apparently composed largely of cranks", expressing clear scepticism about the *Bureau*'s effectiveness and the value of its contributions.[58]

1.1.3 British Anti-Slavery Activism as a Catalyst

The year 1926, which would see the consolidation of the ILO's institutional engagement with colonial labour, also marked the high point of the organisation's reliance on key British actors in both colonial administration and anti-slavery activism. While several historians have analysed the developments leading to the ILO's institutionalisation of colonial labour studies, the role of private correspondence between principal figures within the ILO and British interest groups has often been overlooked. The following section brings these materials together, drawing on key archival sources from both the ILO and the British Anti-Slavery Society. This combined perspective reveals a far more intense and coordinated collaboration than previously recognised.[59]

56 For more information about the commonalities and differences between the English and the French types of colonial administration in the interwar period, see Véronique Dimier (2004): On Good Colonial Government. Lessons from the League of Nations. In: *Global Society* 18(3), 279–299. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360082042000221487.

57 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (December 12, 1924), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

58 Grimshaw, Harold: Conference of the Ligue International Pour La Défense des Indigènes (September 1925), ILO Archives, D 600-720-1.

59 Among the most important earlier accounts of these developments are Andrea Schweizer (2005): Zwischen Rassismus, Markt und Menschenrechten. Das internationale Regime zur Kontrakt- und Zwangsarbeit im südlichen Afrika 1919–1944. Zurich: Chronos,

Following earlier cooperation within the PMC and amidst growing concern about reports of slavery in the Arabian Peninsula, the League of Nations appointed a Temporary Slavery Commission in June 1924 to examine the persistence of various forms of slavery and trade with enslaved persons. Due to their perceived expertise in colonial labour matters, both Frederick Lugard and Harold Grimshaw were named as members.[60] Over the course of the following year, the commission drafted a new international agreement aimed at suppressing these practices. This draft would become the basis for the League of Nations' Slavery Convention, which was debated in the British House of Lords in December 1925 and formally adopted the following year. A pivotal moment during this debate was a statement made by Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (1864–1958), a key figure in Britain's involvement with the League. Referring to indentured labour, Cecil observed:

> I think that indentured labour comes more within the nature of labour properly so-called in the ordinary sense—that is to say, wage labour—and that it ought to be dealt with, if dealt with at all, not by the League itself, but by the International Labour Office, who may, if they choose, take this up and go very carefully into what conditions ought to be applied to it.[61]

This suggestion that colonial labour conditions should fall within the purview of the ILO quickly became the subject of an intense exchange of letters between Harold Grimshaw and John Harris. On January 7, Grimshaw

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101–106, and Susan Zimmermann (2010): 'Special Circumstances' in Geneva. The ILO and the World of Non-Metropolitan Labour in the Interwar Years. In: van der Linden, M., J. van Daele, M. Rodriguez Garcia & G. van Goethem (eds.): ILO Histories. Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century. Berne: Peter Lang, 221–250. The correspondence discussed here was considered by Suzanne Miers (2003): Slavery in the Twentieth Century. The Evolution of a Global Problem. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 134. However, in her work, Miers does not engage with the broader institutional context of the ILO, focusing instead on the persistence of slavery as a global issue.

60 Miers, Suzanne (2003): Slavery in the Twentieth Century. The Evolution of a Global Problem. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 102–103, and Christian Müller (2023): The Imperial 'Guardians' of Slavery. International Humanitarianism, Colonial Labour Policies, and the Crisis of Imperial Governance under the League of Nations, 1919–26. In: Piller, E. & N. Wylie (eds.): Humanitarianism and the Greater War, 1914–24. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 261–264. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526173256.00022.

61 Viscount Cecil of Chelwood: Draft Convention on Slavery, Column 1528. In: Hansard 62 (December 16, 1925) https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1925-12-16/debates/3df9aa3d-2281-41ad-b4cd-e818985b88c4/DraftConventionOnSlavery?highlight=lord%20cecil%20labour# (last accessed: March 5, 2024).

responded to an unpreserved telegram from Harris, stating that he had followed the debate in the House of Lords with great interest and welcomed Cecil's intervention as a potentially valuable impetus.[62] Two days later, Grimshaw followed up with a second letter in which he outlined the institutional position of the ILO in more detail. He explained that he had long wished to initiate a comprehensive study of colonial labour relations, but that any such project required a formal mandate from the ILO's Governing Body, which in turn was necessary to secure additional funding. At present, he wrote, the Office was financially constrained: "At present we are so tightly held that we have not a centime which we could turn over to such a purpose."[63]

Consequently, the future of the colonial labour question within the ILO depended on a decision by the ILO's executive organ, the Governing Body, which met three times annually to determine the organisation's political direction. If the GB selected the issue, among numerous other potential topics, to be included on the agenda of an upcoming International Labour Conference, Grimshaw and his colleagues would gain the mandate and resources to pursue the desired research. However, if the question were to be introduced directly within a GB meeting and subsequently rejected by a majority vote, ILO rules would prohibit its reconsideration by the body for several years—a potentially disastrous outcome from Grimshaw's perspective. Both he and John Harris, who were personally and morally committed to advancing the study of colonial labour conditions, began devising a plan to influence the course of action. Their strategy involved indirect political pressure. A sympathetic Member of British Parliament would be approached informally to raise the issue in Parliament, requesting that the British government should instruct its delegate to the ILO's Governing Body to advocate for the inclusion of colonial labour on one of the next ILC's agendas. This would allow the issue to enter the ILO's programme via the more secure and viable channel of conference planning. Simultaneously, Grimshaw proposed that the Anti-Slavery Society should issue a formal letter to Albert Thomas, citing the parliamentary debate and calling for a comprehensive study of colonial labour. The letter might even recommend the creation of a committee of experts to carry out the work. Grimshaw concluded his appeal with a sense of urgency and hope: "I can assure you that we here are watching very eagerly and anxiously for a

62 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (January 7, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

63 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (January 9, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

favourable occasion to get a move on. Such a letter as I suggest could have no effect other than good."[64]

A few days later, Harris wrote to his colleague at the Anti-Slavery Society, Charles Roberts, to outline the case. From this correspondence, it becomes evident that Harris had already approached the Conservative Minister of Labour, Arthur Steel-Maitland, asking him to support Viscount Cecil's suggestion.[65] That same day, Harris also contacted Gilbert Murray (1866–1957) of the League of Nations Union (LNU), a British peace organisation dedicated to advancing the ideals of the League of Nations. Murray, a noted classical scholar and liberal internationalist, had been active in the LNU since its founding in 1918.[66] In his letter, Harris disclosed that it was in fact he who had prompted Viscount Cecil, who was also a member of the LNU, to raise the issue of indentured labour in the House of Lords in December 1925. In urging Murray to act, Harris requested that the LNU should send a telegram to Albert Thomas in support of the initiative. The urgency and ambition of this coordinated effort is clear from Harris' closing appeal:

> I need not point out to you the enormous significance of getting this done. If we could get it done, it would literally change the industrial conditions of millions of people. […] It is obvious that any additional help we could get might be the turning point in getting the matter put through.[67]

John Harris' extensive network of political and humanitarian contacts thus played a pivotal role in advancing the emerging international campaign on colonial labour. Both Harris and Harold Grimshaw benefitted from their collaboration. Harris contributed well-established political connections, while

64 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (January 9, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

65 John Harris to Charles Roberts (January 14, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

66 Stray, Christopher (2008): Murray, (George) Gilbert Aimé (1866–1957). In: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35159. For more information on the philosophical foundation of the liberal internationalist worldview present in Murray and other supporters of the League of Nations and their imperial connections, see Daniel Gorman (2005): Liberal Internationalism, the League of Nations Union, and the Mandates System. In: *Canadian Journal of History* 40(3), 449–477. https://doi.org/10.3138/cjh.40.3.449, and Mark Mazower (2009): No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations. Oxford/Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 75–77.

67 John Harris to Gilbert Murray (January 14, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

Grimshaw offered insider knowledge of the operations and procedural dynamics of international organisations. This episode also reveals the close institutional interconnection between the League of Nations and the ILO. The ILO was able to leverage the League's work through the Temporary Slavery Commission to open a new avenue of engagement, simultaneously building upon and distinguishing itself from its sister organisation.

Gilbert Murray promptly acted on Harris' suggestion and sent a telegram to Albert Thomas.[68] In Thomas' absence, the ILO's Deputy Director-General Harold Butler responded, first to Murray and then separately to Humbert Wolfe of the British Ministry of Labour, who also served as a member of the ILO's Governing Body. In his letter to Wolfe, Butler emphasised the significance of the House of Lords debate and indicated that Albert Thomas intended to bring the issue before the GB during its next session. Butler endorsed the idea of creating a committee of experts, noting that "without being fortified by expert opinion, we should expose ourselves to the accusation of meddling with things about which we know nothing". He encouraged Wolfe to consult with the British Colonial Office and seek official instructions, stressing that "from every point of view (including the political) it would be eminently desirable that the British Government should take the initiative".[69] Butler also referenced the external support from the League of Nations Union to underscore the growing momentum behind this initiative. Within the span of only a week, the plan Grimshaw had discussed with Harris had been set in motion. While there is no record of direct communication between Grimshaw and Butler during this episode, the complementary nature of their efforts suggests a degree of informal coordination. Grimshaw maintained close contact with actors in the humanitarian lobby, such as Harris, while Butler, more cautious and restrained in tone, leveraged his own ties within the British government, shaped by his earlier role in the British Ministry of Labour. Together, they pursued the shared goal of institutionalising colonial labour as a subject of formal inquiry within the ILO.

At the subsequent meeting of the Governing Body, Albert Thomas introduced the matter as planned. Referring to Viscount Cecil's remark in the House of Lords, he cited recent correspondence from "various organisations" such as the Anti-Slavery Society and the LNU as evidence of growing public pressure on the ILO to take up the issue. Thomas proposed that the Governing Body should authorise a dedicated investigation and the creation of a committee of experts. His suggestion received a mixed response. The South African

68 Harold Butler to Gilbert Murray (January 15, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-0-2.

69 Harold Butler to Humbert Wolfe (January 15, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-0-2.

delegate and the British representatives, William Gemmill, Humbert Wolfe and Louis Kershaw, expressed cautious support, but insisted that a detailed plan outlining the study's scope and cost would be submitted prior to any final decision. Thomas, however, favoured immediate action and was backed up in this by the workers' representative, Mr. Findlay. A compromise was eventually reached: the Office would focus initially on a specific topic, such as forced labour, and prepare a more detailed plan for the next GB meeting in May.[70]

When discussing this new development with John Harris, Harold Grimshaw expressed his support for the decision to focus on a specific topic rather than attempting to construct an overarching "labour charter":

> I am afraid of the latter [the formulation of a labour charter], not only because of its formidability, but because I think in the course of its elaboration so much would have to be given away to meet the objections of individual countries that little might remain. On the other hand, I think that procedure step by step, or rather subject by subject (e.g. forced labour to begin with) gives us much more hope not only of really effective work but of achieving a higher minimum standard than would be possible in an ominumgatherum [sic] of a "charter".[71]

Grimshaw went on to express his strong opposition to including any provision that might oblige colonial subjects to work, stating that no such obligation existed in "civilised states". In his view, the economic pressures inherent in capitalism, present in both Europe and the colonies, were sufficient to compel labour without the need for formal coercion. He was unwilling to provide colonial administrations with tools that might facilitate further exploitation of their colonised populations, citing practices in Portuguese Africa as a negative example. Here, Grimshaw positioned himself more firmly against coercive measures than he had in his earlier memorandum for the PMC, revealing his evolving and at times ambivalent stance on the use of force in colonial labour systems. His rejection of compulsory labour provisions was framed through a comparative lens, aligning his critique with European labour norms while distancing himself from racialised assumptions that had dominated earlier discussions within the PMC. Grimshaw closed his letter to Harris with a note of appreciation, expressing both gratitude and optimism:

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70 N.N. (1926): Second Item on the Agenda. Supplementary Report of the Director. Native Labour. In: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 30th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, Geneva, January 1926. Geneva: ILO, 52–55.

71 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (February 1, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

> I am feeling in a particularly happy mood, having secured, thanks very largely indeed to your efforts from the English end, the authorisation I needed to proceed further. I feel, Harris, that we are on the right lines, and that we shall not fail to produce something very worth while [sic]. It's no good my thanking you; it's your life's work. But I hope to repay you by making the fullest possible use of the international machinery with which I am in touch in order to secure the ends we both aim at.[72]

Harris replied in a similarly pleased, though more cautious tone. He emphasised that the realistic objective should now be to promote one or two key principles concerning colonial labour that could be embedded in an ILO convention or recommendation—this would be "as much as we could expect for the next five or seven years".[73]

This exchange illustrates that even among the organisers of this informal campaign, the ambition to create a full "native labour charter" was abandoned early on. It became apparent that the field of "native labour" encompassed too many different aspects to be addressed all at once. From both political and pragmatical perspectives, it was deemed more effective to prioritise narrower, better-defined topics such as forced labour. Underpinning this decision was an awareness of the likely resistance from colonial administrations, which were expected to oppose any sweeping reforms to colonial labour policy. Grimshaw's final remarks also highlight his personal motivation, which appears to have been driven by sincere humanitarian concern. By acknowledging Harris' "life's work", he not only expressed his personal appreciation but also underscored his awareness of the decisive role that British support had played in the broader campaign.

At the Governing Body meeting of May 1926, Harold Grimshaw presented a "Memorandum on the Study of Questions Relating to Native Labour". The document contained two major proposals. First, it recommended the establishment of a committee of experts on "native labour and colonial administration", drawn from countries directly concerned with or interested in the topic.[74] This committee would advise the Governing Body on potential steps towards the international regulation of colonial labour conditions. Second,

72 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (February 1, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

73 John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (February 5, 1926), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

74 Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Japan and possibly India were considered at this point.

rather than attempting to formulate a broad "charter for native labour", as had been suggested by some actors, Grimshaw proposed a topic-specific approach. He recommended that the committee's initial investigations could focus on issues such as forced labour, indentured labour and racial discrimination. The memorandum also outlined the Office's general stance on colonial labour and included a preliminary list of nine proposed experts.[75]

As in previous discussions, the memorandum was received with mixed reactions. Employers' representatives, in particular, called for an adjournment of the question, requesting more time to consult with their colleagues—most likely out of concern that international regulation could lead to tighter restrictions on colonial business operations and potential financial losses. This was met with resistance of the workers' delegates, including Léon Jouhaux, who advocated for immediate action. Albert Thomas, seeking to maintain the momentum of the initiative, reminded the GB of its responsibility not only to the ILO but also the League of Nations, which had supported the study: "It was important that the Assembly should have the impression that the duties entrusted to the Office had not been neglected, and that it was actively carrying out its work in a sphere in which no one denied its competence."[76] After further deliberation, the employers' group ultimately agreed to the formation of the proposed committee. However, new objections were raised when the French delegate, Arthur Fontaine, expressed concern that colonial labour conditions in African and Asian colonies were too dissimilar to be considered under a single framework. Other suggestions included the inclusion of more experts from the Americas and Spain, to better reflect a global perspective. Despite these reservations, the Governing Body ultimately endorsed the memorandum's core recommendations: (a) that the expert committee should initially focus on forced and indentured labour; and (b) that the attached list of expert candidates should serve as the basis for further discussion.

Over the following months, Harold Grimshaw mobilised both his European contacts and the limited staff assigned to his unit to gather as much material as possible on colonial labour conditions. Even while on annual leave at the French seaside, Grimshaw remained active. He wrote to Edward Phelan (1888–1967), then head of the Diplomatic Division and later Director-General

75 N.N. (1926): Annex A. Memorandum on the Study of Questions Relating to Native Labour. In: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 32nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, May–June 1926. Geneva: ILO, 299–303. The choice of experts is discussed in Chapter 3.

76 N.N. (1926): Second Item on the Agenda. The Director's Report (continued). Native Labour. In: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 32nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, May–June 1926. Geneva: ILO, 288–290.

of the ILO, to request a 500-franc grant for a study on labour legislation in the former German colonies. Leon "Leo" Steinig (1898–?), a lawyer and League of Nations officer working for the ILO, had already begun, on his own initiative, to collect materials for a comparative study of pre-war German colonial taxation and intended to continue his work in Berlin.[77] Phelan, however, expressed reservations. He questioned whether this limited funding might by more effectively used if the research were conducted by ILO staff and incorporated a broader selection of colonial cases beyond Germany.

While the outcome of the funding request remains unclear, Grimshaw's team proceeded in autumn and winter 1926 with several research trips to France, Germany and the United Kingdom. These served both to collect relevant documentation on colonial labour legislation and to cultivate relations with key figures and organisations in colonial administration policy. In France, Grimshaw himself held an initial consultation at the Ministry of Colonies in Paris in October 1926, aiming to gain an overview of French colonial labour legislation and establish connections with local colonial experts and activists.[78] Six weeks later, Jean Goudal (1895–1981), the French-speaking member of Grimshaw's team, returned to Paris to continue the study. He met with officials from the colonial ministry, including Albert Duchêne (1866–1948) and Maurice Besson (1885–1946), as well as with representatives of the colonial journal *Dépêche Coloniale* and the lobbying organisation *Union Coloniale Française*.[79] At the same time, Leon Steinig travelled to Berlin, where he accessed records from the former German Colonial Office, the German parliament, the colonial society *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* and Berlin State Library.[80] In London, Gertrude C. Weaver (?–?) attempted to compile labour legislation

77 Leon Steinig to Harold Grimshaw (March 19, 1926), Harold Grimshaw to Edward Phelan (August 18, 1926), both ILO Archives, N 206-1-24-1, Albert Thomas to Ministerialrat Dr. J. Feig and Geheimrat Eltester (November 17, 1926), BAB, R1001-6291. For biographical details of Leon Steinig, see N.N. (n.d.): Leon Steinig. In: LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/5194 (last accessed: March 7, 2024) and an interview with the daughter of his first wife Regina Hildebrandt (b. Treister). Eckstein, Tanja & Lucia Heilman (2012): Jüdische Erinnerung bewahren – Geschichte zum Leben erwecken: Lucia Heilman. In: Centropa https://www.centropa.org/de/biography/lucia-heilman (last accessed: March 13, 2024).

78 Jean Goudal, Minute Sheet (November 15, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-1-22-1.

79 Jean Goudal: Rapport sur Ma Mission Du 28 Novembre au 8 Decembre au Ministère des Colonies, ILO Archives, N 206-1-22-1. For more information on Albert Duchêne, see N.N. (n.d.): Albert Duchêne. In: BnF Data https://data.bnf.fr/fr/12139908/albert_duchene/. For Maurice Besson, see N.N. (n.d.): Maurice Besson. In: BnF Data https://data.bnf.fr/12169305/maurice_besson/ (both last accessed: March 7, 2024).

80 Leon Steinig to Harold Grimshaw (November 28, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-1-24-1.

from all British colonies.[81] Though she received no response to her request to meet officials from the Colonial Office, she successfully leveraged her personal network to arrange meetings with figures such as Archdeacon W.E. Owen (Kenya), Professor William Miller Macmillan (South Africa), the female American scholar Dr. Abol-Henderson, who was researching the history of anti-slavery activism in London, and John Harris.[82]

Following the Governing Body's endorsement of further research, Grimshaw concentrated the efforts of his unit primarily on the colonial labour legislation of the two dominant imperial powers, Great Britain and France. The inclusion of former German colonial policy, by contrast, was largely the result of Steinig's initiative rather than a strategic priority of the ILO. Nevertheless, both the League and the ILO continued to draw on the expertise of former German colonials, not only in shaping general colonial policy but particularly in the administration of the former German colonies under the League's Mandates System.[83] Notably, the research trips often involved collaboration with pro-colonial actors and lobbying organisations, such as *Union Coloniale Française* and *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*. This reflects the ILO's continued reliance on imperial networks and the central role assigned to colonial lobby groups as producers of knowledge. By contrast, no contact was sought with anti-colonial organisations or groups representing the interests of Black people or other racialised communities. In this way, the preparatory work for the new Committee of Experts for Native Labour remained firmly embedded in the epistemological and political logics of empire.[84] At the same time, these efforts helped to establish Grimshaw's own credentials and authority as a spe-

81 Gertrude C. Weaver to Harold Grimshaw (December 1, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-3. Gertrude Weaver was married to C.W.H. Weaver who later led the Native Labour Section of the ILO. Her biodata remains unknown as no personal file has been preserved in the ILO Archives.

82 Gertrude C. Weaver, Minute Sheet (December 31, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-3.

83 Wempe, Sean Andrew (2019): Revenants of the German Empire. Colonial Germans, Imperialism, and the League of Nations. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 157–193.

84 The chronological order and details of this period of research trips and the following creation of the Native Labour Section are portrayed slightly different by historian Olga Hidalgo-Weber. While Albert Thomas clearly was sympathetic towards the study of colonial labour conditions, the crucial element that led to the formation of the section was the cooperation between Grimshaw and Harris and their campaign towards the Governing Body. The decision to implement the new section and the Committee of Experts for Native Labour had already been made when Gertrude Weaver travelled to London. Hidalgo-Weber, Olga (2017): La Grande-Bretagne et l'Organisation Internationale du Travail (1919–1946). Une Nouvelle Forme D'Internationalisme. Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 226–228.

cialist in colonial labour, setting the stage for his future elevation to the status of an international expert himself.

1.2 The Native Labour Section under Harold A. Grimshaw, 1927–1928

At the beginning of 1927, the ILO's engagement with colonial labour questions entered a new stage of institutionalisation. In a letter to John Harris, Harold Grimshaw reported that he was currently preoccupied with establishing and organising the work of a "new section", which would in the future be responsible for "native labour questions, mandates, slavery and so on". He expressed optimism regarding the staffing of this section and the general support within the ILO for this initiative.[85] In parallel with this organisational development, Grimshaw was advancing two major projects. First, he sought to launch a regular publication focused on colonial labour policy. Second, in collaboration with Harris, he was preparing a memorandum intended to serve as the foundational document for the forthcoming Committee of Experts for Native Labour. Both of these examples should be understood as deliberate strategies adopted by Grimshaw and his colleagues to position the new Native Labour Section as an authoritative producer of expertise on colonial labour, thereby expanding the International Labour Office's role in the production and circulation of knowledge about labour.

1.2.1 Reaching Out to the Public

Harold Grimshaw's first proposal, a publication project on colonial labour policy, was conceived both as a tool of internal communication between colonial administrations and a means of external advocacy for ILO policy. Grimshaw hoped that such a journal would contribute to the creation of a "movement of opinion" that could positively influence member states even before the subject of "native labour" was officially placed on the agenda of future International Labour Conferences. This highlights the significant role attributed to public opinion and informal diplomacy in shaping a political climate conductive to moderate reform in colonial labour policy, reaching beyond the

85 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (January 11, 1927), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

borders of individual colonial empires.[86] Still, the project encountered a material obstacle. Although Grimshaw believed that ILO leadership would, in principle, support the idea, the project's financial feasibility remained unsolved. He therefore followed up on a "hint" from Harris that the Anti-Slavery Society might assist in securing additional sponsorship.[87] Despite extensive correspondence between the two, Grimshaw's continued attempts to secure funding ultimately proved unsuccessful.[88] While he could rely on Harris for informal connections and access to his personal network, the latter hesitated to support the ILO financially. This hesitation underscores the financial limits of international organisations' autonomous networking efforts and their distinctive position within civil society.

Following the unfruitful contact with Harris, Grimshaw postponed further efforts to launch the proposed journal until after the Committee of Experts on Native Labour had held its first meeting. The idea was formally presented to the Governing Body during its thirty-seventh Session in Berlin in October 1927. While the utility of such a publication was acknowledged in principle, the GB decided against a monthly format, favouring instead a less frequent but regular issuance.[89] Over the following months, the matter was left aside as the Native Labour Section concentrated its efforts on supporting the work of the expert committee. Unexpectedly, however, the project gained momentum in early 1929 during Harold Grimshaw's absence. C.W.H. Weaver took the initiative to contact the members of the committee, requesting them to submit a photograph and a brief personal statement on the value of international cooperation in addressing colonial labour problems.[90] A draft table of contents offers insight into the envisioned structure of the first issue. It was to include

86 A helpful overview of transimperial contacts and knowledge exchanges is given by Daniel Hedinger & Nadin Heé (2018): Transimperial History. Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition. In: *Journal of Modern European History* 16(4), 437–439. https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2018-4-429. On press in colonial public spheres, see Emma Hunter & Leslie James (2020): Introduction. Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print. In: *Itinerario* 44(2), 227–242. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248.

87 Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (January 11, 1927), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

88 John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (January 14, 1927), Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (May 12, 1927), John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (May 16, 1927), and Harold Grimshaw to John Harris (May 27, 1927), all Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

89 N.N. (1927): Appendix 3. Third Item on the Agenda: Report of the Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Note by the Office on the work accomplished by the Committee. In: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 37th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, Berlin, October 1927. Geneva: ILO, 468–469.

90 C.W.H. Weaver to Frederick Lugard (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-0-6-1.

a lead article by Albert Thomas titled "The ILO and Native Labour", a compilation of statements from the committee's members and an article by Belgian colonial administrator and jurist Octave Louwers (1878–1959) on "Problems of the Belgian Congo". Additional contributions were planned from staff members of the Native Labour Section, summarising recent developments across various colonies. The issue was to conclude with a digest of new colonial labour legislation and a bibliography of recent publications on the topic.[91] In internal notes on the matter, Weaver reflected on the ambiguities surrounding the term "native" in the proposed title of the journal:

> Assuming that Indian, Chinese and Japanese questions generally are to be excluded, the title must nevertheless be broad enough to cover native labour questions in independent States (e.g. Liberia, Abyssinia, American States), Dominions (South Africa, Australia) and even some Indian problems (e.g. contract labour in Assam) as well as in colonies and mandated territories.[92]

This conceptualisation reveals that "native" was not used as a designation of political status or formal sovereignty. Instead, it appears grounded in racialised criteria, encompassing all African countries, along with selected regions in Oceania and Asia. The general exclusion of industrialised and geopolitically influential nations like China, Japan and in some cases India, indicates an unstable and contested category, problematic even within the Native Labour Section itself. Despite the revived plans, Grimshaw's vision of a regular ILO journal devoted to "native labour" was never realised. The reasons likely include both financial constraints within the ILO and Grimshaw's untimely death shortly thereafter.

However, in the following years, the ILO's *International Labour Review* increasingly featured articles on colonial and racialised labour. Since 1924, the journal had been overseen by a specialised Editorial Section that adapted and popularised internal research for a broader readership.[93] Although the

91 Provisional Table of Contents for "Native Labour – A Quarterly Periodical" (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-0-6-1. Louwers' draft article gave rise to tensions between the ILO and the author, as Louwers refused to moderate his criticism of the League's 1926 Slavery Convention. Schweizer, Andrea (2005): Zwischen Rassismus, Markt und Menschenrechten. Das internationale Regime zur Kontrakt- und Zwangsarbeit im südlichen Afrika 1919–1944. Zurich: Chronos, 107–108.

92 C.W.H. Weaver, Minute Sheet (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-0-6-1.

93 Hoehtker, Dorothea (2022): Historical Perspectives on the *International Labour Review* 1921–2021. A Century of Research on the World of Work. In: *International Labour Review* 161(4), 4, 7. https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12358.

dedicated journal on colonial labour envisioned by Grimshaw never materialised and the ILR largely mirrored the ILO's broader focus on Western industrial labour, the officials concerned nonetheless succeeded in placing their work within the *Review*. For instance, a 1927 article titled "Native Labour Conditions and Population Problems in Nyasaland" drew on a 1926 census report to offer what was described as "the most valuable material for the study of native policy [...], where [...] the chief source of knowledge" remained "casual observation on the part of people of a different race and culture from those of the natives".[94] Other articles covered colonial labour in Northern and Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, Nigeria, Tanganyika or Kenya.[95] In this way, Grimshaw's ambition to shape a colonial "movement of opinion" through public press discourse was, at least in part, realised.

1.2.2 Accessing British Colonial Circles

Returning to Grimshaw's second major initiative in 1927, the drafting of a memorandum on forced labour, the cooperation with Harris proved considerably more productive. As a next step, the Anti-Slavery Society circulated the draft among a group of British experts and asked for their feedback. Responses were received from individuals and institutions such as the Africa House in London, the barrister Anton Bertram (1869–1937), Labour Party figures George Barnes (1859–1940) and Charles Roden Buxton (1875–1942) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The memorandum, originally shaped by Grimshaw and Harris, was thus revised in response to comments from colonial interest groups and individuals whom Harris considered politically moderate and sympathetic to his humanitarian agenda. Politically, most of these respondents were affiliated with the Labour and Liberal parties.

Of particular value to Harris was the response from Anton Bertram (1869–1937), a former Chief Justice of the British colony of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Bertram criticised the memorandum's narrow focus on Africa and pointed out

94 N.N. (1927): Native Labour Conditions and Population Problems in Nyasaland. In: *International Labour Review* 16(1), 78.

95 N.N. (1927): Native Labour in Southern Rhodesia. In: *International Labour Review* 15(5), 741–749, N.N. (1930): Native Labour on the Witwatersrand. In: *International Labour Review* 22(3), 363–367, N.N. (1931): Native Problems in Southern Nigeria. In: *International Labour Review* 23(4), 547–550, N.N. (1931): Native Labour in Northern Rhodesia. In: *International Labour Review* 24(5), 577–580, N.N. (1932): Labour in the Mandated Territory of Tanganyika in 1930. In: *International Labour Review* 25(6), 812–816, and N.N. (1933): Kenya Labour in 1933. In: *International Labour Review* 27(2), 246–250.

that terms such as "native" and "native tribes" were often rejected by the populations to whom they were applied. He also challenged the memorandum's assumption of "white paramount[cy]" as a global norm, highlighting that Japan, itself a colonial and mandatory power, could not be overlooked in discussions of imperial authority.[96] Bertram's critique thus brought to the fore more complex questions of terminology, regional variation and what was perceived as an ambiguous racial and political status of Japan. While Japan ruled over colonised peoples in ways similar to European empires, it remained, in the eyes of many Europeans, including Harris, a racialised Other and was seldom regarded as an equal imperial counterpart. Although Harris expressed great appreciation for Bertram's insights, most of his substantive suggestions were not implemented. The ILO and its British collaborators, including Harris, continued to rely on the broad and, for some, contested category of "native labour", despite its imprecision.

Following this initial round of feedback and revision, John Harris aimed to secure the endorsement of higher-ranking British colonial officials. In May and June 1927, a conference of all colonial British governors was held in London. This was an opportune moment to present the draft memorandum to colonial administrators and thereby elevate its authority before it was formally submitted to the ILO. Harris informed William Ormsby-Gore, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, that the Anti-Slavery Society and the Executive Committee of the League of Nations Union wished to

> avail themselves of the advice of the representatives of the Colonies before finally agreeing the draft memorandum to the International Labour Office, and that the meeting is to be quite private. We should not, of course, refer in any way to the fact that we had received such assistance in the preparation of the memorandum, but we are naturally anxious to bring other Governments into line with the best practices of the British Colonial system.[97]

This statement offers several insights into the political calculus behind Grimshaw's and Harris' strategy. The instruction to avoid mentioning the assistance received from colonial officials can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it may have been intended to preserve the appearance of political neutrality and to present the memorandum as the independent product of

96 Anton Bertram to John Harris (May 3, 1927), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

97 John Harris to William Ormsby-Gore (May 11, 1927), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

humanitarian and internationalist actors, rather than as one aligned with British governmental interests. On the other hand, it may also have been meant to obscure the extent of Harold Grimshaw's behind-the-scenes influence on the memorandum's content, concealing his role to maintain the perceived impartiality of both the Anti-Slavery Society and the ILO. Furthermore, Harris' comment that other colonial governments should align themselves with "the best practices of the British Colonial system" reflects his relatively uncritical support for British imperial governance and reveals an ambition to model international standards after British precedents.

The private meeting took place at London's Hotel Victoria in early June 1927, bringing together a small number of colonial governors, representatives of the Anti-Slavery Society and the LNU, Harold Grimshaw of the ILO and several other anti-slavery activists. Although Harris was "a little disappointed" by the limited turnout—participation was hampered by the meeting's unfortunate overlap with the Epsom Derby—the gathering was later deemed a success.[98] After incorporating additional feedback, the final version of the memorandum on forced labour was formally submitted to Albert Thomas on June 14, 1927, under the joint auspices of the Anti-Slavery Society and the LNU. Both organisations were subsequently invited by the ILO to attend the inaugural meeting of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, held from July 7 to July 12, 1927, where their recommendations continued to shape the ILO's international agenda.

While the content of the final memorandum and the reactions of the ILO's expert committee will be examined in the following chapter, this episode already reveals key insights into the operations of the early Native Labour Section from January 1927 onwards. As head of the section, Harold Grimshaw significantly deepened the ILO's cooperation with British governmental actors and interest groups. In doing so, he repeatedly operated in the ambiguous space between professional responsibility and personal initiative to advance that cooperation. Although Albert Thomas and other senior ILO staff were likely aware of Grimshaw's ties to the Anti-Slavery Society, particularly given his previous work with the PMC, the full extent of the strategic coordination between Grimshaw and Harris may not have been entirely transparent. Harris played a crucial role in helping Grimshaw establish "native labour" as a legitimate area of ILO activity, initially through his influence on debates in the House of Lords and the resulting decisions of the Governing Body. Once Grimshaw had secured funding for a small, dedicated section within the ILO and

98 John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (May 24, 1927), Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 466.

laid the groundwork for the formation of a committee of experts, he was in a position to support Harris' official interventions before that very body in return. This reciprocal arrangement illustrates the ILO's entanglement in what historian Susan Zimmermann has termed "the historical traditions and ongoing dynamics of an internationalized and institutionalized [...] anti-slavery and 'free labour' humanitarianism".[99] Yet despite the effectiveness of this professional alliance, Grimshaw's personal view of Harris appears to have been more ambivalent. In a private letter written a year later, Grimshaw admitted: "Despite my distrust for Harris, I have always thought that that particular crowd were a useful lot and worth cultivating".[100] While the precise source of his distrust remains unclear, this remark underscores that Grimshaw's appreciation of the Anti-Slavery Society's work was purely instrumental. Despite his personal reservations, he recognised Harris' influence and networks as strategically valuable to the Native Labour Section's mission.

1.2.3 Representing the Native Labour Section in Public

After the establishment of the expert committee, much of the Native Labour Section's work focused on maintaining communication with its members and preparing for and following up on their meetings. Nevertheless, the section's staff also began to assume the role of colonial labour experts themselves. One early example of this shift occurred in September 1927, when the ILO's Native Labour Section was invited to participate in and speak at an international vacation school held in Gland-Vaud, Switzerland. The event, titled "Relations of White Races with Races of Colour" ("Les Rapports des Races blanches avec les Races de Couleur"), was organised by the French branch of WILPF, the *Ligue Internationale des Femmes Pour La Paix et La Liberté*, and formed part of a longstanding tradition of annual summer schools hosted in rotating locations.[101] That year, the *Ligue Internationale des Femmes* used the premises of

99 Zimmermann, Susan (2010): 'Special Circumstances' in Geneva. The ILO and the World of Non-Metropolitan Labour in the Interwar Years. In: van der Linden, M., J. van Daele, M. Rodriguez Garcia & G. van Goethem (eds.): ILO Histories. Essays on the International Labour Organization and Its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century. Berne: Peter Lang, 240.

100 Harold Grimshaw to Harold Butler (May 18, 1928), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-5 (Jacket 1).

101 Previous summer schools had taken place in Keswick (England), Ludwigsstadt (Germany) and Varese (Italy). The Gland summer school is briefly mentioned by Maria Susanna Garroni (2013): Peace, Reform, and Democracy. U.S. Wilpfers, Transnational Dialogue, and the Birth of a Gendered Political Discourse. In: Fasce, F., M. Vaudagna & R. Baritono (eds.): Beyond the Nation. Pushing the Boundaries of U.S. History from a Transatlantic Perspective. Torino: Otto, 112, and by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo (2020):

the so-called International Fellowship School in Gland, founded in 1921 by the British Quaker Emma Thomas (1872–1960).[102] The school was portrayed as a kind of idyllic haven for internationalist learning and exchange:

> [T]hose who passed the two weeks of the school at Gland will never forget them: the lake with its beach, the boating, the walks in the fields, the beautiful scenery, the simple hospitality of Miss Thomas and the whole Fellowship School and their devotion at all hours, the excellent atmosphere of confidence and comradeship that existed between the old friends who met again and that which grew up immediately among the new-comers. That is the charm of our Summer Schools.[103]

The 1927 programme, directed by the French philosopher and anti-colonial activist Félicien Challaye (1875–1967), explicitly addressed both citizens of colonial powers and "natives of countries at present ruled by white races".[104] With this focus, the school marked a stark contrast to the Native Labour Section's previous partnerships, which had predominantly involved white colonial officials of European advocacy organisations. Rarely, if ever, had the ILO's work directly welcomed the participation of colonial subjects on such equal footing. The Office was represented at the school by Jean Goudal, who gave a lecture titled "The International Labour Office and Native Labour" ("Le B.I.T. et le travail indigène"). His presence signalled a new role for the Native Labour Section: not only as a body that gathered information from colonial administrations and political actors but increasingly as a producer and disseminator of specialised knowledge in its own right.

With international participants such as the Vietnamese anti-colonial lawyer Dương Văn Giáo (1892–1945), the Indonesian anti-colonial activist and future national president Mohammed Hatta (1902–1980) and the future Indian president Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), the summer school brought together a

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Developing Civilisation? Imperial Internationalism at the League of Nations (1920s–1930s). In: *Histoire Politique* 41. https://doi.org/10.4000/histoirepolitique.385.

102 For more biographical information on Emma Thomas, see Gerard Blaylock (2020): Emma Thomas in England, Switzerland and Italy. A Life Devoted to Education. Library of the Geneva Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers). In: Library of the Geneva Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends (Quakers) https://www.swiss-quakers.ch/ge/library/e-documents/8905-EmmaThomas.pdf (last accessed: July 3, 2024).

103 Jouve, Andrée (1927): French Section. Conclusions on the Summer School. In: *Pax International* 2(11).

104 N.N. (1927): International Summer School of the W. I. L. for 1927. In: *Pax International* 2 (4).

diverse cohort of experts, scientists, politicians and activists.[105] Through this encounter, the ILO was exposed to voices far more critical than those within its usual diplomatic and administrative circles. According to Jean Goudal's brief report, the discussion following his talk centred on the lack of non-European and colonised representation within both the ILO and, more specifically, its Native Labour Section. Participants also underscored the absence of meaningful colonial representation at the International Labour Conferences.[106] While the summer school was nominally open to a broad international audience, the majority of attendees were likely white European WILPF members. Nonetheless, their political stance, generally supportive of a gradual decolonisation, stood in contrast to the ILO's more cautious rhetoric. According to the French women's activist Andrée Jouve, who summarised the school's conclusions in the WILPF journal *Pax International*, "evolved peoples […] such as the Asiatic peoples" were seen as deserving immediate independence. In contrast, for "certain African peoples", some form of protection from "economic exploitation and seizure by the white race" was still deemed necessary.[107] Although the latter argument reveals a contradictory logic—advocating protection from the "white races" by its own institutions—it also reflects widespread beliefs at the time about differing "stages" of civilisational development among racialised groups. Despite its inconsistency, this call for immediate decolonisation in at least some parts of the world marked a more radical stance than anything publicly expressed by the ILO. It was thus through the international women's movement and the anti-colonial figures they brought into dialogue that Jean Goudal, representing the ILO's Native Labour Section, was directly confronted with criticism of the Office's entanglement in imperial structures.

Further public engagements followed in December 1927. Harold Grimshaw delivered lectures titled "The International Labour Office and its Native Labour Programme" for the British section of the WILPF in London and separately at his alma mater, the LSE.[108] Around the same time, a lunch meeting was arranged, though it is unclear whether it actually took place, between representatives of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), World's Student Christian Federation and Grimshaw and C.W.H. Weaver of the ILO

105 Advertising leaflet (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-3.

106 Jean Goudal to Ayusawa Iwao and Edward Phelan (September 3, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-3.

107 Jouve, Andrée (1927): French Section. Conclusions on the Summer School. In: *Pax International* 2(11). For more information on Jouve, see N.N. (2024): Notice JOUVE Andrée [née CHARPENTIER Andrée]. In: Le Maitron (June 17, 2024) https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article114578 (last accessed: July 31, 2024).

108 Harold Grimshaw to M.R.K. Burge (November 23, 1927), ILO Archives, WN 1000-6-11.

to welcome the Black Baptist missionary and YMCA leader Max Yergan (1892–1975) during a visit to London.[109] These various engagements in activist, academic and clerical circles indicate a growing popular interest in the ILO's role in "native labour" issues. The formal institutionalisation of colonial labour studies within the ILO from January 1927 onwards thus coincided with and contributed to a shift in how the organisation was perceived by actors beyond its usual governmental and administrative interlocutors.

1.2.4 Studying Colonial Labour Conditions in South Africa and Southeast Asia

In the late 1920s, the International Labour Office increasingly despatched staff on intercontinental "missions" to member states and their dependencies.[110] These journeys served multiple purposes but were primarily aimed at promoting the ILO's work and improving diplomatic relations with the host countries. One of the earliest of these missions to a colonial context was undertaken by the ILO's Deputy Director, Harold Butler, who travelled to South Africa in November 1927. The immediate impetus for this visit was South Africa's damaged international reputation in the preceding years, particularly due to reports of labour abuses and racial discrimination.[111] In response to mounting criticism, William Gemmill, South Africa's representative on the Governing Body, proposed Butler's visit as a public relations strategy. An official invitation from the South African government soon followed.[112] In preparing for the journey, Butler was in close correspondence with John Harris of the Anti-Slavery Society, who played a significant role in facilitating Butler's entry into South African political circles, once again underlining the ILO's utilisation of Harris' widespread contacts and networks.[113]

Harold Butler, accompanied by his wife Olive Augusta Butler (née Newenham), began the journey in Cape Town and proceeded to Johannesburg. In both cities, Butler held meetings with representatives of the government,

109 Francis P. Miller to G.A. Johnston (November 15, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-16.

110 For more information on the general role of these "missions" for the internationalisation of the ILO, see Guy Fiti Sinclair (2017): To Reform the World. International Organizations and the Making of Modern States. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 82–83.

111 Schweizer, Andrea (2005): Zwischen Rassismus, Markt und Menschenrechten. Das internationale Regime zur Kontrakt- und Zwangsarbeit im südlichen Afrika 1919–1944. Zurich: Chronos, 224.

112 Clarence W. Cousins to Albert Thomas (June 4, 1927), ILO Archives, G 900/3/8. For more information on Gemmill's influential role in the South African mining industry, see Chapter 6.

113 Various letters of introduction by John Harris, ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-5 (Jacket 1).

major industries and trade unions, and was hosted by members of the clergy and local universities. The group toured the gold mines in Johannesburg and visited key health institutions such as the South African Institute of Medical Research and the Miners' Phthisis Medical Bureau, underscoring the ILO's concern with occupational health.[114] The next stop was Pretoria, where Butler met with Prime Minister James Hertzog, ministers of defence and finance, leaders of the political opposition, as well as officials from the Labour Department and the Wage Board. A brief visit to Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State followed. The group then travelled to Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) and continued through the Eastern Cape to Durban. In Durban, Butler met with representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, local trade unions and, notably, with members of the Government of India in South Africa. One of the most politically charged segments of the trip was the trip through Zululand (now KwaZulu-Natal), guided by Henry M. Taberer (1871–1932), South Africa's member of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour. Butler's final destination was Salisbury (now Harare) in the then self-governing British Crown colony Southern Rhodesia, where he met with the governor and senior government officials, visited farms and the so-called Native Labour Bureau and inspected an industrial school.[115]

A few months later, in April 1928, a report on Harold Butler's journey to South Africa was published to inform the wider public about his experiences. The document provides valuable insight not only into the events of the tour itself but also into Butler's personal perceptions and, given his high-ranking position, into the broader professional stance of the Office on South Africa, the African continent and questions of race relations more generally. The twenty-page article opened with an overview of South Africa's relationship with the ILO and contextualised the role of race in the country's labour dynamics. After a brief geographical introduction, the report turned to an economic survey, focusing on major sectors, such as agriculture and gold mining. Subsequent sections discussed topics including "European and Native Labour", industrial

114 These flagship health institutions symbolised the structural and racial inequalities faced by Black workers. While the health of white mine workers was examined centrally at the Bureau, Black workers were subject to examinations by medical officers in individual mines, creating conditions for neglect and abuse. McCulloch, Jock & Pavla Miller (2023): Mining Gold and Manufacturing Ignorance. Occupational Lung Disease and the Buying and Selling of Labour in Southern Africa. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 70. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8327-6.

115 The journey is described in more detail in Harold B. Butler (1928): Annex B. Report of the Deputy Director on His Voyage to South Africa. In: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 38th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, Geneva, February 1928. Geneva: ILO, 107–117. For more information on Taberer, see Chapter 2 and Appendix I.

and wage standards, trade unionism and working conditions in "native" territories. Particular attention was devoted to the neighbouring colony Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).[116]

Throughout the article, Butler sought—at least from his own perspective—to offer a balanced assessment of labour and "race relations" in the Union of South Africa. He juxtaposed views from government officials, employers, trade unionists and both white and, to a lesser extent, non-white workers. Yet despite this apparent inclusivity, the text largely reflected a Eurocentric framework. It portrayed South Africa as carrying a unique burden, suggesting that "the South Africans [we]re bearing the brunt of the search for a modus co-operandi between the white and black races".[117] The systematic racial discrimination underpinning labour practices was euphemistically described as "a subject of perennial controversy", a formulation that implicitly treated racial subjugation and resistance to it as two morally equivalent positions in a legitimate debate.[118] In this framing, South Africa emerged as a symbolic and practical test case for the ILO's engagement with colonial labour and race. The country was understood to act as a magnifying lens for broader global tensions between imperial governance and emerging critiques of racial inequality. Thus, while the report strove for impartiality, it ultimately mirrored the ILO's ambivalent stance, committed to reform yet embedded within the very structures of colonial rule it sought to moderate.[119]

One core idea that reoccurred throughout Butler's article was the supposed link between industrial labour and the advancement of "civilisation", although the pace of this development was imagined to vary across different groups. This reflects the prevalence and popularity of nineteenth-century anthropo-

116 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 465–485. The article is a shortened version of Butler's report to the Governing Body.

117 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 482.

118 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 470.

119 A possibly more critical account of his travels was given by Harold Butler in person. In a letter to John Harris, Butler noted that there were "a great number of things which I want to discuss with you, some of which I cannot commit to paper." In response, Harris organised a lunch meeting on behalf of the Anti-Slavery Society, providing Butler with the opportunity to share his impressions of the journey more freely. In the aftermath of the event, Butler reported to Harold Grimshaw that it had been "quite a worth while [sic] meeting". Harold Butler to John Harris (January 24, 1928), Harold Butler to Harold Grimshaw (May 17, 1928), both ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-5 (Jacket 1), and various letters in Bodleian Libraries, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 467.

logical theories about evolutionary models of human development. The Black population of South Africa was consistently described as originating from an uncivilised state. In his discussion of gold mine labourers, Butler referred to "raw natives" who had had "little or no contact with civilisation" and were considered "incapable of looking after themselves".[120] Later, when distinguishing between various ethnic groups, he described the inhabitants of Pondoland (now EmaMpondweni) as leading a "primitive existence untrammelled by the trappings of civilisation" and referred to the Zulu population as still being "barbaric".[121] These examples reveal an ambivalent and ultimately paternalistic understanding of "civilisation". While the term "barbaric" carried clearly derogatory overtones, the phrase "trappings of civilisation" suggested a certain scepticism or ambivalence about modernity's benefit. Yet this ambiguity did not challenge the civilising hierarchy itself. The fundamental assumption remained that colonised peoples required guidance from white superiors to develop, whether through labour discipline or other forms of political and social governance. This notion was further legitimised through references to colonial science discourse. Butler remarked: "Whether they can be successfully assimilated without a long process of mental education and moral reorientation is still a matter of debate among experts".[122] Here, he alluded to prevailing colonial models, such as the French theory of assimilation or the predominantly British practice of indirect rule, both of which were based on hierarchical racialised thinking.[123]

120 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 468. The term "raw natives" is directly linked to nineteenth century eugenic race science that assumed different "stages of development" between different racial groups. Galton, Francis (1904): Eugenics. Its Definition, Scope, and Aims. In: *American Journal of Sociology* 10(1), 11.

121 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 480.

122 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 485.

123 Put briefly, French colonial policy was largely grounded in the belief that colonial subjects could be transformed into French citizens through the imposition of French culture and law. By contrast, indirect rule denoted a system of colonial governance exercised through local elites, which was widely practised in British colonialism. Despite these differing approaches, French, British and other colonial powers often employed similar techniques, such as fiscal state building, thereby blurring distinctions that have frequently been portrayed as clearly distinguishable colonial models. Frankema, Ewout & Marlous van Waijenbourg (2014): Metropolitan Blueprints of Colonial Taxation? Lessons from Fiscal Capacity Building in British and French Africa, c. 1880–1940. In: *Journal of African History* 55(3), 393. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002185371400036X.

In Butler's framing, white employers and government officials were portrayed as shouldering a difficult responsibility, and the report expressed considerable sympathy for their position. Butler repeatedly asserted that white South Africans generally acted in "the natives'" best interests. Two legislative examples served to underline this perspective: the South African Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911 and the Southern Rhodesian Native Juvenile Employment Act of 1926. Regarding the former, Butler spoke of "very great improvements" following its implementation, employing a vocabulary of humanitarian concern: "good food and good treatment", "excellent hospital accommodation" and "rigorous medical surveillance".[124] Similarly, he portrayed the 1926 Southern Rhodesian act, despite its deeply exploitative elements, such as the absence of a minimum employment age under certain conditions and the legal use of corporal punishment, as a benevolent measure to protect "native" youth.[125] He wrote approvingly of the commissioners' "conscientious and sympathetic spirit" and described the legislation as part of a "progressive and enlightened native policy".[126] This positive evaluation was echoed in a private letter Butler wrote to John Harris: "I am bound to say that my very definite impression was that both the Governed and the Commissioners were anxious to do the right thing by the natives and were doing their best in accordance with their lights."[127] Through such endorsements, Butler effectively aligned himself and, by extension, the ILO, with colonial administrations and their narratives of benevolent governance. In doing so, he reproduced the well-worn trope of the "White Man's Burden", which cast colonial rule as a civilising mission and upheld the moral legitimacy of white supremacy in Africa and Asia.[128]

Although Harold Butler did not explicitly name racism as such, his report nevertheless acknowledged its central role in shaping South African labour relations. When describing the mine workforce, he noted a "strong repugnance of the average white worker to admit the native to social or economic

124 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 468.

125 The act marked a new approach by formalising the previously informal recruitment and control of children for labour in mining and agriculture, thereby securing the colonial state's interests in the long-term availability of workers. Grier, Beverly (1994): Invisible Hands. The Political Economy of Child Labour in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890–1930. In: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20(1), 29.

126 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 483.

127 Harold Butler to John Harris (January 24, 1928), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-5 (Jacket 1).

128 Rudyard Kipling's influential 1898 poem "The White Man's Burden" was a key British literary text promoting white supremacist ideology.

equality with himself".[129] The Black population, in turn, expressed frustration over lower wages and restricted career opportunities. Yet rather than framing this as a clear imbalance of power and racial injustice, Butler sought to balance the perspectives, writing that there was "substance in both the white man's fear and in the native's grievance". This false equivalence portrayed white workers' racial prejudices as morally and politically on par with the material and structural effects of racial discrimination endured by Black workers. Still, Butler claimed to observe a softening of white attitudes, suggesting that segments of the white labour movement were beginning to "evince further sympathy" for Black workers.[130] This interpretation, however, stands in marked contrast to findings in contemporary historical scholarship. While isolated expressions of solidarity may have occurred, the broader South African trade union landscape of the time remained racially segregated and exclusionary. The 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act explicitly denied recognition to Black trade unions and white workers themselves often resisted multiracial labour solidarity.[131] Butler's optimistic reading, therefore, appears more indicative of his desire to frame the situation constructively than of actual conditions on the ground.

In the final section of the article, Butler placed South Africa's labour conditions within a broader narrative about Africa's growing role in the global economy. He interpreted his visit as evidence of the ILO's expanding relevance "even in a continent which ha[d] only been drawn into the orbit of the modern world of politics and industry in very recent times".[132] This statement revealed Butler's Eurocentric worldview and his limited understanding of Africa's long-standing entanglement with global capitalism and imperial exploitation. Nonetheless, Butler viewed the South African government's invitation to the ILO as a sign that African labour issues were beginning to be recognised as having international significance.[133] In this context, he advocated for future

129 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 470.

130 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 478.

131 Money, Duncan (2020): The Struggle for Legitimacy. South Africa's Divided Labour Movement and International Labour Organisations, 1919–2019. In: Bellucci, S. & H. Weiss (eds.): The Internationalisation of the Labour Question. Ideological Antagonism, Workers' Movements and the ILO since 1919. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 386–389. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28235-6_17.

132 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 465.

133 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 466.

meetings of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour to take place on the African continent rather than exclusively in Geneva, suggesting that closer observation might lead to more informed interventions. Until then, he concluded, international cooperation would continue to address colonial labour problems, albeit from a distance.[134] In the end, it was not until the 1950s that an ILO expert meeting about colonial labour would finally take place on the African continent.

Another major journey was planned by Harold Grimshaw for the following year. In early December 1928, he undertook preparatory trips to Paris and London to gather information for his upcoming mission to Southeast Asia. Between December 28, 1928, and May 1, 1929, Grimshaw travelled through the Dutch East Indies and South Africa. His itinerary included stops in Singapore, Java, Sumatra, Colombo, Lourenço Marques and Johannesburg, with the aim of studying colonial labour conditions on the ground.[135] This would, however, remain Grimshaw's first and only journey to the colonies. He died in August 1929, having contracted malaria during his time in the East Indies, compounded by kidney and lung complications.[136] A planned report based on his experiences and impressions remained unfinished.[137]

Grimshaw's death was deeply mourned within the ILO and its wider networks. William Paton of the International Missionary Council, for example, wrote to Harold Butler, recalling his final meeting with Grimshaw in hospital: "I had not realised how ill he was and was grieved beyond measure to see how near death he looked. […] people like Grimshaw are so much more important than many men who get much more public kudos. He will be impossible to replace in a great many relationships".[138] Harold Butler himself authored a heartfelt obituary in the British weekly magazine *The Spectator*, in which he praised Grimshaw's many personal and professional qualities, such as his

134 Butler, Harold B. (1928): Labour Problems in Southern Africa. In: *International Labour Review* 17(4), 485.

135 Travel plans (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 131.

136 N.N. (1929): Calverley Man Dies at Geneva. Mr. H. A. Grimshaw. Expert on Labour Questions. In: *Leeds Mercury* (August 7, 1929), 1. Harold Grimshaw had already been severely ill in spring 1928, which had forced him to spend some time at the Clinique Mont Riant in Chamby sur Montreux, close to Geneva. After that, however, his health seemed to have improved. Harold Grimshaw to Harold Butler (May 18, 1928), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25- 5 (Jacket 1).

137 The publication plans are mentioned in: N.N. (1929): Internal Organisation. Appendix XII. The Director's Report (Thirteenth Item on the Agenda). In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 46th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, Geneva, October 1929. Geneva: ILO, 553–554. Grimshaw's notes have not been preserved.

138 William Paton to Harold Butler (September 16, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-9.

enthusiasm, energy, ability and especially the force and charm of his personality.[139] Grimshaw's "intellectual, economic, and [...] human" interest in colonial labour was emphasised, as was the singularity of his contribution to the ILO. He had acquired a significant "amount of accurate information" and demonstrated "soundness of [...] judgement", all before he had even set foot in a colony. By the end of his life, Butler wrote, Grimshaw had become "a recognised authority" on colonial labour and had paved the way for the future success of the ILO's work in this field. Grimshaw's passing was also addressed in Albert Thomas' report to the Governing Body in October 1929, where Thomas echoed the high regard in which Grimshaw was held and acknowledged his significant contributions to the Office. As his death was attributable to an illness contracted during an official mission, discussions were also held concerning insurance provisions for his widow.[140]

All in all, the study of colonial labour within the ILO was so closely associated with the person of Harold Grimshaw that his death undeniably slowed the Office's progress in this field. Although Grimshaw's friend and colleague C.W.H. Weaver competently assumed leadership of the Native Labour Section, the extensive personal networks and close relationships Grimshaw had cultivated, particularly within British humanitarian and labour circles, now required careful maintenance. A retrospective view of Grimshaw's career also illustrates that, in the early years of the ILO, it was still possible to join the newly established organisation with a general professional background in administration and labour and subsequently shape a more specialised field of expertise over time. In comparison to the various candidate suggestions made by W.E.B. Du Bois for the Native Labour Section, it becomes clear that the early ILO prioritised hiring white European nationals with bureaucratic or administrative experience over incorporating the lived perspectives of Black people or colonised subjects. While the Native Labour Section would continue to receive inquiries and correspondence from individuals in the colonies, the organisation's direct engagement with colonial contexts only began to expand meaningfully at the end of the 1920s, marked by the intercontinental missions of Harold Butler and Harold Grimshaw to Africa and Southeast Asia.

139 Butler, Harold B. (1929): Letters to the Editor. In: *The Spectator* (August 31, 1929), 16.

140 N.N. (1929): Internal Organisation. Appendix XII. The Director's Report (Thirteenth Item on the Agenda). In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 46th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, Geneva, October 1929. Geneva: ILO, 553–554.

1.3 The Native Labour Section under C.W.H. Weaver, 1929–1939

After Grimshaw's death, Charles William Henry Weaver (1887–1954) assumed leadership of the Native Labour Section. Weaver had joined the ILO in 1920. Having left school at the age of fourteen to begin an apprenticeship as a printer, he soon became actively engaged in the labour and trade union movement. He later pursued studies at the University of Lille, the University of Paris and the LSE, before enlisting in the military during the First World War. Following the war, he briefly held a post as an administrative officer at the British Consulate General in Berlin.[141] In his letter of application to the ILO, Weaver expressed a deep commitment to the ideals of the League of Nations: "I combine a thorough belief in the underlying idea of the League of Nations with a belief that the international regulation of wages and labour conditions is one of the sacred means of making the League a success."[142] His initial appointment at the ILO was as an interpreter, but within a few months he joined the Diplomatic Division, becoming Assistant Chief of Section under Harold Grimshaw in January 1922. Following Grimshaw's death in 1929, Weaver was promoted to Chief of Section, later advancing to Principal Chief of Section in 1944. He retired from the Office in 1947. Like Grimshaw, Weaver came from a background in the British labour movement and maintained ties to the LSE. His succession thus suggested a continuation of Grimshaw's trajectory, aligned with the ideal of promoting intellectually reformed colonialism.

1.3.1 Epistemic Emancipation

From 1929 onwards, the focus of the Native Labour Section increasingly centred on collaboration with the Committee of Experts for Native Labour and on the drafting of related conventions and recommendations. While relationships with international activist organisations such as the Swiss *Bureau International* and the British Anti-Slavery Society were maintained, their influence gradually declined. Weaver's internal reports on his participation in their meetings reflect the political and generational shifts within these groups. In a 1929 report, for instance, he noted a sense of stagnation within the Swiss *Bureau International*, which, in his view, had come to rely almost entirely on the aging leadership of Ed. Junod. Weaver expressed hope that the British

141 CV of C.W.H. Weaver (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 154.

142 C.W.H. Weaver to Albert Thomas (March 10, 1920), ILO Archives, P 154.

Anti-Slavery Society might offer support to what he saw as a fading Swiss branch.[143]

The next recorded meeting between British anti-slavery activists and the ILO's Native Labour Section took place two years later. In April 1931, C.W.H. Weaver attended the annual meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in London. At this gathering, the society launched a public campaign to commemorate the centenary of the formal abolition of slavery in the British Empire. Their proposed programme aimed to attract broad public attention through various means, including lowering membership subscription fees to increase accessibility, forming local committees, promoting parliamentary debates and organising a lecture tour in the United States. According to Weaver, the centenary campaign was intended not merely as a commemorative exercise, but as a strategic effort to shape public opinion on contract labour and to advocate for international oversight of the League of Nations' 1926 Slavery Convention and the ILO's 1930 Forced Labour Convention. Faced with these ambitions, Weaver felt compelled to reiterate the procedural constraints of the ILO. In particular, he explained that the society's goal of creating a unified supervisory body for both conventions was unfeasible due to the distinct constitutional framework of the two Geneva-based organisations. This encounter thus revealed a tension between the idealistic aims of the Anti-Slavery Society and the more complex and gradualist operations of international organisations. While John Harris and his political network had been instrumental in the establishment of the Native Labour Section, they now proved largely irrelevant for the administration and oversight of colonial labour conventions. Between 1926 and 1930, the ILO had debated and negotiated its own system of colonial labour regulation, which had since been integrated into the institutional procedures provided by the Versailles Treaty. Although Weaver expressed a continued openness to cooperation, it was evident that the Native Labour Section had, by this point, emancipated itself from its earlier dependence on Harris and the British anti-slavery movement.

In his report to the ILO, Weaver also offered a critique of the Society's narrow national focus. He urged them to internationalise their campaign and to collaborate more fully with organisations beyond Britain. In his view, their failure to do so undermined the effectiveness of their advocacy. He summarised the problem in striking terms:

> [T]he Society, and particularly Mr. Harris, who really dictates its policy, suffer from a sort of humanitarian imperialism. They seem to think it natural and

143 C.W.H. Weaver to Albert Thomas (September 23, 1929), ILO Archives, D 600-720-2.

> desirable that the movement should be concentrated in the hands of a British Society and that this British Society should have the whole world as its province.[144]

The term "humanitarian imperialism", now widely used by historians as an analytical concept, was in this context employed by Weaver to describe the parochialism and imperial assumptions underpinning the Society's programme.[145] As historian Amalia Ribi Forclaz has argued, interwar humanitarian anti-slavery activism extended well beyond British actors to include Swiss, French and especially Italian organisations, many of which have been historically overlooked. Yet from Weaver's contemporary vantage point, the British activists' lack of international perspective appeared both self-defeating and short-sighted.[146] As he had already remarked in 1929, he now again linked the decline of the Swiss *Bureau International* to the British group's failure to foster genuine international cooperation: "it is to some extent their fault [...] if the Geneva Bureau international pour la défense des indigènes has shrunk to what is practically a local Genevese society". Weaver concluded that meaningful change in the Society's approach was unlikely for as long as John Harris remained in its leadership.[147]

In 1933, as planned, the British Anti-Slavery Society commemorated the centenary of the formal abolition of slavery in the British Empire. The same year, the Swiss *Bureau International* again invited the Native Labour Section to its biannual meeting. Although the programme announced a lecture on colonial labour in the Portuguese colonies by António Augusto Gomes de Almendra (1893–1974), an ILO officer, C.W.H. Weaver ultimately decided not to attend. His absence may be interpreted as a reflection of the *Bureau International*'s waning influence in international labour and humanitarian circles.[148] Instead,

144 C.W.H. Weaver: Report on Mission to London, 18.–22. April 1931 (May 4, 1931), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/1/2.

145 See the titles of James Heartfield (2011): The Aborigines' Protection Society. Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1836–1909. London: Hurst, and Amalia Ribi Forclaz (2015): Humanitarian Imperialism. The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880–1940. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198733034.001.0001.

146 Ribi Forclaz, Amalia (2015): Humanitarian Imperialism. The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880–1940. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 7. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198733034.001.0001.

147 C.W.H. Weaver, Report on Mission to London, 18.–22. April 1931 (May 4, 1931), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/1/2.

148 C.W.H. Weaver, Minute Sheet (September 20, 1933), ILO Archives, D 600-720-3. Almendra was the first Portuguese ILO official. For more information on his biography and

1933 marked a new phase of engagement by the ILO's Native Labour Section, with a renewed focus on fieldwork. Four years after Harold Grimshaw's untimely death following his mission to the Dutch East Indies, the Office organised another tour to Asia. This time, C.W.H. Weaver undertook a mission to India, Iraq, Persia and Turkey, continuing the section's efforts to assess labour conditions on the ground.

Taken together, developments between 1929 and 1934 illustrate a marked shift in the ILO's relationship with the two principal actors in humanitarian anti-slavery activism. Two key factors help explain this transformation. First, the advancing age of key British and Swiss activists and their apparent failure to cultivate a younger generation of leadership led to a stagnation of their political efforts and, at least from the ILO's perspective, a noticeable decline in their influence. Second, with the establishment of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, the ILO had developed its own internal framework of expertise. This institutional maturation reduced the Office's earlier reliance on external networks, particularly those associated with the British humanitarian milieu. Under Weaver's leadership, the Native Labour Section thus operated with increasing independence. Whereas Grimshaw's tenure had been marked by close cooperation with activist circles, particularly in Britain, Weaver steered the Section towards a more autonomous position within the ILO's institutional structure. This evolution reflected both broader generational shifts in the humanitarian field and the growing professionalisation of international labour governance in the interwar period.

1.3.2 New Cooperations, 1935–1939

In the following years, the ILO's Native Labour Section saw further shifts in its networks of external cooperation. Whereas the 1920s had been marked by close collaboration with actors from the anti-slavery movement and women's organisations, the 1930s brought new interlocutors to the fore. One such organisation, surprisingly absent from earlier discussions, was the International Colonial Institute (ICI). Founded in Brussels in 1893 and operating, under different names, until 1982, the ICI functioned as a key meeting point and think tank for the internationalist colonial lobby from the late nineteenth and to the mid-twentieth century. During its biannual meetings, held in varying loca-

work within the ILO, see Cristina Rodrigues (2019): António Augusto Gomes d'Almendra – The ILO's first Portuguese official. In: ILO (ed.): The ILO and Portugal. 100 Years of History. Geneva: ILO, 105–119, and José Pedro Monteiro (2023): The Internationalisation of the 'Native Labour' Question in Portuguese Late Colonialism, 1945–1962. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 75–77. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05140-1.

tions, members discussed a wide range of issues related to colonial governance, aiming to develop transnational administrative techniques and methods of governmentality for colonial territories. Many ICI members, experienced in colonial administration and policymaking, regarded themselves as better qualified to speak on colonial matters than the League of Nations' PMC. Nevertheless, some degree of personal overlap and informal cooperation between the two bodies existed.[149]

Despite the ICI's prominence in colonial circles, its relationship with the ILO, particularly the Native Labour Section, remained marginal. The first significant mention of the ICI in ILO records appeared only in 1929, when the institute addressed the topic of colonial labour at its Brussels session. The proceedings of this meeting were later published in a collected volume titled "Le régime et l'organisation du travail des indigènes dans les colonies tropicales".[150] Following this session, concerns arose within the ILO that the ICI was adopting an increasingly critical stance towards the organisation's work. This reaction was interpreted as stemming from feelings of having been overlooked or insufficiently consulted in areas it regarded as its domain expertise.[151] While ILO officer Jean Goudal noted that it was necessary to "induce a more friendly attitude than was shown by the large majority of the speakers at the recent session of the Institute", the 1929 publication itself contained no overt signs of antagonism toward the ILO. Generally, the ICI advocated for a differentiated approach to colonial labour legislation, arguing that the diversity of colonial conditions and "stages of civilisation" made generalisation through international norms impractical.[152] While this position clearly diverged from that of the ILO, it did not openly challenge the organisation.

149 Jerónimo, Miguel Bandeira (2018): A League of Empires. Imperial Political Imagination and Interwar Internationalisms. In: Jerónimo, M.B. & J.P. Monteiro (eds.): Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 108–110. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60693-4_4, Florian Wagner (2022): Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 210–211. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009072229, and Elisabetta Fiocchi Malaspina (2023): Universalising Colonial Law Principles on Land Law and Land Registration. The Role of the Institut Colonial International (1894). In: *History of European Ideas* 49(2), 396–398. https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2022.2073680. For the personal overlaps, see Appendix I.

150 Bibliothèque Coloniale Internationale (ed.) (1929): Le régime et l'organisation du travail des indigènes dans les colonies tropicales. Brussels: Etablissements généraux d'imprimerie.

151 C.W.H. Weaver, Minute Sheet (September 6, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-5.

152 Schumann, Willem Martinus Godfried (1929): Rapport Général. In: Bibliothèque Coloniale Internationale (ed.): Le régime et l'organisation du travail des indigènes dans les colonies tropicales. Bruxelles: Etablissements généraux d'imprimerie, VII.

The criticism must thus have been transmitted via spoken word. Nevertheless, the Office evidently perceived the need to intervene. In consultation with C.W.H. Weaver, Albert Thomas met with ICI secretary Octave Louwers to express the ILO's recognition of the institute's expertise and to reaffirm its interest in closer cooperation.[153] As part of this conciliatory gesture, the possibility of including an ICI representative on the Committee of Experts for Native Labour was even considered.

However, this suggestion ultimately failed to gain traction. In his reply, Louwers explained that many ICI experts had already been consulted by their respective governments in relation to the committee's work, rendering official inclusion unnecessary. Others who might have been inclined to participate declined, fearing conflict with their governments' official positions.[154] In the end, no formal collaboration except Louwers' draft article for the planned colonial labour publication materialised. While the correspondence between Thomas and Louwers may have helped to improve mutual perceptions, no concrete steps towards cooperation were taken between 1929 and 1930. This continued distance can be attributed in part to differing institutional and geographic orientations. The ICI was dominated by French, Belgian and Dutch colonial experts, while the ILO's Native Labour Section operated largely within British networks. Furthermore, the organisations approached the regulation of colonial labour from different perspectives. The ICI prioritised the economic modernisation of colonial systems, often in the service of maintaining imperial control. By contrast, the ILO approached colonial labour issues from the standpoint of global labour activism, where colonial concerns formed only one part of a broader international agenda.

A few years after the tentative advances between the ILO and the ICI, C.W.H. Weaver of the Native Labour Section participated for the first time in one of the ICI's sessions, held in London in August 1936. His attendance came at the special invitation of Frederick Lugard, who was both an active member of the ICI and a prominent figure on the ILO's Committee of Experts for Native Labour. Weaver used the occasion to further develop the ILO's ties to influential figures within the colonial lobby.[155] However, his internal report on the event reveals a rather critical assessment. He described the session as disappointing, citing "poor" attendance, with Belgian and Dutch delegates being the notable exceptions, and minimal time allocated for substantive discussion of the agenda. He also noted that the preliminary reports prepared by the mem-

153 Albert Thomas, Minute Sheet (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-5.

154 Octave Louwers to Albert Thomas (February 13, 1930), ILO Archives, N 206-1-01-5.

155 Octave Louwers to C.W.H. Weaver (September 21, 1936), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/15.

bers were "not very good".[156] As with the earlier exchange between the organisations in 1929, relations between the ILO and the ICI remained distanced and formal rather than genuinely collaborative. During the same visit to London, Weaver took the opportunity to engage with a broader range of British colonial actors. He met with prominent figures such as Lord Hailey and George Maxwell, both British representatives on the League of Nations' PMC and Temporary Slavery Commission, as well as with Julius Lewin of the Colonial Ministry and the Friends of Africa Society.[157] These meetings suggest that Weaver, and the ILO more broadly, continued to prioritise established British connections, especially those with links to Geneva, over closer engagement with the ICI.

Another more productive collaboration with British colonial actors occurred in the summer of 1938, when Weaver participated in the Oxford University Summer School on Colonial Administration.[158] This initiative, co-organised by the historians Reginald Coupland (1884–1952) and Margery Perham (1895–1982), had launched the previous year and was now being held for the second time. At the time, Coupland was professor for colonial history at Oxford and Perham lectured in colonial administration. According to the programme brochure, the summer school was primarily aimed at administrative officers of the British Empire, though it also welcomed staff from the Colonial Office in London. Running from June 27 to July 9, the programme covered a wide range of topics related to colonial administration and global imperial politics. The event was inaugurated by the distinguished Frederick Lugard, then eighty years old and a close associate of Perham, but also featured significantly younger speakers. As such, it illustrated the generational shift occurring within the British colonial establishment, a transformation that increasingly shaped the networks with which the ILO's Native Labour Section engaged.

Some of the speakers had a practical background in colonial administration and could already look back on distinguished careers. Among them were figures such as Donald Cameron (1872–1948), former Governor of the British Mandate Tanganyika and later Nigeria, and Alan Pim (1871–1958), a veteran administrator in colonial India. Others represented a wide range of academic disciplines. Unsurprisingly, the fields of social and cultural anthropology

156 C.W.H. Weaver: Report on Mission in London to Attend Institut Colonial International (October 23, 1936), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/15.

157 C.W.H. Weaver: Report on Mission in London to Attend Institut Colonial International (October 23, 1936), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/15.

158 On the history of the science of colonial administration in the UK, see Véronique Dimier (2006): Three Universities and the British Elite. A Science of Colonial Administration in the UK. In: *Public Administration* 84(2), 337–366.

were prominently represented, featuring renowned scholars such as Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955), Bronisław Malinowski (1884–1942) and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973). However, the programme also included contributions from economists, palaeoanthropologists, anatomists and sociologists, reflecting the summer school's ambition to provide an interdisciplinary perspective on colonial governance. Strikingly, and in marked contrast to previous networks with which the Native Labour Section had engaged, female scholars were also part of the speaker lineup. In addition to Margery Perham, who would become the first woman appointed as a Reader at Nuffield College the following year, the programme featured lectures by social scientist Charlotte Leubuscher (1888–1961) and anthropologist Lucy Mair (1901–1986).[159]

Although the manuscript of C.W.H. Weaver's lecture on "Labour in the Colonies" has not been preserved, it is evident that his contribution was well received and seen as a valuable intervention by the ILO. In a letter to Harold Butler, who had succeeded Albert Thomas in the role of Director of the ILO in 1932, Reginald Coupland, the event's organiser, praised Weaver's performance, noting that "he [Weaver] gave a most admirable discourse" and that "the School [sic] were clearly impressed by his mastery of his subject and the great authority with which he spoke". The audience for Weaver's talk was estimated to have included approximately 180 participants.[160] Internally, Butler affirmed the importance of the engagement, describing the Summer School as "a rare opportunity of getting into touch with Colonial Administrators" and expressing hope that the ILO might be invited to future sessions.[161] However, any plans for continued cooperation were soon overtaken by the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939.

In conclusion, this chapter has traced the emergence and evolving role of the ILO's Native Labour Section as a specialised department for research and policy on colonial labour relations. Originating from close institutional ties with the League of Nations and early cooperation with Swiss and British anti-slavery advocacy networks, the section gradually developed into an autono-

159 Timetable of the Oxford University Second Summer School on Colonial Administration (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/9/2. For an overview over Margery Perham's relation to the Colonial Administrative Service and a short mention of the summer school, see Anthony Kirk-Greene (1991): Forging a Relationship with the Colonial Administrative Service, 1921–1939. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19(3), 62–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086539108582846.

160 Reginald Coupland to Harold Butler (July 7, 1938), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/9/2.

161 Harold Butler to Edward Phelan and C.W.H. Weaver (July 27, 1938), ILO Archives, N 206/1000/9/2.

mous and confident body of expertise. Its activities remained embedded in existing colonial networks and the British influence, especially through the personal and professional networks of Harold Grimshaw and C.W.H. Weaver, proved particularly enduring. Over time, the Native Labour Section repositioned itself from a reactive body reliant on external advocacy to a proactive institution shaping international standards in colonial labour governance.

CHAPTER 2

Colonial Expertise in the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, 1926–1934

The Committee of Experts for Native Labour originated from shared initiatives between the British anti-slavery milieu and ILO officials interested in colonial labour issues, such as Harold Grimshaw and Albert Thomas. The formal creation of the expert committee was approved during the thirty-second session of the ILO's Governing Body in May and June 1926. It was further decided that the experts would be tasked with addressing a specific question, namely the international legal treatment of forced labour in non-European territories, rather than examining the entire field of colonial labour conditions. At the same time, Grimshaw and his team began preparing for the establishment of an internal Native Labour Section, which formally came into existence at the beginning of 1927. Among its main tasks were maintaining communication with the experts and preparing its meetings. Over time, however, the section also developed into a body of expertise in its own right.

To date, most studies addressing the work of the committee have focused on its outcomes, particularly the 1930 Forced Labour Convention.[1] Far less attention has been paid to the experts themselves, the reasons for their selection, their biographies and political profiles and their roles within the committee.[2] An analysis thereof provides important insights into the ILO's con-

1 Maul, Daniel (2007): The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present. In: *Labor History* 48(4), 477–500. https://doi.org/10.1080/00236560701580275, Susan Zimmermann (2018): Globalizing Gendered Labour Policy. International Labour Standards and the Global South, 1919–1947. In: Boris, E., D. Hoehtker & S. Zimmermann (eds.): Women's ILO. Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present. Leiden: Brill, 227–254, and Theresa Wobbe, Léa Renard, Nicola Schalkowski & Marianne Braig (2023): Deutungsmodelle von Arbeit im Spiegel kolonialer und geschlechtlicher Dimensionen. Kategorisierungsprozesse von ‚Zwangsarbeit' während der Zwischenkriegszeit. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 52(2), 172–190. https://doi.org/10.1515/zfsoz-2023-2014. The impact of the convention beyond colonial contexts is analysed by Sandrine Kott (2012): The Forced Labor Issue between Human and Social Rights, 1947–1957. In: *Humanity* 3(3), 69–84. https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2012.0025.

2 During the preparation of this book, Christopher M. Roberts published a detailed legal analysis of the wider context in which the 1930 Forced Labour Convention was formulated. Roberts, Christopher M. (2025): Re-Covering Forced Labour. Colonial Foreclosures and Forgotten Potentials. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law Research Paper 2025-1. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5079594.

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ception of expertise, especially in relation to colonial labour, as well as its embeddedness in national and international power structures. Additionally, this chapter aims to uncover the racialised assumptions that shaped the committee's work, conventions and recommendations. While the reports and regulations produced by the committee ultimately had to be adopted by the International Labour Conference and were therefore subject to revision, an analysis of the committee's internal communication offers valuable insight into the influence of various colonial ideologies, beliefs and specific policies on its decisions and work.

This chapter traces the work of the committee of experts from its inception in 1926, through its five meetings between 1927 and 1934, until its eventual dissolution around 1940. Using the chronology of events as a framework, the chapter explores the contrasting conceptions of colonial knowledge and expertise as understood by the ILO, various outside interest groups and the experts themselves. The analysis is supported by additional biographical material on the individual experts, as well as a tabular overview of their participation in the committee, both of which are included in Appendix I.

2.1 The Committee's Convocation, 1926–1927

The creation of the League of Nations and connected to it, the ILO, is widely regarded as one of the major caesuras shaping trans- and international networks of expertise in the early twentieth century. Through their overarching missions to promote world peace and fair working conditions on a global scale, both organisations came to rely heavily on expert knowledge across a range of topics.[3] However, expertise does not possess an inherent or fixed meaning; rather, it is socially constructed and shaped by historical and political contexts. Alongside specialised scientific knowledge and practical skills, this historically situated notion of expertise also encompassed shared ideals about the future of the world and practical strategies for achieving them.[4]

3 On colonial experts at the League of Nations, see, for example, Véronique Dimier (2020): The Mandates Commission, International Bureaucracies and the Legitimacy Trap. The Use and Misuse of Expertise and Comparisons. In: Bourmaud, P. et al. (eds.): Experts Et Expertise Dans Les Mandats De La Société Des Nations. Figures, Champs, Outils. Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 213–227. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pressesinalco.38512.

4 Vandendriessche, Joris, Evert Peeters & Kaat Wils (2015): Introduction. Performing Expertise. In: Vandendriessche, J., E. Peeters & K. Wils (eds.): Scientists' Expertise as Performance. Between State and Society, 1860–1960. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 2, and Jennifer Karns Alexander (2015): Rationalization Comes to Rome. Expertise in Labour Management

Within the ILO, various interests converged in the effort to define and locate expertise on the issue of "native labour". These were reflected in the process of staffing and establishing the Committee of Experts for Native Labour in the lead-up to, and during, its first meeting.

2.1.1 Casting Candidates

In spring 1926, the International Labour Office compiled a first draft list of potential experts and presented it to the Governing Body during its thirty-second session. The list contained nine individuals representing Belgium, France, Great Britain, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal and South Africa.[5] While the suggestions were generally well received, several points of contention emerged. For example, the Spanish member of the Governing Body, the Count of Altea, criticised the absence of a Spanish representative and called for the appointment of a Spanish expert. France demanded a second expert, arguing that its colonial holdings in Africa and Asia were too different to be represented by a single individual. If the Philippines were to be included in the ILO's conception of "native labour", the appointment of an American expert would also become necessary.[6]

The list prepared by the Office and the Governing Body's reactions to it underscore the centrality of nationality in the selection of experts. Rather than assembling a group of individuals internationally recognised for their knowledge of colonial labour conditions—a notion whose meaning will be discussed further below—the Office prioritised the representation of member states most directly involved in colonial labour systems. While the emphasis on national representation was also typical of other bodies, such as the Governing Body itself or the League of Nations' PMC, it is important to note that another key ILO principle, tripartite representation of workers, employers and

at the Third International Congress, 1927. In: Vandendriessche, J., E. Peeters & K. Wils (eds.): Scientists' Expertise as Performance. Between State and Society, 1860–1960. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 148.

5 In the order of the countries listed, the suggested names were Albrecht Léon Joseph Gohr, Martial Henri Merlin, Frederick Dealtry Lugard, Charles Ernest Low, Giuseppe Ostini, Sugimura Yōtarō, Daniel François Willem Van Rees, Alfredo Augusto Freire de Andrade and Henry Melville Taberer. N.N. (1926): Supplementary Note Submitted to the Governing Body at its Sitting of 4 June 1926. Annex A. Memorandum on the Study of Questions Relating to Native Labour. In: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 32nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, May–June 1926. Geneva: ILO, 302–303.

6 N.N. (1926): Second Item on the Agenda. The Director's Report. Native Labour. In: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 32nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, May–June 1926. Geneva: ILO, 288–290.

governments, was not applied here. As will be shown, only governmental officials and, in a few exceptional cases, employers, were deemed "experts" by the ILO. Trade unionists or workers were entirely excluded from this category. The classed nature of this decision went unquestioned.[7]

Returning to the earlier discussion of the ILO's understanding of expertise, it becomes evident that the scientific knowledge and practical skills that constituted one part of this concept were seen as necessarily embedded in specific local conditions. Thus, "native labour expertise" was not conceived as universal, but as bound to regional or national contexts, justifying the selection of experts based on nationality rather than on general qualifications. At the same time, the demands for countries such as Spain or the United States to be included in the committee underscore its second, more implicit function. In addition to its scientific purpose, the Committee of Experts for Native Labour also operated as a forum for political representation, even if it was not officially designated as such.

This dual character becomes particularly clear when examining the various channels through which candidates were proposed to the ILO. During the 1926 Governing Body meeting, Albert Thomas explained that most of the proposed names had been selected due to their prior involvement with the League of Nations. Five of the nine individuals had served either on the League's Permanent Mandates Commission or on the Temporary Slavery Commission, two of the most influential bodies shaping international approaches to imperial and colonial governance after 1919. Their participation in these commissions was taken as evidence of both their familiarity with colonial questions and the elevated status of their expertise following their work in those contexts. Given the close institutional ties between the League of Nations and the ILO, the Office considered the transfer of these figures into its own structures a natural and politically uncontroversial decision.

Among the remaining initial candidates was Sugimura Yōtarō (1884–1939), a Japanese diplomat who served as a delegate to the League of Nations.[8] Following Japan's entry into the League, the Japanese government established a permanent diplomatic mission in Geneva to facilitate communication and

7 This status quo was only challenged by the successor to the Committee of Experts for Native Labour in the 1950s.

8 According to local custom, Japanese names are listed in the order of family names first, followed by the given names. For more information on Sugimura's role in the League of Nations, see Thomas W. Burkman (2008): Japan and the League of Nations. Empire and World Order, 1914–1938. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 111–126. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824829827.001.0001. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

assert its influence more directly. Albert Thomas, leveraging a personal connection, invited Sugimura to join the committee. In the cases of Italy and India, the respective governmental delegates to the Governing Body (Italy) and the International Labour Conference (India) proposed candidates they deemed appropriate.[9] The only unclear nomination is that of the South African representative Henry Melville Taberer (1871–1932). His name had already surfaced internally by April 1926, but the precise origin of the suggestion remains unknown. However, it is likely that Taberer's name was suggested by William Gemmill who represented South Africa on the Governing Body.[10] The selection of members not previously involved in the PMC or the Temporary Slavery Commission thus appears largely driven by national governmental interests. In Sugimura's case, his nationality was the decisive factor, despite his lack of experience in colonial questions. Similarly, the Italian nominee, Giuseppe Ostini (?–?), was a former colonial military officer then serving in the Italian Immigration Commission, a government-linked position.[11] Relatively little is known about Charles Low, but his role as a former British Commissioner for the Indian Central Provinces points to a similar background in colonial administration.[12] In summary, all initial candidates were selected primarily as representatives of their respective governments. Unlike in other fields, where scientifical credentials might have been paramount, here national affiliation and state interests shaped the concept of "expertise" from the outset, prefiguring the debates on "native labour" that the committee would later engage in.

In the following months, several additions and modifications were made to the list. As recommended by the members of the Governing Body, representatives from Spain, the United States and an additional French member were included. Arthur Fontaine, the French Chair of the Governing Body, proposed Camille Charles André Lejeune (1881–1960), a former colonial administrator in French Indochina and Guadeloupe who fit the ILO's preferred profile.[13] For Spain, Pedro Saura del Pan (?–1928) was suggested by the Count of Altea.[14] The

9 Albert Thomas to Guiseppe Ostini (July 17, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-34, Albert Thomas to Charles Low (July 17, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-33.

10 Harold Grimshaw to F. Clarke (April 21, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-65.

11 Albert Thomas to Guiseppe Ostini (July 17, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-34. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

12 N.N. (1926): Proceedings of the Society, Indian Section. In: *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 74(3833) (March 19, 1926), 586–606. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

13 Albert Thomas to Camille Lejeune (July 17, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-22. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

14 Count of Altea to Albert Thomas (September 11, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-57.

American case was unique: although the United States were not a member of the League of Nations or the ILO at the time, the government agreed to nominate a representative, viewing the appointment as a matter of expertise rather than official national representation. Following discussions with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), an influential actor in the ILO's foundation, the name of Joseph Perkins Chamberlain (1873–1951) emerged as a suitable candidate.[15] The case of the United States highlights the dual nature of the committee's composition. While framed as a body of experts, its membership was deeply shaped by national affiliation. Officially, the experts were not state representatives; however, in practice, their national origin carried symbolic and political significance. The blurred line between expertise and representation, though unacknowledged in formal terms, became a defining characteristic of the committee's makeup.

Shortly before the committee officially commenced its work, two initial appointments, Sugimura Yōtarō and Charles Ernest Low, were forced to decline their nominations due to unforeseen national obligations. In response, Albert Thomas sought replacements with the assistance of Maeda Tamon, former Deputy Mayor of Tokyo and a past member of the Governing Body.[16] Through Maeda's mediation, the name of Itō Nobufumi (1885–1960) was proposed. Like Sugimura, Itō had held a role related to the League of Nations, serving as Deputy Director of the Japanese League office in Paris.[17] In the Indian case, Selwyn Howe Fremantle (1869–1942), a recently retired member of the Indian Civil Service, was selected to replace Low.[18] Additionally, a British member representing British Malaya was nominated, though he ultimately did not participate in the committee's work.[19]

A final addition came from Germany. Despite the loss of its colonial territories following the First World War, Germany remained engaged in colonial affairs. In the autumn of 1926, Walter de Haas of the German Federal Foreign Office learned of the committee's formation and urged the German Ministry of

15 William Green to Albert Thomas (June 13, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-61.

16 Burkman, Thomas W. (2008): Japan and the League of Nations. Empire and World Order, 1914–1938. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 136–137. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824829827.001.0001.

17 Kasama Akio to Albert Thomas (March 30, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-35-1. Itō's first name was often mistakenly translated to Nobumi, Nomubi or Nobubumi, but Nobufumi is the correct version. I thank Azuma Satter for her help and translation. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

18 Albert Thomas to Selwyn H. Fremantle (April 19, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-33-1. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

19 R.G. Somervell to Albert Thomas (November 18, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-82. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

Labour to propose a German candidate.[20] De Haas suggested Georg Albrecht von Rechenberg (1861–1935), former Governor of German East Africa. After resigning from public office, Rechenberg had served as a parliamentary representative for *Zentrum,* the Catholic Centre party, and had become active in colonial revisionist circles. Within three weeks, the Ministry of Labour reported back that it had consulted with the German ILO representative and successfully arranged for Rechenberg's nomination.[21] With these additions, the Committee of Experts for Native Labour was now complete.

Rechenberg's inclusion in the committee of experts must be understood alongside the contemporaneous appointments of two other former German colonial officials, Ludwig Kastl and Julius Ruppel, to the PMC of the League of Nations.[22] Compared to more controversial figures, Rechenberg had cultivated a public image as a moderate reformer. During his tenure as Governor, he was frequently criticised by German settlers for his allegedly lenient stance towards the colonised populations.[23] While this is not the place for a detailed assessment of Rechenberg's colonial administration, recent scholarship has shown that it was precisely this type of former colonial official, perceived as moderate, who was able to reposition himself as an "imperial expert" within the emerging structures of international governance.[24] Despite their involvement in Imperial Germany's colonial apparatus and their ongoing engagement with pro-colonial advocacy after 1919, individuals such as Kastl, Ruppel and Rechenberg were seen as sufficiently palatable by the international community to serve in international organisations like the League and the ILO. Their appointments not only signalled a measure of continuity between imperial and international forms of governance but also allowed for the transfer of German colonial expertise into the new Mandates System. In this way, former colonial knowledge was repurposed to serve the interests of the new international order and the states administering former German territories. Similar dynamics resurfaced in the transformation of former colonial experts into

20 De Haas to Dr. Sitzler (October 1, 1926), BAB, R1001-6291.

21 Dr. Sitzler to Auswärtiges Amt (October 26, 1926), BAB, R1001-6291. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

22 Wempe, Sean Andrew (2019): Revenants of the German Empire. Colonial Germans, Imperialism, and the League of Nations. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 157–193.

23 The obituaries written after Rechenberg's death in 1935 reveal his ambiguous standing in German public opinion. See, for example, N.N. (1935): Gouverneur Frhr. v. Rechenberg. In: *Hamburger Nachrichten* (February 27, 1935) and Wilhelm Methner (1935): Albrecht Freiherr von Rechenberg gestorben den 26. Februar 1935. In: *Afrika Nachrichten* (April 1, 1935).

24 Wempe, Sean Andrew (2019): Revenants of the German Empire. Colonial Germans, Imperialism, and the League of Nations. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 159.

international development experts during the onset of decolonisation in the 1940s and 1950s.

2.1.2 The Committee's First Meeting, Geneva, 1927

The first meeting of the committee of experts, originally scheduled for autumn 1926, was postponed for organisational reasons and eventually held from July 7 to July 12, 1927, in Geneva.[25] In addition to the assembled experts, two of whom were absent, the meeting was attended by four ILO staff members, one representative of the League of Nations and, for part of the proceedings, four representatives of the British anti-slavery movement. The principal aim of this inaugural session was to discuss and revise a draft report on forced labour in colonies and mandated territories, which had been prepared in advance by Harold Grimshaw and his team in the ILO's Native Labour Section.[26] The experts' discussion followed the structure of the draft report, though they primarily focused on its final section, chapter seven, which proposed specific recommendations for inclusion in future conventions adopted by the International Labour Conference. In this chapter, Grimshaw sought to synthesise criteria drawn from a range of colonial laws, official reports and administrative documents that were used to justify the imposition of forced labour. It also addressed the question of which colonial or mandate authorities should have the power to authorise such practices, as well as the conditions under which forced labour could be employed for public purposes. The procedure adopted for the committee's work highlights a key characteristic of its epistemic structure: unlike other forums for scientific exchange, such as international academic conferences or congresses, the body of specialised knowledge under discussion had already been pre-structured by the Office. In this context, the Native Labour Section played a central role in what counted as authoritative knowledge. The experts' task, in turn, was to assess this preliminary synthesis and collaboratively translate it into a set of practical guidelines that could underpin future international regulation. In this way, the process of producing expertise was not a matter of original knowledge creation by the experts alone, but rather a negotiated refinement of a draft that had already been filtered through the institutional lens of the ILO.

25 Albert Thomas to Albrecht Gohr (December 4, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-7.

26 The draft report itself was not preserved in the archives. However, parts can be reconstructed with the help of the official minutes. Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

The committee's initial debates centred on the definition of the term "forced labour".[27] These discussions engaged not only the specialised knowledge compiled by Harold Grimshaw and his team but also the personal experiences and perspectives of the assembled experts. Key questions included: What constituted forced labour? What forms did it take in colonies and mandated territories and how had these been regulated to date? To what extent did statutory regulations diverge from practices on the ground? Building on this empirical foundation, the committee proceeded to address more normative and policy-oriented questions. Who should be subject to forced labour? What temporal or geographical limits should be placed on its use? And, on a more abstract level, how could the ongoing existence of forced labour be morally and ethically justified, given the ILO's stated commitment to its eventual abolition?[28] These questions reveal that, fundamentally, neither the Office nor the committee of experts regarded the immediate abolition of forced labour as either desirable or feasible.

To understand this position, it is necessary to consider the historical conditions of labour in the colonies. Whereas prior to the nineteenth century, major Asian land empires and early European overseas expansion were largely organised around taxation and tribute, by the nineteenth century, European imperial relations increasingly focused on raw material extraction and the protection of commercial interests. Economic profit became a central, though not exclusive, driver of imperial expansion, intensifying imperial rivalries.[29] A key turning point in this international competition for territory and revenue was the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, convened by the German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to regulate European rivalries through the delineation of spheres of influence in Africa. The conference laid the foundations for formal colonial rule, after which European powers increasingly transformed occupied territories into fully administered colonies.[30] This process of colonisation

27 For a more detailed analysis of the racialised discourses prevalent in the first meeting's proceedings, see Fabiana Kutsche & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Between Work Regulation, Integration into the Capitalist Economy and 'African Laziness'. The International Labour Organization and African Workers, 1927–1930. In: *Innovation in the Social Sciences*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1163/27730611-bja10037.

28 Kutsche, Fabiana & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Between Work Regulation, Integration into the Capitalist Economy and 'African Laziness'. The International Labour Organization and African Workers, 1927–1930. In: *Innovation in the Social Sciences*, 7. https://doi.org/10.1163/27730611-bja10037.

29 Gardner, Leigh & Tirthankar Roy (2020): The Economic History of Colonialism. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2–3. https://doi.org/10.56687/9781529207651.

30 The conference took place among the United States, the Ottoman Empire, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Por-

generated an urgent and growing demand for labour, which often could not be fulfilled. Many colonial economies faced persistent shortages of free labour relative to their planned exploitation of natural resources. As a result, imperial powers relied on a range of coercive strategies to compel local populations into labour contracts with European settlers, companies and colonial administrations, including taxation, forced labour and systems of indentured labour. Among these, the imposition of taxes was widely regarded by colonial governments as an effective coercive instrument. Because subsistence farming and local trade met most daily needs of the colonised populations, taxes payable exclusively in cash served to force people into wage labour. While historians now largely agree that taxation proved economically ineffective, at least in British and French Africa, it nonetheless remained a commonly employed method until the first half of the twentieth century.[31]

Although taxation was often the first means through which colonised populations encountered the colonial state, it proved insufficient to resolve labour shortages in the colonial economy. As a result, various forms of forced labour became widespread. Before the ILO's attempt of formally regulating the practice in the 1930s, and to some extent even afterward, forced labour remained integral to colonial capitalism. Mostly used in infrastructure projects, mining and agriculture, it was justified as necessary to overcome the colonial workers' aversion against labour for Europeans.[32] At the time, forced

tugal, Russia, Spain and Sweden-Norway. No members of African states were invited or allowed to participate in the discussion. For a recent overview, see Matthew Craven (2015): Between Law and History. The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 and the Logic of Free Trade. In: *London Review of International Law* 3(1), 32. https://doi.org/10.1093/lril/lrv002.

31 Gardner, Leigh (2012): Taxing Colonial Africa. The Political Economy of British Imperialism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 58. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199661527.001.0001. See also Ewout Frankema & Marlous van Waijenbourg (2014): Metropolitan Blueprints of Colonial Taxation? Lessons from Fiscal Capacity Building in British and French Africa, c. 1880–1940. In: *Journal of African History* 55(3), 371–400. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002185371400036X, and Marlous Van Waijenburg (2018): Financing the African Colonial State. The Revenue of Imperative and Forced Labor. In: *The Journal of Economic History* 78(1), 40–80. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050718000049.

32 Fall, Babacar & Richard L. Roberts (2019): Forced Labour. In: Bellucci, S. & A. Eckert (eds.): General Labour History of Africa. Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries. Woodbridge: James Currey, 78. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvd58sjm.11. From the vast literature on forced labour in colonial Africa see, for example, Babacar Fall (2002): Social History in French West Africa. Forced Labour, Labour Market, Women and Politics. Amsterdam: SEPHIS, Opolot Okia (2012): Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya. The Legitimization of Coercion, 1912–1930. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230392960, Alexander Keese (2014): Slow Abolition Within the Colonial Mind. British and French Debates About 'Vagrancy', 'African Laziness', and

labour was treated by most colonial experts as a legitimate tool for economic development, despite being framed as a last resort. The fact that it was often described as exceptional reveals more about moral posturing than about its actual frequency. While chattel slavery was widely condemned by the early twentieth century, other forms of coerced labour were tolerated as long as they could be rhetorically distinguished from outright bondage. Within the moral framework of colonial labour ideology, the appearance of freedom often outweighed the reality of compulsion.[33] Both taxation and forced labour regimes were often rationalised through the rhetoric of the coloniser's "civilising mission".

Additional to these political motives, discussions of forced labour within the ILO's Committee of Experts for Native Labour also rejected the prospect of immediate abolition, because the ILO's capacity to effect immediate change was perceived to be limited. Situated within the broader framework of the League of Nations and its project of international imperial oversight, the committee's mandate was not to eliminate forced labour outright, but rather to reconfigure it into a system of labour extraction that could be internationally regulated and legitimised.

During this first meeting of the expert committee, a number of racialised and explicitly racist assumptions about the colonial labour force became apparent. An analysis of these beliefs shows that, alongside the specialised administrative knowledge compiled by Harold Grimshaw, the experts' own racialising perspectives were treated as a legitimate and even desirable component of the expertise the ILO sought to assemble and institutionalise. One example emerged during the discussion of the living and working conditions of migratory forced labourers. The widespread deployment of forced labour for infrastructure and other public works in many colonial territories often resulted in the displacement of large numbers of men from their home regions to distant work sites. When debating how far a forced labourer could be sent

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Forced Labour in West Central and South Central Africa, 1945–1965. In: *International Review of Social History* 59(3), 377–407. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859014000431, and Zachary Kagan Guthrie (2022): Forced Labor in Portuguese Africa. In: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.849. For an introduction to similar questions in Asia, see Anthony Reid (2022): Slavery and Forced Labour in Asia. Status Quaestionis. In: Allen, R.B. (ed.): Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia, 1250–1900. Leiden: Brill, 33–48. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004469655_003 as well as the other contributions in that volume.

33 Cooper, Frederick (2000): Conditions Analogues to Slavery. Imperialism and Free Labor Ideology in Africa. In: Cooper, F., T.C. Holt & R.J. Scott (eds.): Beyond Slavery. Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies. Chapel Hill, NC/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 107–151.

from his home, the Office proposed the following principle: "(1) No forced worker should be taken to a greater distance than X days travel from his home, and, (2) He should be permitted to return there at stated intervals".[34] In the discussion over the acceptable distance that forced labourers could be relocated from their home regions, two distinct positions emerged among the experts. On one side were the French representative Martial Henri Merlin (1860–1935), a former Governor-General in various French colonies, and Albrecht Léon Joseph Gohr (1871–1936), former President of the Belgian Colonial Ministry. Both argued against setting a fixed limit on distance, provided that sufficient provisions were made for the workers' sustenance. They further contended that restricting relocation distances could inadvertently harm the workers' own interests by depleting the available labour pool within village communities, thereby undermining essential local economic functions. In contrast, Harold Grimshaw of the ILO offered a different interpretation. Drawing on position papers from the British Anti-Slavery Society and the League of Nations Union, Grimshaw emphasised that the principle at stake was not primarily about physical distance, but about the right of workers to return home at regular intervals. His position reframed the issue as one of labour rights rather than administrative convenience. Grimshaw's stance was supported by Albrecht von Rechenberg, the German representative, and Pedro Saura del Pan, the Spanish expert.[35]

The discussion about travel distance naturally progressed to a debate over whether the days required for the journey to the work site should also be compensated.[36] While the question had practical dimensions, such as whether it was feasible or advisable to apply a uniform standard across all dependent territories, it was also shaped by racialised assumptions about the character and intention of colonial subjects. For instance, the conference minutes recorded the intervention of Alfredo Augusto Freire de Andrade (1859–1929), former Governor of Mozambique and the Portuguese expert: "He [de Andrade] however hoped that it would be drafted so as to show that the natives should be paid only for the days reasonably taken in travelling. A provision of this kind

34 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 85. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

35 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 86–87. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115. See Appendix I for more biographical information.

36 Kutsche, Fabiana & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Between Work Regulation, Integration into the Capitalist Economy and 'African Laziness'. The International Labour Organization and African Workers, 1927–1930. In: *Innovation in the Social Sciences*, 9–10. https://doi.org/10.1163/27730611-bja10037.

would prevent the natives taking more time than was necessary for the journey".[37] De Andrade's remark reflected a fundamental distrust in the workers, implying that they might exploit legal ambiguities for personal gain. Similarly, Martial Merlin also expressed strong opposition to the idea of counting travel days as paid workdays, proposing instead that colonial administrations should offer workers a fixed allowance based on wage levels. Pedro Saura del Pan supported this restrictive interpretation, arguing that regular employees were typically compensated only from the first day of actual work. In contrast to these perspectives, Harold Grimshaw adopted a markedly different tone. He reminded the committee that forced labour constituted a distinct category of labour:

> The Committee should not forget that forced labour was a special type of labour, accompanied generally by evil effects socially, morally and psychologically. One should therefore err on the side of generosity in regard to questions of payment. He [Grimshaw] also pointed out that the forced worker who was compelled to undertake a journey of a certain number of days to reach his place of employment lost the wage which he might have earned in his own locality during this time.[38]

Grimshaw's intervention marked a departure from the detached provision of technical expertise towards a moral and humanitarian critique of prevailing assumptions. While he had solicited the experts' personal assessments of forced workers' "nature", he ultimately resisted the dominant view, which treated these workers with suspicion and positioned them as potential exploiters of the system rather than its victims. His frustration with the experts' reservations reveals both the limits of the Office's influence over the expert discourse and the political complexity of translating moral concern into institutional consensus.

Another contested issue during the first meeting concerned the remuneration of overtime.[39] The ILO's proposal, "(4) Hours worked in excess of the normal working day or the normal working week should be remunerated at

37 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 92. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

38 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 93. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

39 Kutsche, Fabiana & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Between Work Regulation, Integration into the Capitalist Economy and 'African Laziness'. The International Labour Organization and African Workers, 1927–1930. In: *Innovation in the Social Sciences*, 10–11. https://doi.org/10.1163/27730611-bja10037.

rates higher than the normal rates" met with notable resistance. The experts opposing the suggestion advanced two main arguments. First, the French representative Martial Merlin drew on long-standing colonial stereotypes by evoking so-called "black working habits".[40] He argued that improved compensation for overtime would inevitably encourage abuse of the system, attributing this to what he perceived as an inherently poor work ethic among Black workers. At one point in the debate, Merlin even referred to colonial territories as "spaces who had no taste for work".[41] While such tropes of innate laziness or indolence among racialised and colonised populations were deeply embedded in European imperial ideologies, a gradual shift in rhetoric began in the nineteenth century and had become more pronounced by the late 1920s. Rather than assuming innate laziness, many now argued that colonised workers required moral uplift and training to become effective participants in colonial capitalism.[42] Merlin's remarks thus appeared increasingly anachronistic, though they still found resonance among some experts. The second argument against the ILO's proposal was framed in terms of fairness. Several experts warned that any perceived preferential treatment of forced labourers over free workers, particularly regarding overtime pay, could provoke unrest among the latter. In this logic, the interests of free Black workers were strategically mobilised against those of coerced recruits, reinforcing a divide-and-rule narrative while legitimising inferior conditions for forced labourers.[43]

Throughout these discussions, it was primarily the French, Belgian and Portuguese members who voiced openly racialised assumptions about supposed inferiority, duplicity or moral shortcomings of the colonial workforce. In their view, stricter regulatory conditions for forced labourers were not only justified but necessary to prevent deception and maintain order. In contrast, Harold Grimshaw, speaking for the ILO's Native Labour Section, repeatedly defended the more lenient and humanitarian proposals laid out in the draft report. He sought to appeal to the moral sensibilities of the experts and to position the Office as both an administrative and ethical authority. These debates revealed

40 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 96. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

41 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 29. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

42 Mark-Thiesen, Cassandra (2017): African Women and the 'Lazy African' Myth in Nineteenth-Century West Africa. In: Bänziger, P.-P. & M. Suter (eds.): Histories of Productivity. Genealogical Perspectives on the Body and Modern Economy. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 46.

43 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 97. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

a clear dissonance between the ILO and several members of the committee. Although the experts had been invited to advise the international organisation on the basis of their specialised knowledge, their assessments were not uncritically accepted. On the contrary, Grimshaw, whose professional role at the ILO did not preclude personal conviction, engaged in these debates as an expert in his own right. His willingness to challenge the committee's more conservative voices underscores the Office's active role in shaping international labour standards.

2.1.3 The Influence of British Humanitarian Interests During the Committee's First Meeting

The early work of the committee of experts was significantly shaped by the influence of the British humanitarian anti-slavery lobby. Due to the Anti-Slavery Society's pivotal role in advocating for the creation of the committee and, owing to this involvement, its leading figures were granted participation in the committee's inaugural meeting. On Saturday, July 9, 1927, a delegation comprising Gilbert Murray, John Harris, Edward Bateson and Henry Nevinson was formally welcomed by the committee of experts. Prior to the meeting, the committee members had been circulated a memorandum prepared by the British activists, in which their core positions on forced labour were articulated. Owing to its development with the close assistance of Harold Grimshaw and its prior review by several British experts and colonial administrators, the positions presented in the memorandum closely mirrored the contents of the ILO's draft report on forced labour.

The central point of the Anti-Slavery Society's memorandum was an uncompromising call for the abolition of forced labour for private purposes under all circumstances. While the League of Nations' Slavery Convention had permitted such labour in "exceptional" cases, the British activists rejected even these exceptions. In contrast, a more nuanced view was adopted regarding forced labour in the public sector. Here, the memorandum drew a distinction between forced labour for local public needs and that used for broader governmental purposes. While the former could, in rare situations, be justified when free labour was unavailable and the task deemed urgent, the memorandum stressed the necessity of robust oversight mechanisms to prevent abuse. The activists also argued that all forced labourers, including porters, should be paid wages at standard market rates. Specific regulations were proposed, such as the establishment of maximum distances for transport and defined weight limits for carried loads. Eligibility for forced labour was to be restricted to able-bodied male workers between the "apparent" ages of 16 and 40, leaving room

for subjective assessment in the absence of official documentation. When labourers were required to be transported, the memorandum recommended a maximum allowable distance. In terms of penalties and discipline, the memorandum urged that all punitive measures should be sanctioned only by civil judicial authorities. Corporal punishment, particularly flogging, was to be strictly limited and permissible only in "exceptional cases". The memorandum concluded with a reiteration of its key demands and expressed its aspiration for the "progressive suppression of forced labour". It stressed that the persistence of coerced labour led to unrest and social instability, while the introduction of free, waged labour would foster economic growth and aid the spread of "civilisation".[44]

During the meeting, Gilbert Murray emphasised the importance of public opinion for the success of expert bodies such as the ILO's committee of experts. He noted that the delegation had travelled to Geneva precisely to affirm that "public opinion in Great Britain would be firmly behind it [the committee]".[45] This statement implicitly referenced Harold Grimshaw's earlier effort to mobilise British public opinion by proposing the creation of a specialised ILO journal focused on colonial labour. Although that project never came to fruition, Murray's remarks reaffirmed the notion that the ILO depended on public support, positioning himself as a representative of that constituency. Murray also described the genesis of the memorandum and detailed the various British experts who had contributed to its content. In doing so, he not only demonstrated the societies' extensive connections with British civil society but also highlighted the broader influence of British public opinion in shaping international politics, at the ILO and beyond.

In his speech, Murray further introduced each member of the delegation, outlining their experiences with colonial matters, whether through political engagement or personal travel. This move can be read as a deliberate attempt to align the group with the committee's official experts and to establish their own standing as informal yet authoritative voices on colonial labour issues. The speeches by Murray and John Harris before the committee were thus carefully orchestrated performances, designed to assert a claim to expertise even in the absence of formal recognition.[46] Ultimately, the British delegation

44 Charles Roberts and Gilbert Murray to Albert Thomas (June 15, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-1-25-5 (Jacket 1).

45 Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 60. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

46 On the performative aspect of expertise, see Joris Vandendriessche, Evert Peeters & Kaat Wils (2015): Introduction. Performing Expertise. In: Vandendriessche, J., E. Peeters &

left Geneva pleased with the reception of their input. In a letter to a friend, John Harris reflected on the meeting with satisfaction:

> But perhaps the most important thing was that M. Gohr said that they had already considered very carefully our Memorandum and the material we had been good enough to put before them, and he thought that, without being indiscreet, he might disclose to us the fact that a great many, if not all of our recommendations had been accepted, and would in some way or other be embodied in the recommendations of the Commission, – I think the whole of our work could hardly have been more successfully carried through than this.[47]

A comparison between the Anti-Slavery Society's memorandum and the ILO's draft report prepared by Harold Grimshaw reveals their close alignment. While the memorandum remained more ambiguous in its formulations, the discussions within the committee of experts gave those ideas sharper definition, transforming them into more concrete proposals. Through its international composition, the committee also included a broader range of perspectives, including more conservative or reactionary voices such as those of Martial Merlin and Albrecht Gohr. Notably, even the British representatives did not advocate for the immediate abolition of forced labour. Despite its moral tone, the Anti-Slavery Society's memorandum continued to permit forced labour for public purposes and maintained the possibility of corporal punishment under the euphemism of "exceptional cases".

Taken together, both the events leading up to the first meeting of the committee of experts and the meeting itself offer a revealing picture of how colonial expertise was imagined and enacted within the structures of early twentieth-century international imperial oversight. Officers like Harold Grimshaw assembled substantial bodies of scientific and administrative knowledge, which they sought to convert into actionable policy. Yet international organisations like the ILO also depended on the endorsement of established colonial authorities to legitimise their initiatives. These experts, however, often held outdated views, as illustrated by the clashes between Grimshaw and figures like Merlin. Civil society actors such as the British anti-slavery activists also played a pivotal role, wielding public influence and drawing on broad networks. The formation of "colonial expertise" was thus a process shaped

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K. Wils (eds.): Scientists' Expertise as Performance. Between State and Society, 1860–1960. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 2.

47 John Harris to Charles Roberts (July 13, 1927), Bodleian Library, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 467.

by mutual dependencies between policymakers, technical experts and metropolitan publics.[48] The only group entirely excluded from this process were the colonised workers themselves. Their voices remained unheard, their agency eclipsed by racialised assumptions and colonial rescue fantasies. Even as the ILO sought to reform the system of forced labour, the terms of debate were defined by those with the power to speak and not by those most affected by the policies in question.

2.2 Expertise in Contention. Race, Gender and Bureaucratic Authority, 1928–1931

When the Committee of Experts for Native Labour convened for its second meeting in Geneva between December 4 and December 8, 1928, ten members were in attendance. While the first meeting had focused primarily on the ILO's draft report on forced labour, the agenda now shifted to the examination of a draft questionnaire intended to be circulated among ILO member states. Its purpose was to collect information on national practices and perspectives regarding forced labour. After incorporating the committee's revisions, the questionnaire was to be submitted to the upcoming International Labour Conference in 1929.[49] Alongside the draft report, it laid the groundwork for what would later become the 1930 Forced Labour Convention. Beyond these substantive discussions, the 1928 meeting and the debates that followed also exposed the contested status of colonial labour experts, shaped by disagreements over the significance of nationality, professional experience and gender.

2.2.1 The Committee's Second Meeting, Geneva, 1928

A central development evident in the records of the second meeting was the increasingly pronounced criticism voiced by the French experts Martial Merlin and Camille Lejeune towards the ILO's work, exceeding even their level of objection from the previous year. At the core of this critique were fundamental questions concerning the position of experts situated between the ostensi-

48 This multilayered dependency has been emphasised by Martin Kohlrausch (2015): The Hour of the Expert? Reflections on the Rise of Experts in Interbellum Europe. In: Vandendriessche, J., E. Peeters & K. Wils (eds.): Scientists' Expertise as Performance. Between State and Society, 1860–1960. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 70.

49 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 2. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

bly neutral mandate of international organisations and their entanglement in national colonial agendas. Before engaging with the content of the questionnaire, both Merlin and Lejeune voiced strong objections to its underlying assumptions, particularly those found in the second, more general section. Camille Lejeune expressed concern that the nature of the questions risked sending the wrong signal to colonial governments and labourers alike. In his view, the overly restrictive treatment of labour conditions could promote what he called a "system of forced idleness". While he acknowledged that limiting the use of forced labour was a shared objective, he insisted that colonial governments needed to retain maximum flexibility in their efforts to improve the work ethic of colonised populations and increase their productivity.[50] Martial Merlin echoed this sentiment, arguing that many of the practices targeted by the questionnaire could not reasonably be described as forced labour. Rather, they were, in his view, "means of preventing the natives from leading a life of idleness".[51] These comments not only laid bare the deep racialised assumptions underpinning French colonial labour policy but also revealed the complex position of the experts themselves. Though the ILO emphasised the universalist and independent character of its expert committees and explicitly stated that the members did not represent their national governments in an official capacity, both Lejeune and Merlin clearly felt bound by national loyalties and the broader economic imperatives in the French colonial project. Within this framework, the notion of a "life of idleness" represented the ultimate threat not only to economic efficiency but the ideological justification of colonial rule itself.

Additional examples of these dynamics can be found throughout the discussions of the meeting. One striking case arose with the seventh question of the questionnaire, which asked whether officials should be prohibited from "putting constraint upon the populations under their charge to work for private employers". Camille Lejeune vehemently opposed even the inclusion of such a question, arguing that it represented an unwarranted intrusion into colonial administration. In his view, raising such issues would have significant ramifications and could negatively impact the colonised workforce. Lejeune even claimed that the discussions at the committee's first meeting had already provoked unrest among African workers:

50 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 9. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

51 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 17. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

> The natives knew what was going on in Geneva better than the Committee thought. They had a press of their own and followed the work of the Committee. Last year Mr. Merlin had expressed a fear that this would happen and this fear had become a reality. If a Convention prohibited officials from even seeming to put pressure on the natives the whole of colonial development was endangered.[52]

Although it is highly unlikely that the committee, having met only once and not yet issued any draft conventions, recommendations or binding instruments, had sparked significant protest or desertion among colonial labourers, Lejeune's remarks reflect deeper anxieties about political mobilisation and the growing agency of African workers in French colonies.[53] His objection reveals the colonial authorities' fear that even the suggestion of labour rights could embolden resistance. Lejeune and Merlin both projected a narrative in which African workers, when exposed to such notions of protection, would deliberately misinterpret them as permissions to "remain quite idle".[54] Thus, they concluded, workers had to be reminded that labour was not a right but an obligation.

Notably, the French position found some support from Henry M. Taberer of South Africa. While less explicit in tone, he echoed the idea that officials should "encourage natives to labour and to better themselves", whether in industry or through domestic work, thereby reflecting similar fears as the French.[55] The absence of a British counterbalance, most likely due to the non-attendance of Frederick Lugard, left these views largely unchallenged.[56] Taken together, these interventions show how the concept of "encouragement" was often a euphemism for coercion, revealing how the experts' authority was fundamentally shaped by the colonial state's economic priorities.

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52 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 32–33. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

53 For more information on contemporary forms of bonded labour and slavery in French African colonies, see Benedetta Rossi (2023): Slavery in Francophone West Africa. In: Pargas, D.A. & J. Schiel (eds.): The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 583–604. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_33.

54 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 31–32. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

55 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 32. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

56 Lugard had just returned from Geneva to England after a meeting of the Permanent Mandates Commission and therefore did not want to travel back to Switzerland so soon again. Frederick Lugard to Albert Thomas (August 3, 1928), ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-0.

The French experts' resistance to broader scrutiny of colonial labour policies became even more apparent when the discussion shifted to the second section of the questionnaire. Fearing political repercussions, Martial Merlin again attempted to limit the scope of the debate. He argued that the committee was "unduly widening the scope of its work" by attempting to "supervise the colonial policy of Governments". He did not wish the committee to be reproached by the governments.[57] Merlin went so far as to abstain from certain votes, particularly when the questionnaire included a question asking whether the ILC should adopt a recommendation regarding economic development in "industrially undeveloped areas", with a view to avoiding "undue pressure that could amount to forced labour". Merlin expressed concern that such a question might lead governments to believe the committee was advocating for a kind of "colonial Malthusianism", thus an intentional limit of economic growth to reduce reliance on forced labour. In the eyes of Harold Grimshaw, however, this concern was unjustified.[58]

Unlike many of his colleagues, or at least more prominently than most, French expert Martial Merlin approached his role in Geneva not as an impartial adviser mediating between national and international interests but as a representative of French political authority. In doing so, he acted less like an autonomous expert and more like a foreign politician defending national priorities. The French experts' strong alignment with their government not only suggests that they operated under significant pressure from Paris but also reveals their own internalisation of a state-centric, hierarchical model of expertise. This stance was particularly evident during the committee's discussion of a document on contract labour and, more specifically, the role of administrative officers in recruiting labourers for long-term contracts. In that context, Harold Grimshaw had cautiously written that "the situation of a Government official [wa]s in some degree a guarantee of his honesty and impartiality". The phrase "in some degree" provoked immediate indignation from Merlin. He demanded this wording to be removed, expressing outrage at what he saw as an unacceptable suggestion of fallibility in government officials. Drawing on his own career in the French colonial administration, Merlin insisted that representatives of government ought to be regarded by both the ILO and the wider public as inherently trustworthy. Even if not all members of the committee shared this belief, Merlin implied that it was essential for the

57 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 76, ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

58 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 157. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

group to maintain the public image of governmental integrity, regardless of internal disagreements.[59]

These moments highlight the fundamental duality embedded in the role of the expert. For figures like Merlin, trained as civil servants within imperial bureaucracies, expertise was inseparable from loyalty to the state. The authority of the expert derived not from independent evaluation but from their embeddedness in a hierarchical administrative structure—one that, especially in colonial contexts, claimed a natural right to govern and discipline. In contrast, Harold Grimshaw, who prepared most of the documents for discussion, embodied a reformed internationalist conception of expertise, prioritising empirical observation and aiming to hold national policies accountable to international standards. These opposing conceptions collided in the committee of experts. While Merlin's interventions stood out as ideologically rigid and defensive, they also revealed the persistent tension between international oversight and national sovereignty, particularly in matters concerning colonial rule. Within this dynamic, Merlin played a role similar to the one he had assumed in the League's PMC, where, as historian Susan Pedersen observed, he became "the Commission's near-pariah".[60] Outside of the French interventions, however, the second meeting of the committee remained relatively calm. Most other members largely endorsed the preparatory work undertaken by Grimshaw and his staff, reaffirming the growing authority of the ILO's secretariat in shaping international discourse on forced and colonial labour.

Following the revision of the forced labour questionnaire, the document was submitted to the Governing Body. As noted earlier, the Native Labour Section had simultaneously prepared a draft plan for the study of legislation on contract labour. In preparation, it circulated a series of preliminary studies among the members of the committee of experts. These documents focused on various forms of labour recruitment, including through administrative officers, local *chiefs*, professional recruiters and worker-led recruitment. Apart from minor modifications, the committee broadly endorsed the content of these drafts. In June 1929, the materials prepared by the committee were presented to the ILC, where they were reviewed by a specially convened tripartite "Committee on Forced Labour".[61] At the conclusion of its deliberations, this

59 ILO (1928): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Second Session, Geneva, 4th–8th December 1928. Provisional Minutes, 127. ILO Archives, N 206-2-2-1.

60 Pedersen, Susan (2015): The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 84. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199570485.001.0001.

61 See Chapter 3.1.3. In the discussion, a Peruvian delegate further demanded the inclusion of a Latin-American expert in the Committee of Experts for Native Labour. This was not

body submitted a resolution calling upon the ILO to undertake further studies on compulsory and forced labour. It also recommended that the issue should be formally placed on the agenda of the next ILC.[62]

2.2.2 Masculinised Expertise and Colonial Governance. The Role of Gender Within the Expert Committee

Struggles for representation within the committee were not limited to questions of nationality; gender also played a central role. After 1919, international and transnational women's organisations increasingly aimed at increasing women's participation in the new international organisations, ensuring that women's interests were represented within them.[63] As early as 1920, the National Council of Women in Great Britain (NCW) initiated the formation of the Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations.[64] The NCW was itself affiliated with the International Council of Women (ICW). In 1926, a second coalition was established: the Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organisations (for securing the appointment of women to the International and Expert Committees of the League of Nations).[65] This body united multiple international women's groups in a collective push for greater female representation at the League of Nations. The proliferation of such umbrella organisations during the years following the First World War reflected the women's movements' intensified efforts towards internationalisation. Despite their stated commitment to inclusivity across lines of nationality, religion and political affiliations, these organisa-

followed up by the ILO. ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 56.

62 ILO (1929): Appendix XI. Resolutions adopted by the Conference. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 1058.

63 For an introduction, see Carol Miller (1992): Lobbying the League. Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations. University of Oxford: PhD Thesis, and Deborah Stienstra (1994): Women's Movements and International Organizations. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-23417-2.

64 Gordon, Maria Ogilvie (1937): Historical Sketch of the National Council of Women of Great Britain. London: Richard Madley, 36.

65 The Joint Standing Committee represented the following groups: Equal Rights International, IAW, International Council of Women, International Federation of University Women, St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, WILPF, World Union of Women for International Concord, World's Women's Christian Temperance Union and the World's Young Women's Christian Association.

tions frequently fell short of their own ideals in practice by largely representing white, upper-class Christian women.[66]

While these groups lobbied the League of Nations on a wide range of topics, their engagement with the ILO focused primarily on questions of female wage labour. Within these debates, a spectrum of positions emerged. Some organisations argued explicitly that women required special workplace protection on the basis of their sex, while others advocated equal treatment. After prolonged discussions, proponents of the notion of women's particular vulnerability gained prominence. This position was reflected in the ILO's decisions on maternity protection, the prohibition of night work for women and restrictions on women's employment in areas involving workplace poisons.[67] Taken together, these measures demonstrate that, while ILO conventions were formally intended to apply to all workers regardless of sex, ILO debates and regulations consistently constructed female workers as "a special kind of worker" requiring targeted regulatory instruments.[68]

From 1926 onwards, several international women's organisations also launched coordinated campaigns to secure the appointment of at least one female member to the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, thereby seeking a voice in colonial matters.[69] Similar efforts had previously succeeded in gaining women's representation on the League of Nations' PMC, where one

66 Rupp, Leila (1994): Constructing Internationalism. The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations 1888–1945. In: *The American Historical Review* 99(5), 1573, 1576. https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/99.5.1571. Still, an interesting counter example showcasing cooperation efforts between the British organisations and the Indian women's movement is discussed by Rosalind Parr (2021): Solving World Problems. The Indian Women's Movement, Global Governance, and 'the Crisis of Empire', 1933–46. In: *Journal of Global History* 16(1), 122–140. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022820000169.

67 Boris, Eileen (2019): Making the Woman Worker. Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 31–34. See also Nora Natchkova & Céline Schoeni (2013): The ILO, Feminists and Expert Networks. The Challenges of a Protective Policy. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 49–66. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_4, and Olga Hidalgo-Weber (2018): Femmes britanniques et pratiques internationales de justice sociale dans la première moitié du XXe siècle. In: *Le Mouvement Social* 263(2), 77–92. https://doi.org/10.3917/lms.263.0077.

68 Boris, Eileen (2019): Making the Woman Worker. Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 4.

69 Discussed in more detail in Fabiana Kutsche (2026): Transnationale Frauenorganisationen und die ILO. Koloniales Expert*innenwissen und Geschlecht in den 1920er- und 1930er-Jahren. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (forthcoming). See, for example, Florence M. Beaumont to Albert Thomas (December 11, 1928), ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1.

woman served as a member.[70] Nevertheless, for several years, these initiatives proved unsuccessful at the ILO. Although women's organisations submitted names and biographical details of female candidates whom they deemed well-qualified by virtue of their work and experience in colonial contexts, their recommendations were consistently rejected. The ILO's Native Labour Section justified these decisions by claiming that the proposed candidates did not meet the committee's criteria. In a 1929 letter to the women's rights activist Florence M. Beaumont (1876–1929) of the Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations, C.W.H. Weaver of the Native Labour Section reiterated this stance:

> The members [...] have in all cases been chosen because of their direct personal knowledge of the problems of native labour [...]. There is thus no question of appointing a woman representative, but of endeavouring to secure the nomination of a woman whose qualifications would be at least approximately equivalent to those of the distinguished gentlemen.[71]

In this line of reasoning, direct, personal experience with colonial labour conditions was framed as the decisive criterion for inclusion in the committee of experts. Yet Weaver's implication that none of the women suggested possessed such experience disregarded their documented involvement in colonial administration, education or reform. Moreover, this rationale invites further scrutiny: had all the male appointees truly studied colonial labour conditions firsthand? A closer examination of the full list of approved male candidates, as outlined in the appendix, reveals that they fall into six distinct categories—many fitting more than one—thereby raising critical questions about the consistency of the criteria applied.[72]

Taking into consideration Table 2.1, the overwhelming majority of members had had careers in the colonial civil service. While these individuals undoubtedly acquired experience in the political administration of colonial territories, it remains unclear whether all of them had direct engagement with questions of colonial labour. Nonetheless, given the central role

70 Pedersen, Susan (2008): Metaphors of the Schoolroom. Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations. In: *History Workshop Journal* 66, 193.

71 C.W.H. Weaver to Florence M. Beaumont (March 4, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1.

72 The names of all candidates approved by the ILO are included, irrespective of the question whether they confirmed their nomination or participated in the meetings of the committee. The topic of interest here is not their actions in the committee—those will be discussed in other parts of this chapter—but the biographical profiles of experts deemed suitable by the ILO.

TABLE 2.1 Members of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Sorted by Profession.

Civil Service	– Frederick Dealtry Lugard (Britain)
	– Granville St John Orde Browne (Britain)
	– Charles Ernest Low (Britain)
	– Edpuganti Raghavendra Rao (Britain)
	– Henry Raymond Joynt (Britain)
	– Martial Henri Merlin (France)
	– Camille Charles André Lejeune (France)
	– Théodore Paul Marchand (France)
	– Georg Albrecht Freiherr von Rechenberg (Germany)
	– Daniel François Willem van Rees (The Netherlands)
	– Alfredo Augusto Freire de Andrade (Portugal)
	– José Capelo Franco Frazão, Count of Penha Garcia (Portugal)
	– José de Almada (Portugal)
	– Henry Melville Taberer (South Africa)
	– Herbert Sutton Cooke (South Africa)
Diplomacy	– Sugimura Yōtarō (Japan)
	– Itō Nobufumi (Japan)
	– Pedro Saura del Pan (Spain)
	– Domingo de las Bárcenas y Lopez Mollinedo Mercado (Spain)
	– José Ruiz de Arana y Bauer (Spain)
	– Samuel Reber (USA)
Law	– Albrecht Léon Joseph Gohr (Belgium)
	– Edpuganti Raghavendra Rao (Britain)
	– Georg Albrecht Freiherr von Rechenberg (Germany)
	– Jacobus Johannes Schrieke (The Netherlands)
	– Joseph Perkins Chamberlain (USA)
	– Eugene Allen Gilmore (USA)
Military	– Alphonse Louis Joseph Cayen (Belgium)
	– Frederick Dealtry Lugard (Britain)
	– Granville St John Orde Browne (Britain)
	– Giuseppe Ostini (Italy)
	– Lodovico Pollera Orsucci (Italy)
	– Herbert Sutton Cooke (South Africa)
Sales	– Alphonse Louis Joseph Cayen (Belgium)
	– Camille Charles André Lejeune (France)

TABLE 2.1 Members of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Sorted (*cont.*)

Science	– Emile Théodore Auguste Deladrier (Belgium) – Léopold Mottoulle (Belgium) – Alfredo Augusto Freire de Andrade (Portugal) – Lopo Vaz de Sampaio e Mello (Portugal) – Rafael Cavestany y Anduaga (Spain)

of economic development in the colonial project, one can argue that, from the perspective of their respective governments, these individuals possessed a general familiarity with the functioning of colonial capitalist economies. One of the second-largest groups consisted of individuals with military backgrounds. Many began their careers as officers involved in colonial campaigns or wars of conquest and later transitioned into administrative positions within the colonial bureaucracy. The Italian case is particularly telling: both nominated candidates, Giuseppe Ostini and Lodovico Pollera Orsucci (1870–1953), came from the military, reflecting the militarised ethos of the contemporary Fascist regime under Benito Mussolini.[73] Historically, military conquest and the occupation of land were integral to colonial expansion, and once a territory was secured, former officers were often redeployed into administrative roles. In the view of colonial powers, military service connoted discipline, authority and the capacity to enforce rule. All these traits were seen as useful for managing colonial populations.[74] When these officers moved into civil administration, they may have encountered labour issues, although often through the lens of maintaining order and economic productivity rather than worker rights or welfare.

Six of the candidates held legal training, with some specialising in colonial law. While this expertise might have seemed relevant for an international organisation concerned with labour standards, the committee's discussions reveal a more complex picture. During meetings, ILO representatives occasionally had to intervene when legal debates became too detailed, reminding

73 The relation between the ILO, Albert Thomas and Mussolini is discussed in Stefano Gallo (2013): Dictatorship and International Organizations. The ILO as a 'Test Ground' for Fascism. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 153–171. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_10.

74 Wilcox, Vanda (2022): Imperial Thinking and Colonial Combat in the Early Twentieth-Century Italian Army. In: *The Historical Journal* 65(5), 1335. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X21000741.

members that such issues fell under the purview of the ILO's legal department or would be addressed by national governments.[75] This suggests that legal knowledge, though present, was not central to the committee's practical function. Notably, in the case of the American expert Joseph Perkins Chamberlain, a law professor at Columbia University, no colonial experience could be identified. His only related work concerned the study of forced labour practices in Mexico, which, while significant, lay outside the traditional colonial framework prioritised by the ILO committee.[76]

Another portion of the experts came from scientific fields, including one pharmacist-geologist, a physician, two engineers and a political scientist. Through their academic training and practical work, sometimes in colonial contexts, they developed varying degrees of contact with colonised populations. Although not all dealt directly with labour, it is important to note that much of the scientific inquiry of the period was entangled with colonial ideologies.[77] Several of these experts held teaching positions at national colonial training institutions, such as the Belgian Emile Théodore Auguste Deladrier (1878–1938) at the Université Coloniale de Belgique or Lopo Vaz de Sampaio e Mello (?–?) at the Portuguese Escola Superior Colonial, suggesting that their expertise was not only state-sanctioned but also legitimised by the academic institutions of empire. These intersections between scientific authority and colonial governance likely contributed to their selection as experts at the ILO.

The presence of diplomats among the committee members highlights the broader political considerations that often shaped definitions of expertise. Six candidates from Spain, Japan and the United States were trained diplomats who had represented their countries in various international contexts. In the Spanish case, two of these individuals, Pedro Saura del Pan and Domingo de las Bárcenas y Lopez Mollinedo (1880–1969), had been affiliated with the Spanish Department for Morocco and the Colonies. Yet, they had never resided or worked in the colonial territories themselves.[78] Their careers were defined by international postings and administrative work in the colonial centres rather than by firsthand experience in managing colonial labour. This reflects Spain's diminished colonial presence by the early twentieth century, when only a few territories, such as parts of Morocco, Spanish Sahara

75 See, for example, Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Minutes of the First Session 7th–12th July 1927, 50. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 115.

76 Leifur Magnusson to Albert Thomas (June 27, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-61.

77 Tilley, Helen (2011): Africa as a Living Laboratory. Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950. Chicago, IL/London: The University of Chicago Press, 313–314. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226803487.001.0001.

78 For more information, see Appendix I.

and Spanish Guinea, remained under its control.[79] The decreased imperial relevance, combined with the diplomats' largely non-colonial career trajectories, set them apart from the more embedded colonial administrators of other imperial powers. The Japanese experts, too, exemplify the predominance of diplomacy over practical experience in colonial labour. Both had pursued conventional diplomatic careers and resided in Europe well before their proposed appointments to the committee. Although the Japanese government highlighted that Itō Nobufumi had recently visited Japan's colonial and mandated territories, this constituted his only apparent connection to colonial labour conditions.[80] Their selection thus appears to have been shaped less by specific expertise and more by Japan's political position within the League of Nations and the ILO, as outlined in the introduction. In this way, both the Spanish and Japanese cases illustrate how diplomatic considerations could outweigh practical experience in the formation of the expert group.

Finally, it is important to consider the cases in which experts had direct involvement in colonial business ventures.[81] Camille Charles André Lejeune, in addition to his roles in colonial administration, also served as a leading director of the *Compagnie Nosybéenne d'Industries Agricoles* in Madagascar. This company was active in the cultivation and trade of various agricultural products, including manioc, sugarcane, vanilla, cocoa, coffee and copra, as well as essential oils such as lemongrass, ylang-ylang and patchouli.[82] Similarly, Alphonse Louis Joseph Cayen (1885–1943) held a prominent position as direc-

79 For an introduction to the history of Spanish colonialism in the twentieth century, see Eloy Martín Corrales (1999): El protectorado español en Marruecos (1912–1956). Una perspectiva histórica. In: Nogué, J. & J.L. Villanova (eds.): España en Marruecos (1912–1956). Discursos geográficos e intervención territorial. Lleida: Editorial Milenio, 145–158, and Yolanda Aixelà-Cabré (2017): Exploring Euro-African Pasts Through an Analysis of Spanish Colonial Practices in Africa (Morocco and Spanish Guinea). In: *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 51(1), 23–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2016.1276848.

80 Kasama Akio to Albert Thomas (March 30, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-35-1.

81 As recent scholarship on the German case demonstrates, colonial business history provides a productive avenue for generating new insights into colonial labour relations that should be extended by transimperial perspectives in the future. See, for example, Nina Kleinöder & Kim Sebastian Todzi (2025): Reassessing Germany's Colonial Economies. Actors, Dynamics and Legacies. In: *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 112(2), 148–157. https://doi.org/10.25162/vswg-2025-0005, and Nina Kleinöder & Mona Rudolph (2026): Business and Labour in German Colonialism. An Introduction. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 54(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2025.2608271.

82 N.N. (2023): Compagnie Nosybéenne d'Industries Agricoles. In: Entreprises Coloniales https://www.entreprises-coloniales.fr/madagascar-et-djibouti/Nosybeenne-ind.-agric.pdf (last accessed: April 15, 2024). For more information, see Appendix I.

tor of the well-known mining company *Forminière* in the Belgian Congo.[83] Albert Thomas had especially pushed for Cayen's nomination because he considered him an "enlightened employer" and had "great personal regard" for him.[84] While employers naturally exerted influence on the development of conventions and recommendations through the ILC's tripartite structure, their partial integration into the expert committee itself further highlights the structural imbalance and the complete absence of worker or trade union representation among the experts. As early as 1927, following the committee's first meeting, this imbalance attracted public criticism. The British socialist magazine *The New Leader* wrote that:

> The League of Nations has a committee of "experts" inquiring into "questions of native labour." We have obtained a list of these "experts." Here it is: [...] Every one of these "experts" is either an official or ex-official of some Imperialist Power or an official of some capitalist concern which is exploiting "native labour." This is a scandal which cannot be tolerated. The Labour and Socialist Movement of every country attached to the League should raise the matter vigorously.[85]

It remains unclear whether other labour and socialist movements responded to this call, but the quotation nonetheless illustrates that at least some critical, anti-imperialist scrutiny was directed at the ILO's handling of "native labour".

Overall, the analysis of the professional backgrounds of expert candidates reveals that "expertise on native labour" was not understood as a clearly defined or standardised qualification. The most common credential, by far, was prior experience in colonial administration, which, from the perspective of both the ILO and national governments, was seen as the key marker of expertise. This pathway, however, was effectively inaccessible to women at the time. Nonetheless, the presence of candidates from a variety of fields, including law, science, the military, diplomacy and business, demonstrates that the definition of expertise remained flexible and open to interpretation. Against this backdrop, the continued rejection of candidates put forward by women's organisations must be seen as a product of patriarchal bias, one that

83 Berlemont, F. (1955): Cayen, Alphonse Louis Joseph. In: Biographie Coloniale Belge 4. Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 136–139. For more information, see Appendix I.

84 N.N., Minute Sheet (March 9, 1937), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-7-2.

85 N.N. (1927): Experts on Native Labour. News of the Week. In: *The New Leader* (November 25, 1927).

closely associated colonial authority and knowledge production with masculinity.[86]

After years of unsuccessful efforts, British women's rights activist Elsie Zimmern (1876–1967) of the Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organisations made a final proposal to Harold Grimshaw in June 1929.[87] She suggested Fanny Hélène Marzorati [née Tolputt de Fallot] (?–?), the wife of the Governor of Ruanda-Urundi, as a candidate for the committee of experts. Zimmern emphasised Marzorati's deep interest in, and knowledge of, local life in the district as well as her confident handling of administrative duties during her husband's illness. Marzorati's nationality was also presented as an advantage: British by birth but Belgian by marriage, she could potentially sidestep contentious questions of national representation.[88] In contrast to earlier proposals, Zimmern offered the additional opportunity for Grimshaw to meet the candidate in person, as Marzorati planned to visit Geneva in the coming months. Grimshaw responded cautiously but not unfavourably. He recalled having met Alfred Marzorati and, possibly, Hélène Marzorati as well, but noted that a final decision could only be taken after the next meeting of the Governing Body in October.[89] Meanwhile, support for the nomination grew. In July, the well-known women's rights activist Margery Corbett Ashby (1882–1981) of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAW) directly addressed Albert Thomas, strongly endorsing Marzorati's candidacy.[90] Thomas responded warmly and expressed his willingness to meet her.[91] That meeting took place on November 12, 1929. In a note written afterwards, Thomas remarked:

> She made an excellent impression on me. In the absence of a woman with a name in indigenous labour protection, she seems to me to be able to contribute

86 Kutsche, Fabiana (2026): Transnationale Frauenorganisationen und die ILO. Koloniales Expert*innenwissen und Geschlecht in den 1920er- und 1930er-Jahren. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (forthcoming).

87 Elsie Zimmern to Harold Grimshaw (June 18, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1.

88 There was some internal disagreement about the nationality of the female candidate to be appointed. Even though the candidate would officially not represent any nation but only "the females", the ILO was afraid to include a British citizen as the committee already contained a handful of British members, although representing different colonies/dependencies. Other previous suggestions had been forwarded to the male candidates representing the different countries and sometimes turned down because of their personal disapproval with the women.

89 Harold Grimshaw to Elsie Zimmern (July 2, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1.

90 Margery Corbett Ashby to Albert Thomas (July 19, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1.

91 Albert Thomas to Margery Corbett Ashby (August 27, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1.

> a useful note to the debates of the Commission. And if such a nomination can have a general political interest, I am willing to consider it.[92]

Thus, Thomas signalled his approval despite not considering Marzorati's experience as equal to direct expertise in colonial labour conditions.

When Hélène Marzorati's appointment was finally confirmed in 1930, after four years of persistent advocacy, it was widely celebrated by the international women's organisations.[93] Nonetheless, the reasons behind her eventual selection warrant scrutiny. One likely explanation is that Marzorati was accepted not on the basis of her own professional credentials but rather through her association with a prominent colonial official, her husband, Alfred Marzorati. As Grimshaw's response indicates, familiarity with Alfred Marzorati may have lent legitimacy to Hélène Marzorati that previous female candidates lacked.[94] This highlights how deeply the field of colonial labour politics was embedded in male-dominated networks of power and expertise. In this context, Hélène Marzorati was seen less as an expert in her own right than as an extension of her husband's administrative legacy. At the same time, the sustained pressure exerted by trans- and international women's organisations must be acknowledged as a crucial factor in this outcome. Earlier scholarship has noted that while Albert Thomas was generally receptive to collaboration with women's groups, their practical influence remained limited.[95] The findings of this section support this assessment, but also show that coordinated, long-term advocacy efforts such as the campaign for the inclusion of a female expert could yield tangible, if modest, results. The drawn-out negotiations surrounding Marzorati's appointment and the contested definition of "expertise" would resurface just two years later, in 1932, when the Correspondence Committee

92 The author's translation. Albert Thomas (November 13, 1929), Minute Sheet, ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1.

93 Corbett Ashby, M.I. (1931): President's New Year's Greeting. In: *International Woman Suffrage News* (January 2, 1931), 52, N.N. (1931): Section Française. Evenements de l'année, 1930. In: *International Woman Suffrage News* (January 2, 1931), 62, and N.N. (1931): Some Interesting Reports. In: *The Woman's Leader* (January 30, 1931), 399.

94 Selected biographies of other candidates are discussed in more detail in Fabiana Kutsche (2026): Transnationale Frauenorganisationen und die ILO. Koloniales Expert*innenwissen und Geschlecht in den 1920er- und 1930er-Jahren. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (forthcoming).

95 Natchkova, Nora & Céline Schoeni (2013): The ILO, Feminists and Expert Networks. The Challenges of a Protective Policy. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 60. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_4.

on Women's Work was established in the ILO.[96] In that context, similar doubts were raised about the lack of suitably qualified female experts, suggesting that the issue was not only about colonial knowledge or administrative experience but also about broader, gendered assumptions concerning women's expertise in domains not traditionally viewed as "female", such as labour.

Unfortunately, little is known about Hélène Marzorati's own views on her role within the committee. Ahead of her first meeting in 1930, she sought to educate herself on the issue of forced labour in the colonies. Her initial point of contact was the British organisation National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), formerly the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). NUSEC, known for its more moderate approach compared to the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), had little expertise on colonial labour.[97] They therefore referred her request to Margery Corbett Ashby, who in turn passed it on to John Harris of the Anti-Slavery Society. Harris provided Marzorati with relevant documents, which, along with materials from Grimshaw, helped her prepare for her participation in the upcoming expert meeting.[98]

2.2.3 The Committee's Third Meeting, Geneva, 1930

The third meeting of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour took place from May 15 to May 17, 1930. Whereas the preliminary report on forced labour and the accompanying questionnaire for national governments had already been discussed in earlier meetings and circulated accordingly, the primary objective of this session was to review the draft convention and recommendations prepared by the ILO. These drafts were based on the replies received from governments and were intended to be finalised for presentation at the

96 Thébaud, Françoise (2018): Difficult Inroads, Unexpected Results. The Correspondence Committee on Women's Work in the 1930s. In: Boris, E., D. Hoehtker & S. Zimmermann (eds.): Women's ILO. Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present. Leiden: Brill, 57–62.

97 On NUSEC's history, see Pat Thane (2025): What Difference Did the Vote Make? Suffrage in Parliament, 1919–28. The Representation of the People Act, 1918. In: Cowman, K. (ed.): The Routledge Companion to British Women's Suffrage. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 408. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781138557420-30.

98 Hélène Marzorati to Mrs. Hoston of NUSEC (March 5, 1930), Margery Corbett Ashby to John Harris (April 6, 1930), John Harris to Hélène Marzorati (April 8, 1930), all Bodleian Library, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, G 467.

upcoming ILC in June 1930.[99] The session opened with an intervention by the Dutch member Daniel François Willem van Rees (1863–1934), which revealed a fundamental divergence in views concerning the role of the experts and their relationship to the ILO. Van Rees stated that, upon receiving the draft convention and recommendations, he had intended to offer comments on the general principles underlying the proposals. However, the introductory remarks to the meeting had given him the impression that the Office was primarily interested in discussing only the formal structure and language of the documents. This was not a new concern for van Rees. At previous meetings, he had already attempted to raise broader policy questions but had been repeatedly asked to postpone them. Now, with the draft convention and recommendations already formulated, he found little space left for including more fundamental or overarching reflections, despite considering such input both necessary and valuable.[100] Van Rees' intervention highlights a further dimension of the contested role of the expert within the ILO framework. While he positioned himself as a contributor to the formulation of broader colonial labour policies and as a provider of strategic guidance to various colonial administrations, he perceived the ILO as attempting to restrict the committee's function to narrowly defined, technical discussions on documents already in preparation for the ILC. In sharp contrast to the French experts' nationally anchored interventions during the second meeting, van Rees did not view himself as a sole representative of the Dutch government. Rather, he constructed his role as that of a more abstract and transnational expert, drawing on a lifetime of accumulated colonial experience that he now sought to offer to an international colonial community. For van Rees, the knowledge he produced was inherently universalist and he expected the ILO to recognise and value it as such.

This broader understanding of the expert role came into conflict with the operational realities of the ILO, which, as an international organisation, was constrained in its ability to shape labour policy beyond the limits of its own procedural framework. During the meeting, Albert Thomas responded to van Rees by clarifying the ILO's position. While he encouraged experts to share their personal views and reflections freely within the committee, he also emphasised that the organisation's work was necessarily governed by internal procedures and institutional hierarchies. The documents under discus-

99 ILO (1930): Commission d'experts en matière de travail indigène. Troisième Session. Genève, 15–17 Mai 1930. Procès-Verbaux. Geneva: ILO, 6. ILO Archives, N 206-2-3-2. The English version of the minutes was not preserved.

100 ILO (1930): Commission d'experts en matière de travail indigène. Troisième Session. Genève, 15–17 Mai 1930. Procès-Verbaux. Geneva: ILO, 8–9. ILO Archives, N 206-2-3-2.

sion, for instance, had been drafted based on the responses from member states to the ILO's questionnaire and the final decision on the matter of forced labour would ultimately be taken at the forthcoming ILC. While the experts' contributions were considered meaningful and valued, the actual power of decision rested with the national delegations and the conference's working groups. This exchange illustrates the tension between the experts' self-perception as authoritative knowledge producers and the practical limitations of their influence. Albert Thomas, for his part, sought to maintain the experts' sense of purpose and authority without undermining the procedural boundaries imposed by the organisation's structure. As a compromise, the committee agreed to proceed with a detailed discussion of the draft documents first and to reserve time at the end of the meeting for more general remarks. However, by the final session on May 17, time had run out and the general discussion never took place. This outcome suggests that van Rees and the other experts ultimately deferred to the institutional logic and workflow of the ILO.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to a meticulous article-by-article review of the draft convention—a laborious process, even in its written record. As a result, the debates during this session were notably more restrained than in the committee's two earlier meetings. For Hélène Marzorati, who was attending for the first time and whose status as an expert remained the most precarious, the rigid format offered little opportunity for meaningful participation. Historian Olga Hidalgo-Weber highlights this example to illustrate the stark contrast between the persistent efforts of women's organisations to secure a seat for a female expert on the committee and the minimal influence Hélène Marzorati was ultimately able to exert during the third expert meeting.[101] While her appointment clearly served the ILO's political interests and reflected persistent tensions over the legitimacy of female colonial expertise, it is important to acknowledge, in her defence, that the third meeting was the most rigidly structured of the three. As previously highlighted by van Rees, the constrained agenda left little space for interventions that had not been already raised in earlier sessions, thus limiting participation for all committee members. Indeed, during this meeting, most of the other experts also operated strictly within the parameters set by the ILO. By the close of the third session, the committee had reviewed the draft convention and recommendations in full, making only

101 Hidalgo-Weber, Olga (2017): La Grande-Bretagne et l'Organisation Internationale du Travail (1919–1946). Une Nouvelle Forme D'Internationalisme. Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia-Bruylant, 151.

minor revisions to the original proposals. One month later, the ILC adopted the Forced Labour Convention (C29).[102]

2.3 A Demise of Authority, 1932–1934

The committee of experts convened for a fourth time in the autumn of 1932. Following the adoption of the Forced Labour Convention (C29), the group was tasked with addressing a new topic, colonial long-term contract labour, commonly referred to as indentured labour. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term "indentured labour" referred to a form of contract labour in which workers, mostly of Indian or Chinese origin, were recruited for employment in plantation economies across the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and in mining and other colonial industries in Africa.[103] Indentured labour was typically used in contexts where free labour was either too costly for employers or unattractive to workers due to poor conditions. By the time the issue reached the ILO in the 1930s, formal systems of indenture had been officially discontinued. However, much like the formal abolition of slavery, the end of indenture did not necessarily translate to immediate change on the ground. Colonial economies continued to rely heavily on migrant contract labour, sometimes recruited internally, sometimes across colonial borders, under conditions that were often exploitative.[104] These workers were fre-

102 N.N. (1930): Appendix C. First Item on the Agenda: Forced Labour. In: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Geneva: ILO, 671–750. See Chapter 3.1.3.

103 Lindner, Ulrike (2016): Indentured Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa (1870–1918). Circulation of Concepts between Imperial Powers. In: Damir-Geilsdorf, S. et al. (eds.): Bonded Labour. Global and Comparative Perspectives (18th–21st Century). Bielefeld: transcript, 60. See also Hugh Tinker (1974): A New System of Slavery. The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830–1920. London: Oxford University Press, Peter Richardson (1977): The Recruiting of Chinese Indentured Labour for the South African Gold-Mines, 1903–1908. In: *Journal of African History* 18(1), 85–108. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700015243, Kay Saunders (ed.) (1984): Indentured Labour in the British Empire 1834–1920. London: Croom Helm, David Northrup (1995): Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, Marina Carter & Khal Torabully (2002): Coolitude. An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora. London: Anthem Press. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9781843313670, and Rachel K. Bright (2013): Chinese Labour in South Africa, 1902–10. Race, Violence, and Global Spectacle. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137316578.

104 Recent historical debates on how to periodise the abolition of indentured labour systems are addressed in Julia T. Martínez & Claire Lowrie (2024): Introduction. Historicizing the

quently employed on long-term contracts, the terms of which they either could not read or did not understand and worked under harsh conditions.

As in previous meetings, C.W.H. Weaver had prepared a series of preliminary reports covering various dimensions of the issue, which served as the basis for the committee's discussions. Topics included the conditions under which contract workers were recruited and engaged, the nature and content of the contracts, the classification of different worker groups, patterns of migration to and from the places of employment, including repatriation, and the use of penal sanctions.[105] Overall, the ILO expert debates largely centred on the migration of African workers within the continent, often extending beyond the borders of individual colonies.

2.3.1 Race, Gender and Fears of "Detribalisation"

For one of the first times, the gendered composition of the colonised workforce featured more prominently in the committee's deliberations. The central question was whether female colonised workers should be permitted to enter into contract labour arrangements. The diverging positions articulated in this debate closely mirrored earlier discussions of women's employment within the ILO in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, the organisation had adopted gender-differentiated labour standards in relation to women workers in Western industrial societies. Some member states had refused to ratify the conventions on the grounds that such provisions were discriminatory, while others maintained that women required special protection due to innate gender differences.[106] These opposing perspectives reappeared in the 1932 debate on colonial contract labour.[107]

Abolition of Chinese Indentured Labour. In: *Slavery & Abolition* 45(3), 432–441. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2024.2344387.

105 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

106 Boris, Eileen, Dorothea Hoehtker & Susan Zimmermann (2018): Introduction. A Century of Women's ILO. In: Boris, E., D. Hoehtker & S. Zimmermann (eds.): Women's ILO. Transnational Networks, Global Labour Standards and Gender Equity, 1919 to Present. Leiden: Brill, 6–8.

107 Similar dynamics have been examined in greater depth and with reference to alternative archival sources by Susan Zimmermann (2016): Night Work for White Women and Bonded Labour for 'Native' Women? Contentious Traditions and the Globalization of Gender-Specific Labour Protection and Legal Equality Politics, 1926 to 1939. In: Kimble, S.L. & M. Röwekamp (eds.): New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 394–427.

At the centre of the expert debate stood the hypothetical situation of women and children who accompanied male colonial contract workers. The migration of entire families raised further controversy and intersected with one of the dominant colonial anxieties of the time, the so-called "detribalisation" of colonised workers. In colonial discourse, "detribalisation" referred to the perceived breakdown of traditional village and family structures resulting from prolonged absence of male workers due to labour migration. Whether driven by coercion, long-term contracts or "free will", this movement of men from rural areas to urban centres was thought to erode community cohesion and provoke moral decline.[108] Colonial officials frequently linked this to a series of social problems among the male workforce, including alcoholism, gambling, promiscuity and violence. Interestingly, similar concerns were raised in relation to urbanisation and internal migration within Europe and led to the formation of a global temperance movement in the nineteenth century.[109] However, as the Belgian expert Albrecht Gohr emphasised, to the experts, these were fundamentally different phenomena. He argued that "migration movements in European countries did not have the same effects as the removal of male Natives from African villages", thereby reinforcing a racialised distinction between European and colonial experiences of labour mobility.[110]

For these reasons, most experts considered the presence of entire families in labour migration to be desirable. The company of wives and children was thought to exert a calming and "moralising" influence on male workers and their sexual behaviour. Yet the question remained: should these accompanying women and children be permitted to work alongside the men? On this issue, opinions within the committee diverged. Frederick Lugard firmly opposed allowing women to enter into formal labour contracts. In his view, if wives accompanied their husbands, they might "offer themselves spontaneously for labour", but should not be permitted to do so under their own

108 Cooper, Frederick (1996): Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 49.

109 For an overview of comparable discourses about the demoralising effects of industrialisation and urbanisation in Imperial Germany, see Klaus Tenfelde (1992): Arbeiterfamilie und Geschlechterbeziehungen im Deutschen Kaiserreich. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 18(2), 179–203. For a general overview of the history of the global temperance movement, see Jack S. Blocker Jr., David M. Fahey & Ian R. Tyrrell (eds.) (2003): Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History. An International Encyclopedia. Santa Barbara, CA/Denver, CO/Oxford: ABC Clio, and Chapter 3.1.1.

110 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 21. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

contract, except in specific roles as domestic servants or nurses.[111] Hélène Marzorati explicitly supported this position.[112] By contrast, Camille Lejeune challenged this restrictive view, arguing that women should be allowed to benefit from contractual protections if they performed clearly defined roles such as cooking in railway construction camps.[113] He was supported by Albrecht Gohr, Willem van Rees and Selwyn Fremantle.[114] Despite these disagreements, all members agreed that married women would require the consent of their husbands to enter into contracts and that "young girls" (without a clearly defined age range) should only be permitted to work in domestic or medical roles or perform light agricultural labour.[115] These debates reveal the specific ways in which race and gender intersected. Racialised women, in-cluding potential female workers, were constructed as fundamentally different from racialised male workers. At the same time, the gendered labour protections developed for Western women within the ILO framework were not extended to the women under discussion. This exclusion produced a form of double Othering, whereby racialised and colonised women were positioned simultaneously outside both the normative category of the worker and the framework for women.[116] When the ILO published these considerations on gender-specific contract labour relations in a report for the twenty-fourth ILC in 1938, they received immediate criticism by a number of British and international women's organisations, such as The Open Door International (ODI) and the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organisations. In the end, a reformulated question was included in the ILO's questionnaire for the governments, which led the focus away from the prohibition of contract work for women and thus satisfied the women's organisations. In the final 1939 Convention, no specific reference was made to women.[117]

111 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 103. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

112 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 112. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

113 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 112. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

114 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 112–113. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

115 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 115. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

116 Boris, Eileen (2019): Making the Woman Worker. Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 21.

117 Zimmermann, Susan (2016): Night Work for White Women and Bonded Labour for 'Native' Women? Contentious Traditions and the Globalization of Gender-Specific Labour Protection and Legal Equality Politics, 1926 to 1939. In: Kimble, S.L. &

These exchanges reveal that the committee's debates about contract labour were structured primarily around male workers. Women were addressed largely in their capacity as wives, not as workers in their own right. The general principles of labour protection promoted by the ILO were not consistently applied to them. Even those arguing for including women in contractual arrangements grounded their opinions in assumptions about the women's moral influence and emotional labour rather than their economic agency. As such, the committee's definition of "native labour" effectively excluded women and reinforced a gendered division of labour within colonial systems, seeking to balance perceived threats of racialised male disorder with the presumed stabilising presence of women.

Such gendered assumptions were further intertwined with racialised hierarchies. Although racial distinctions had appeared in the committee's discussions since its first meeting in 1927, they were especially pronounced during the fourth session. When debating appropriate conditions for contract labour, C.W.H. Weaver argued that "developed peoples, such as the Javanese" did not require as strict regulations as "the most primitive peoples". According to Weaver, the committee's purpose was to guide colonised peoples through various stages of development towards free labour, tailoring regulation to their perceived level of "advancement".[118] Similar sentiments were echoed by Selwyn Fremantle, who argued that "work books [sic]" to track labour contracts might be necessary in Africa but not in places such as Assam, Ceylon or Malaya, to which Weaver agreed.[119] Likewise, when discussing the maximum duration of contracts, Frederick Lugard suggested this issue was "much more important in Africa than in the Far East" due to the perceived risk of African workers "becoming detribalised".[120] Italian expert Lodovico Pollera Orsucci

M. Röwekamp (eds.): New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 415–418, and Eileen Boris (2019): Making the Woman Worker. Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 51.

118 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 76. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

119 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 83. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116. A recent article has demonstrated the ILO's tacit toleration of the continuation of indentured labour systems in British Malaya during the interwar period. See Claire Lowrie (2024): Exceptions to the Abolition of Chinese Indenture. Chinese Workers on Rubber Estates in Interwar British Malaya. In: *Slavery & Abolition* 45(3), 541–561. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2024.2344393.

120 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 132. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

(1870–1953) also claimed that, due to vast differences in the "physical and intellectual development of young persons of different races", such matters should be left to "the discretion of colonial authorities".[121]

Although the various conventions and recommendations that emerged from the work of the committee of experts consistently referred to a generic, abstract figure of the colonised male worker, the archival material reveals that deeply entrenched distinctions were drawn between Asian and African workers. These distinctions were framed through vague and racialised notions of "development", which relied on stereotypical assumptions about the economic systems and labour markets in the respective colonies. The result was a taxonomy of colonial labour that categorised workers hierarchically and implicitly positioned them against one another. Exceptions to proposed regulations, as well as pre-emptive accommodation of likely refusals by certain colonial governments to implement these measures, exposed the instability of the committee's racialised and gendered concept of "native labour".

2.3.2 Aging Membership and the Erosion of Influence

At the time of the committee's fourth meeting in 1932, personnel changes also began to alter the composition of the group. Even prior to the committee's formal establishment, concerns had been raised about the advanced age of some of its members. In 1923, for instance, Harold Grimshaw had inquired with John Harris of the Anti-Slavery Society about Frederick Lugard's suitability. Harris responded that although the Anti-Slavery Society had generally viewed Lugard favourably, crediting him with a number of "enlightened measures" and a strong stance against forced labour, he was "getting rather deaf", though still open to dialogue.[122] Nearly a decade later, Lugard was in his mid-seventies and C.W.H. Weaver recommended bringing new energy into the committee through the addition of younger members. In an internal note, he proposed the inclusion of both a French and a British representative:

> On the other hand, I should be glad if M. Marchand could be added to the Committee, on condition that we could also add Major Orde-Browne as an additional expert for British territories. […] The appointment of M. Marchand and Major Orde-Browne would do something to meet one of the difficulties noted at the recent session of the Committee of Experts: that of the advancing

121 ILO (1932): Committee of Experts on Native Labour. Fourth Session, Geneva, 27th October–2nd November 1932. Minutes, 103. Bodleian Library, Lugard Papers, 116.

122 John Harris to Harold Grimshaw (June 1, 1923), Bodleian Library Oxford, G 466.

> age of some of the members, who are also no longer in touch with present conditions.[123]

Over the years, several of the original members had indeed passed away and were replaced by slightly younger individuals. Nevertheless, since most candidates were generally only considered for appointment after the conclusion of lengthy colonial careers, the average age of the committee remained high. This demographic composition contributed to a generally conservative outlook and a tendency to perpetuate outdated views on colonial governance and labour policy. While most governments appeared content to appoint distinguished, older colonial officials, figures symbolising the perceived heyday of imperial expertise, their selections may also reflect a broader assessment of the committee's limited influence, particularly during the mid to late 1930s. Had the committee been regarded as more consequential, more actively engaged experts might have been nominated. A few years after the ILO's efforts to rejuvenate the group, this shift was mirrored to some extent by the British Colonial Office. Internally, officials expressed frustration with Frederick Lugard, referring to him disparagingly as a "tiresome old gentlem[a]n", who would "never take a hint [about his age] even when phrased in the most tactful terms possible". In their view, it was "essential that any British representative on this Committee should be possessed of the latest first-hand information regarding Colonial labour conditions".[124] By that point, however, the committee's institutional relevance was already in decline.

The final fifth meeting of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour took place between April and May 1934. While the exact minutes of the meeting have not been preserved, some of the preparatory documents produced by the International Labour Office are available. These materials indicate that the meeting focused on two main issues. First, the committee was asked to approve the final versions of the labour standards on contract labour that had been developed during the fourth session, following a small number of textual revisions. Second, the experts were tasked with addressing three outstanding matters not yet included in the previous recommendations: the conditions under which contracts could be terminated, the issue of worker repatriation and the application of penal sanctions.[125] In 1935, the ILO pub-

123 C.W.H. Weaver to Edward Phelan, Minute Sheet (December 13, 1932), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-22-2.

124 Minute Sheet (May 23, 1938), Kew Archives, CO 323/1539/7.

125 ILO (1934): Committee of Experts on Native Labour, C.E.T.I./V/4/1934, C.E.T.I./V/5/1934 and C.E.T.I./V/6/1934, Bodleian Library Oxford, Lugard Papers, 116.

lished a "grey book" summarising the committee's work on labour recruitment, which was presented for discussion at the ILC that year.[126] This process culminated in the adoption of the Recruiting of Indigenous Workers Convention (C50) in 1936.

Conceptually, the convention marked a shift from the earlier terminology of "native labour" to that of "indigenous labour". As discussed in the introduction, both terms were used interchangeably in colonial discourse and legal frameworks, though with slightly shifting connotations. Importantly, "indigenous" in this context did not correspond to its contemporary meaning, namely, "culturally distinct groups living within the borders of independent states" who trace their descent from precolonial populations.[127] Instead, it functioned largely as a semantic replacement for "native", continuing to refer primarily to colonised workers in dependent territories. This terminological change was prompted by concerns raised by independent member states of the ILO, who feared that the ambiguous language of the organisation's colonial policies might extend to their own indigenous populations.[128] By 1935, "indigenous" thus formally replaced "native" within the ILO's legal vocabulary, though without altering the underlying conceptual boundaries, still referring to colonised workers in dependent states.[129] This marked the beginning of a broader series of terminological and conceptual shifts that would continue after 1944.

With the adoption of Convention C50, the influence of the committee continued to diminish. A 1935 decision by the ILO's Governing Body mandated that the composition of all expert committees needed to be reviewed every three years. While this review process was still applied to the Committee of Experts for Native Labour as late as 1938, its operational role had already begun to fade.[130] When the Native Labour Section under C.W.H. Weaver

126 N.N. (1935): Fourth Item on the Agenda. The Recruiting of Labour in Colonies and in Other Territories with Analogous Labour Conditions. In: ILO (1935): Minutes of the 19th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1935. Geneva: ILO, 852–872.

127 Rodríguez-Piñero, Luis (2005): Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime (1919–1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 39–40. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199284641.001.0001.

128 Rodríguez-Piñero, Luis (2005): Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime (1919–1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 44. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199284641.001.0001.

129 Rodríguez-Piñero, Luis (2005): Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime (1919–1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 46–47. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199284641.001.0001.

130 See, for example, John Gilbert Winant to Frederick Lugard (July 14, 1938), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-25.

requested authorisation to convene a further meeting in 1937, this time to address labour conditions for colonised workers employed without formal contract, the Governing Body declined.[131] The outbreak of the Second World War made the prospect of another session even more remote. In 1940, C.W.H. Weaver responded to an inquiry from Frederick Lugard regarding the committee's future. Weaver explained that the Office had initially planned to reconvene the committee only after all related conventions and recommendations had been adopted by the ILC. This process had concluded in June 1939 with the acceptance of the Contracts of Employment (Indigenous Workers) Convention (C64) and the Penal Sanctions (Indigenous Workers) Convention (C65). However, the war and the "consequent drastic budgetary restrictions" rendered further planning impossible.[132] Although some committee members maintained correspondence with the ILO during the war years, this marked the formal end of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour.

In conclusion, this chapter examined how the categories of race and gender shaped the knowledge produced by the Committee of Experts for Native Labour. It demonstrated that conceptions of colonial labour were deeply embedded in racial hierarchies, which informed prevailing assumptions about the capacity and suitability of racialised populations for different forms of work. Labour was predominantly constructed as a male domain, with women largely absent from both the expert committee's composition and its discourses. An analysis of the committee members' biographies available in Appendix I revealed that, despite their varied professional trajectories, many shared prior experience as colonial administrators. This background contributed to a perspective rooted in administrative practice and imperial authority. Finally, the chapter highlighted the dual position of the experts, who operated at the intersection of national allegiances and the ILO's international, often inter-imperial, mandate. This intermediary role exposed the structural tensions and compromises that characterised the committee's work.

131 N.N., Commission pour le printemps de l'année 1937 (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-2-6-1.
132 C.W.H. Weaver to Frederick Lugard (February 22, 1940), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-25.

CHAPTER 3

The ILC as a Forum for Debates About Racialised Labour, 1919–1939

In October 1919, the ILO began its operations by convening the first International Labour Conference (ILC). Constituting the third constitutive decision-making organ of the ILO next to the International Labour Office and the Governing Body, the ILC typically convened annually in Geneva, bringing together national tripartite delegations from all member states. These delegations usually comprised two government representatives, one employers' delegate, one workers' delegate and their respective advisors. Especially in the earlier years, delegations were not always complete. Delegates had the right to speak and vote independently and the primary function of the ILC, then as now, was the creation and adoption of international labour standards in the form of binding conventions or non-binding recommendations.[1] The agenda of the ILC, determined by the Governing Body, included both standing and technical items. Following the election of a president and an opening address, the conference split into tripartite committees of government, employer and worker delegates, which prepared reports and draft proposals, though final decisions on conventions and recommendations were made by the full assembly. The plenary also included a discussion of the Director's annual report, which reviewed global developments in labour and the ILO's activities. Delegates could comment on the report and broader issues, to which the Director typically offered a brief reply.

This chapter draws on the extensive source material generated by the ILC to investigate how racialised and colonised labour was discussed and framed within this tripartite forum. It is grounded in an understanding of conferencing as a distinctive and central practice of twentieth-century internationalism. Rather than treating international conferences merely as formalised expres-

1 A concise overview of the structure and procedures of the ILCs is provided in: ILO (2023): The International Labour Conference at a glance. In: ILO https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/international-labour-conference-glance (last accessed: June 2, 2024). In this chapter, the term "delegates" is used inclusively to refer not only to official voting members but also to those who accompanied delegations in an advisory capacity. Although advisers did not possess voting rights, they were permitted to participate in the debates and thus played a meaningful role in shaping the discourse on race and labour. The actual voting outcomes are of secondary importance in the analysis presented here.

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sions of pre-existing international relations, the annual ILCs are understood as co-constitutive of internationalism itself.[2] As Mike Heffernan et al. have argued, international conferences, of which the regularised meetings of international organisations represent only a small subset, were instrumental in shaping organisations and their policies, rather than simply reflecting them.[3] By paying particular attention to the role of racialised assumptions within these debates, this chapter explores how such discourses intersected with the politics of labour standard-setting. Through the identification of key themes, tropes and recurring topics in the recorded exchanges among government, employer and worker delegates, it complements previous findings by offering a more explicitly international and tripartite perspective. Special emphasis is placed on the emergence and expression of anti-colonial rhetoric, particularly from Indian, Japanese and, to some extent, Chinese representatives.[4]

The chapter is structured in three parts. The first section examines the racialising discourses surrounding colonial labourers. The second explores critiques of the ILO's Eurocentric orientation. The final section analyses the strategies and interventions deployed by colonial and non-European delegates to contest and counterbalance the organisation's European bias. Taken together, Chapter 3 moves beyond an analysis of individual delegates to illuminate the broader structural conflicts at the core of the ILO's tripartite system—between capital, the nation-state and labour—and demonstrates how these lines of conflict were frequently shaped and reinforced by differing racial positionalities. By employing the ILC as a magnifying lens to foreground tripartite debates and positions, the chapter also traces the circulation and afterlives of the ideas articulated and contested within this forum beyond the conferences themselves. In doing so, it highlights both the broader political and discursive imperial networks within which twentieth-century international conferences

2 Heffernan, Mike, Jake Hodder, Stephen Legg & Benjamin J. Thorpe (2021): Introduction. In: Heffernan, M., J. Hodder, S. Legg & B.J. Thorpe (eds.): Placing Internationalism. International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 4. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350254831.0006.

3 Heffernan, Mike, Jake Hodder, Stephen Legg & Benjamin J. Thorpe (2021): Introduction. In: Heffernan, M., J. Hodder, S. Legg & B.J. Thorpe (eds.): Placing Internationalism. International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 4. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350254831.0006.

4 The rhetoric structures of these debates have been analysed by Ulrike Davy (2023): Decolonizing Equality – The Legacies of Anti-Colonial Struggles at International Labour Conferences, 1920–1940. In: *Human Rights Law Review* 23(3), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngad017.

operated and the creative and provocative potential that conferencing could offer to anti-colonial actors.

3.1 Perceptions of Colonised Workers. Racialised Attitudes and Labour Hierarchies

From the very first ILC, both the scope and the limit of the ILO's responsibilities were the subject of intense debate. Among the results of the inaugural conference in 1919 was the adoption of a convention establishing the eight-hour day and the forty-eight-hour week for factory workers in Western industrialised countries.[5] This outcome illustrates how the archetypical worker envisaged by the ILO and its tripartite constituents was overwhelmingly white, European, male and employed in an industrial setting. One of the earliest fields in which this narrow understanding of work was challenged was agriculture. While some delegates maintained that agriculture was too heterogeneous to be regulated through international social legislation and that rural workers were too dispersed and unstable to be organised politically, others, including the ILO's Director-General Albert Thomas, argued for their inclusion. They emphasised both the dire working conditions prevalent in rural labour and its fundamental economic importance.[6]

Although agricultural labour was successfully placed on the ILO's agenda by 1920, the organisation's concern remained bound by assumptions of whiteness, Europeanness and regular wage employment, which continued to define the hard limits of its labour standard-setting activities.[7] Agricultural labour in the colonies remained excluded from this debate and the concrete working conditions of colonised and racialised workers did not become a central concern of ILC debates until the late 1920s. Nevertheless, interventions by delegates from India and South Africa introduced questions of race into the discussions and exposed the underlying assumptions of racial superiority and inferiority that shaped contemporary understandings of labour. Framed within the rhetoric of a "civilising mission", frequently used to legitimise colo-

5 ILO (1920): Minutes of the 1st Session of the International Labour Conference, Washington, 1919. Washington: Government Printing Office, 41.

6 Ribi Forclaz, Amalia (2025): Cultivating Fields of Progress. Agriculture and the International Labour Organization, 1920s–1950s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 22–24, 27. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191945014.001.0001.

7 Ribi Forclaz, Amalia (2025): Cultivating Fields of Progress. Agriculture and the International Labour Organization, 1920s–1950s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 29. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191945014.001.0001.

nial rule, two core assumptions were evident in many delegates' contributions. First, the existence of civilisational hierarchies; second, the supposed necessity of European tutelage for the advancement of colonised populations, often through the use of force and coercion.

3.1.1 Civilising Missions and Labour

From the mid-1920s, "civilising" ideology began to surface more explicitly in discussions on colonial labour. At the 1926 conference, for instance, the South African government delegate Clarence Wilfred Cousins articulated what he perceived as a dual civilisational structure within South Africa. As a settler colony, South Africa occupied a particular position within imperial structures. Settler colonialism, as a mode of domination, is primarily oriented towards the control of land rather than the extraction of labour and typically operates through the replacement rather than the reproduction of colonised subjects.[8] Yet, despite its status as a settler colony, South Africa's relatively small white population and heavy reliance on Black labour produced dynamics more commonly associated with classical colonial formations.[9] Against this background, Cousins claimed that South Africa comprised "two orders of civilisation […] widely divergent": settlers of Dutch and English descent, whom he described as "men imbued with high racial tradition", and the "virile races of the Bantu", portrayed as "scarcely out of the nursery of civilisation" and "just emerging from conditions of savagery".[10] The metaphor of a "nursery of civilisation" underscored a racialised hierarchy of development, casting the Black population as childlike and dependent. This paternalism was made explicit when Cousins referred to the white settler as a benevolent "father" who, though "kind", was obliged to "guide […] and guard" the "younger ones".[11] By reproducing the influential racial framework of the "family of man", Cousins construed

8 Veracini, Lorenzo (2016): Introduction. Settler Colonialism as a Distinct Mode of Domination. In: Cavanagh, E. & L. Veracini (eds.): The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism. London: Routledge, 3.

9 Cavanagh, Edward (2016): Settler Colonialism in South Africa. Land, Labour and Transformation, 1880–2015. In: Cavanagh, E. & L. Veracini (eds.): The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism. London: Routledge, 291–309.

10 Clarence Wilfred Cousins, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 261–262. The term Bantu refers to an ethnolinguistic category encompassing several hundred distinct ethnic groups that speak Bantu languages across large parts of West, Central, Southeast and Southern Africa.

11 Clarence Wilfred Cousins, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 261–262.

Black people as children and white Europeans as fully developed adults. Within this logic, the Bantu population was deemed incapable of autonomous development and in need of the continued presence and guidance of the white population.[12]

This civilising ideology was closely intertwined with the economic exploitation and valorisation of colonial resources and aligned most clearly with the interests of the employers' group at the ILC. For example, Alphonse Cayen, the Belgian employers' delegate who would later serve on the ILO's Committee of Experts for Native Labour, praised by Albert Thomas for his ostensibly progressive attitude, argued that next to the "duty of raising the moral, intellectual and social level of the peoples entrusted to their care", colonial powers were required to give "full effect to the latent prosperity" of the territories. The wealth of the colonies, he insisted, had to be integrated into global financial circuits to justify the investments made in the "civilising" process.[13] A few years later, another Belgian employers' delegate reiterated this view, citing the discovery of mineral deposits in formerly "idle" areas as evidence of colonial advancement.[14] Such statements reflected the widespread conviction that colonial powers and their enterprises were entitled to the material wealth of the colonised territories they governed, underscoring the close entanglement of private economic interests and state authority. The "civilising mission" was thus cast as a reciprocal arrangement: the uplift of colonised populations would be repaid through the exploitation of their land and labour; a logic famously articulated in Frederick Lugard's *The Dual Mandate*.

Despite their claims of a "civilising mission", colonial powers were ultimately dependent on the labour of colonised populations to extract value from the territories they controlled. They employed various strategies, often coercive, to ensure a steady supply of labour. A recurring justification for these measures was the alleged unwillingness of colonised peoples to work. The Australian governmental delegate Granville de Laune Ryrie, for example, described "the natives" as "improvident and lazy", claiming that the inhabitants of Papua and New Guinea, if left to their own devices, would neither labour nor cultivate food, eventually starving without colonial intervention.[15]

12 McClintock, Anne (1995): Imperial Leather. Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York, NY: Routledge, 49–51. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203699546.

13 Alphonse Cayen, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 53–54.

14 Mr. Moeller [First name not included in the source], in: ILO (1935): Minutes of the 19th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1935. Geneva: ILO, 418.

15 Granville de Laune Ryrie, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 58. In 1920, the former German

Similarly, the Portuguese governmental delegate Vasco de Quevedo asserted the colonising powers' right to demand "a certain degree of industry" from colonised populations as part of their supposed progression towards education and civilisation.[16] This presumed lack of industriousness not only legitimised colonial control but also served as a rationale for the implementation of forced labour.

However, such claims did not go unchallenged. In 1928, Indian workers' delegate Dewan Chaman Lall wryly remarked that the colonial and mandatory powers invoking the Treaty of Versailles were not upholding the "sacred trust of civilisation" as outlined in Article 22 but rather pursuing the "financial trust of Europe".[17] With this critique, Lall exposed the primacy of economic motives underlying European colonial rule in contrast to the humanitarian ideals used to rhetorically legitimise it. Other labour representatives similarly emphasised the economic interests driving colonialism and highlighted how the characterisation of colonial workers as "savages" functioned as a rhetorical tool to justify the use of forced labour.[18] These contrasting perspectives expose the structural conflict between capital and labour that lay at the heart of the ILO's tripartite system and was further exacerbated by racial dynamics. Within this framework, national governments and employers largely advanced the interests of capital, whether imperial, national or corporate, while workers' representatives articulated the interests of labour. Racialised workers, in particular, sought to defend the position of non-white labour against both state authority and the economic imperatives of capital.

Assumptions about the supposed lower level of civilisation among colonised workers were often linked to ideas about "primitive" economies and a presumed inability to organise independently or make "rational" decisions. In the case of India, these assumptions were framed less as innate "backwardness" and more as structural deficiencies, such as widespread illiteracy and limited access to education.[19] One Indian employer, for example, justified low wages by claiming that workers irresponsibly spent their earnings on alco-

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colony German New Guinea had been handed over to Australia as a League of Nations' mandate and remained an external territory of Australia until 1975.

16 Vasco De Quevedo, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 44.

17 Dewan Chaman Lall, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 183.

18 Agus Salim, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 409.

19 R.P. Paranjpye, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 121.

hol, thereby impending their own "physical, intellectual and moral improvement", a process he felt entitled to.[20] This rhetoric echoed broader currents of the global temperance movement, which had gained traction throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century and had similarly been applied in Europe and the United States. While ostensibly concerned with public health and "morality", the movement disproportionately targeted the working class, blaming alcohol consumption for poverty and social disorder. The classed dynamic between its predominantly middle-class advocates and the working-class "beneficiaries" demonstrated the paternalistic logics underpinning such campaigns.[21] In colonial contexts, these class-based narratives often intersected with racialised and, in India, caste-based ones. As historian Eileen Boris observes, such "cultures of protection" were framed as measures to safeguard working conditions and workers, but, in fact, regulated issues of morality, sexuality, family structure and gender norms, thereby disciplining workers on behalf of the state, the economy and the family.[22]

Debates also emerged over the applicability of "European" industrial norms to colonial settings. A Belgian governmental delegate argued that social legislation, such as that developed during the ILC, could serve an educational purpose by instilling among colonial workers "an appreciation of the need for labour and of the need for discipline in its performance".[23] From this perspective, the gradual transformation of colonial economies was viewed positively. In contrast, French workers' delegate Léon Jouhaux referenced a well-known

20 D.P. Khaitan, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 317.

21 The literature on the history of the global temperance movement is too vast to be covered here. For a general overview, see Jack S. Blocker Jr., David M. Fahey & Ian R. Tyrrell (eds.) (2003): Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History. An International Encyclopedia. Santa Barbara, CA/Denver, CO/Oxford: ABC Clio. For India, specifically, see Lucy Carroll (1976): The Temperance Movement in India. Politics and Social Reform. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 10(3), 417–447, Robert Eric Colvard (2013): A World Without Drink. Temperance in Modern India, 1880–1940. University of Iowa: PhD Thesis. https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.t8aabnhj, Jana Tschurenev & Harald Fischer-Tiné (2014): Introduction. Indian Anomalies? Drink and Drugs in the Land of Gandhi. In: Fischer-Tiné, H. & J. Tschurenev (eds.): A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia. Intoxicating Affairs. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 1–25, and Erica Wald (2018): Governing the Bottle. Alcohol, Race and Class in Nineteenth-Century India. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46(3), 397–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2018.1452546.

22 Boris, Eileen (2019): Making the Woman Worker. Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 20.

23 Arthur Wauters, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 302.

socialist critique of colonial capitalism. In 1906, British colonial administrator Sydney Olivier (1859–1938) had published his study *White Capital and Coloured Labour*, which drew on his experience as colonial secretary in Belize and Jamaica.[24] In his study, Olivier, an early member of the British Fabian Society, offered a socialist critique of capitalist exploitation in the colonies, challenging economic injustice while accepting and supporting the broader framework of imperialism.[25] Citing Olivier, Léon Jouhaux noted the general reluctance or inability of "African races" to adopt capitalist norms or form an industrial proletariat.[26] Despite their differing political and tripartite positions, both speakers shared the assumption that colonial workers were fundamentally unsuited to "Western" models of industrial organisation, although they disagreed on the implications of this perceived resistance. Notably, such discussions generally took place about colonised subjects rather than with them.

3.1.2 Child Labour

In addition to generalised assumptions about the work ethics of non-European or colonised workers, the ILC also served as a forum for discussing coercive labour systems outside of Europe, among which child labour featured prominently. At the time, the regulation of child labour was also a contentious issue within Europe. During the early years of the ILO, conventions were adopted that established a minimum age of fourteen for employment in industry, maritime occupations and agriculture.[27] Member states responded variably to the prospect of ratification. In countries such as Britain, increasing mechanisation had already led to a decline in occupations traditionally filled with children,

24 Williams, Stephanie (2011): Running the Show. Governors of the British Empire 1857–1912. London: Viking, 333–355, and G.F. McCleary & George Mariz (2008): Olivier, Sydney Haldane, Baron Olivier. In: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/35309.

25 Olivier, Sydney (1906): White Capital and Coloured Labour. London: Independent Labour Party. Despite Olivier's comparatively progressive view on capital and colonialism, more advanced criticism on empire was voiced by him only much later. El-Amin, Mohammed Nuri (1977): Sydney Olivier on Socialism and the Colonies. In: *The Review of Politics* 39(4), 530. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670500024992.

26 Léon Jouhaux, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 324.

27 Droux, Joëlle (2013): From Inter-Agency Competition to Transnational Cooperation. The ILO Contribution to Child Welfare Issues During the Inter-War Years. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 264. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_16.

making ratification less contentious. In contrast, in countries like France, child labour remained prevalent in unskilled sectors.[28] Reluctance to ratify was also linked to national variations in the age of compulsory schooling, raising the possibility that children could complete their compulsory education before becoming legally eligible to work.[29] While such concerns were largely confined to European contexts, efforts to impose concrete prohibitions on child labour in colonial territories encountered significantly greater resistance.

Colonial powers often justified child labour by claiming that children in colonial or dependent territories matured physically earlier than their European counterparts and were therefore capable of performing strenuous tasks at a younger age. These arguments drew on racialised notions of physical difference, emphasising traits such as stature, strength and bodily maturity.[30] As historians Sacha Hepburn and April Jackson have demonstrated, such narratives were particularly pronounced in the context of British Africa.[31] Yet, similar tropes can be identified in discussions of child labour in India, as evidenced in the ILC protocols.[32] This was not due to the exceptional prevalence of child labour in India but rather to the fact that, unlike most dependent territories, India held full representation at the ILC. Its presence allowed for more direct and contested debates than in the case of Britain's African colonies, which lacked formal representation. As the following analysis will show, the absence of delegates from many colonial regions significantly shaped not only which

28 Droux, Joëlle (2013): From Inter-Agency Competition to Transnational Cooperation. The ILO Contribution to Child Welfare Issues During the Inter-War Years. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 264. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_16.

29 Droux, Joëlle (2013): From Inter-Agency Competition to Transnational Cooperation. The ILO Contribution to Child Welfare Issues During the Inter-War Years. In: Kott, S. & J. Droux (eds.): Globalizing Social Rights. The International Labour Organization and Beyond. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 265. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137291967_16.

30 The persistent resonance of this trope until today is reflected in contemporary research, such as Phillip Atiba Goff et al. (2014): The Essence of Innocence. Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children. In: *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106(4), 526–545. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0035663.

31 Hepburn, Sacha & April Jackson (2022): Colonial Exceptions. The International Labour Organization and Child Labour in British Africa, c. 1919–1940. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 57(2), 218–241. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094209880 63.

32 Similarly noted by Sacha Hepburn & April Jackson (2022): Colonial Exceptions. The International Labour Organization and Child Labour in British Africa, c. 1919–1940. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 57(2), 236. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094209880 63.

issues were brought to the fore but also which remained absent from international discourse.

Already in 1919, a significant exchange unfolded between the Indian government's delegate Atul Chandra Chatterjee (1874–1955) and the Indian workers' representative Narayan Malhar Joshi (1879–1955).[33] Chatterjee, a senior civil servant, defended child labour in India by asserting that "children [there] develop[ed] much earlier than in the North or in the West", and that, given the lack of educational infrastructure, work was preferable to idleness. He further downplayed the risks by characterising such labour as "light and subsidiary".[34] Joshi, however, forcefully challenged these claims, questioning whether climate alone could plausibly account for such developmental differences and urging a shift in focus from racialised explanations to structural deficiencies: "Do you think that climate can make that great difference?".[35] He argued that the British colonial administration bore responsibility for providing adequate schooling and social support, rather than justifying exploitative labour practices.

In 1921, N.M. Joshi revisited the issue of racialised assumptions about child development, referencing debates from the previous year's special ILC session on maritime labour in Genoa.[36] During that session, several delegates had proposed lowering the minimum working age for Indian and Japanese trimmers and stokers, citing claims of earlier physical maturity. Joshi directly challenged this rationale in the plenary, asking:

> I should like to know from the Reporter of the Commission what is the meaning of "earlier and more precocious development" which is said to take place in the case of youths in India and Japan. Is it meant that in India lads become full-grown men at the age of sixteen, while they become full grown men at the age of eighteen in Europe? Is it meant that in India a lad of sixteen, when engaged as a trimmer or stoker in a steamer, will not suffer in health, while a lad of

33 For more information on Chatterjee's and Joshi's biographies, see Chapter 4.1.1.

34 A.C. Chatterjee, in: ILO (1920): Minutes of the 1st Session of the International Labour Conference, Washington, 1919. Washington: Government Printing Office, 94.

35 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1920): Minutes of the 1st Session of the International Labour Conference, Washington, 1919. Washington: Government Printing Office, 96.

36 For an introduction to the history of the maritime conferences, see Leon Fink (2015): A Sea of Difference. The ILO and the Search for Common Standards, 1919–1945. In: Jensen, J.M. & N. Lichtenstein (eds.): The ILO from Geneva to the Pacific Rim. West Meets East. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 15–32. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137570901_2.

> sixteen in Europe, so engaged, will suffer in health? I should like to get a clear explanation of these facts, because I believe, as stated, they are inaccurate.[37]

He then accused the Indian government of using such claims to avoid investing in a national system of literary education, instead pushing young boys prematurely into the workforce. As in 1919, the Indian government's delegate Atul Chandra Chatterjee defended his position, reiterating the assertion that children in "Asiatic countries" matured "much more rapidly" due to the climate.[38] Whether sincerely held or not, this argument served a strategic function. It legitimised the continued exploitation of child labour. In doing so, references to race and climate became key ideological tools for sustaining differential standards between the so-called "East" and "West".[39]

Although briefly raised and then dropped again in 1926, the issue of Indian child labour returned to the forefront of ILC debates in 1931, prompted by the report of the Committee on the Age of Admission of Children to Employment in Non-Industrial Occupations.[40] Speaking in plenary, Indian workers' delegate V.M. Ramaswamy Mudaliar criticised the Indian government's initial proposal to set the minimum working age at ten, four years below the European standard of fourteen. He noted that in some Indian provinces, compulsory education extended to age twelve, aligning with the minimum set in the 1919 convention. Though the Indian government eventually withdrew its proposal, the example highlighted ongoing attempts by colonial authorities to justify lower standards for colonised populations through racial reasoning. In contrast, Mudaliar argued for a universalist perspective, asserting that "the welfare of the child [wa]s a universal one, transcending race, class and creed" and rejecting the notion of fundamental psychological differences between "Eastern" and "Western" children.[41] As these examples illustrate, while the underlying conflict in both European and colonial contexts stemmed from a shared

37 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 253–254.

38 A.C. Chatterjee, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 255–256.

39 For a discussion of the role attributed to climate in debates surrounding development and sexuality in the League of Nations, see Ashwini Tambe (2011): Climate, Race Science and the Age of Consent in the League of Nations. In: *Theory, Culture & Society* 28(2), 109–130. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276410380942.

40 See the debate between Lala Lajpat Rai and A.C. Chatterjee, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 118–122.

41 V.M. Ramaswamy Mudaliar, in: ILO (1931): Minutes of the 15th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1931. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 438.

economic interest in maintaining access to child labour, the discursive strategies employed to justify it diverged significantly. In Europe, arguments for lower minimum age standards often referenced other legal frameworks, particularly discrepancies between the age of compulsory education and the legal age for employment. In contrast, in the case of India, both employers and government representatives relied on racialised constructions of childhood and physical development, invoking perceived biological differences to legitimise the continued employment of children.

3.1.3 Forced Labour

A second key example of colonial labour exploitation debated at the ILC was the issue of forced labour.[42] While the drafting of the 1930 Forced Labour Convention had been prepared by the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, whose members largely came from colonial administrative backgrounds, the tripartite composition of the ILC brought a broader range of perspectives when the committee's findings were presented in 1929 and 1930.[43] Although there was a broad agreement among delegates that forced labour should be abolished, this consensus often rested on pragmatic rather than ethical grounds, namely its inefficiency and lack of the purported "educative effect". A Spanish governmental delegate, for instance, argued that forced labour had a "demoralizing effect" rather than any civilising benefit.[44] Others agreed that education

42 For an alternative interpretation of this debate, see Christopher M. Roberts' analysis, published during the preparation of this book, which arrives at broadly similar conclusions. Roberts, Christopher M. (2025): Re-Covering Forced Labour. Colonial Foreclosures and Forgotten Potentials. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law Research Paper 2025–1, 30–36. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5079594.

43 For the ILO's handling of forced labour beyond the period and context analysed here, see Daniel Maul (2007): The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present. In: *Labor History* 48(4), 477–500. https://doi.org/10.1080/00236560701580275, Sandrine Kott (2012): The Forced Labour Issue between Human and Social Rights, 1947–1957. In: *Humanity* 3(3), 321–335. https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2012.0025, José Pedro Monteiro (2018): 'One of Those Too-Rare Examples'. The International Labour Organization, the Colonial Question and Forced Labour (1961–1963). In: Jerónimo, M.B. & J.P. Monteiro (eds.): Internationalism, Imperialism, and the Formation of the Contemporary World. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 221–251. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60693-4_9, and, for the more recent past, Jens Lerche (2007): A Global Alliance against Forced Labour? Unfree Labour, Neo-Liberal Globalization and the International Labour Organization. In: *Journal of Agrarian Change* 7(4), 424–452. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2007.00152.x.

44 José Gascon y Marin, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 52.

could not be achieved under working conditions as horrible as those of forced workers and that "work done under compulsion" was "inefficient".[45] By that time, the use of paid forced labour had already begun to decline in several colonial contexts. However, the explanations provided by colonial governments during the ILC, inciting moral or developmental rhetoric, served more to obscure than to clarify the reasons behind this shift. More plausible explanations include growing international criticism of especially brutal practices and broader structural changes that gradually undermined the legitimacy of openly coercive labour systems. Yet, as historical scholarship has shown, colonial authorities frequently found alternative mechanisms and legal loopholes to perpetuate coercive labour under different guises.[46]

References to slavery featured prominently in the debates. French and Italian workers' delegates Léon Jouhaux and Luigi Razza both equated forced labour with a "form of slavery", using the term's strong moral resonance to reinforce their critique.[47] Since the formal abolition of chattel slavery in the British Empire in 1833, Europe's identity as a civilising force had relied on its ostensible rejection of slavery. This symbolic boundary served both pro-colonial and anti-colonial rhetoric. While imperial advocates framed empire as a bulwark against inner-African slavery, critics invoked images and memories of the trauma and violence attached to the history of the trade with enslaved persons to strengthen calls for reform. Groups like the British Anti-Slavery Society had intensified the public disapproval of slavery, acting from a point of view characterised as "humanitarian imperialism". The 1926 Slavery Convention of the League of Nations had further renewed international commitments to ending slavery and catalysed the ILO's investigation into forced labour. In referencing slavery, European workers' delegates aimed to harness

45 Léon Jouhaux and Jennings Wong, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 50, 75.

46 See, for example, Elisabeth McMahon (2017): Developing Workers. Coerced and 'Voluntary' Labor in Zanzibar, 1909–1970. In: *International Labour and Working-Class History* 92, 114–133. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547917000126, Sarah Kunkel (2018): Forced Labour, Roads, and Chiefs. The Implementation of the ILO Forced Labour Convention in the Gold Coast. In: *International Review of Social History* 63(3), 449–476. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859018000524, Opolot Okia (2019): Labor in Colonial Kenya after the Forced Labor Convention, 1930–1963. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17608-2, and Alexander Keese (2023): Between Community Development Effort and Hidden Colonial Forced Labour. The Long History of 'Communal Labour' in Gold Coast/Ghana, 1927–2010. In: Bauer, R. & E. van Nederveen Meerkerk (eds.): Global Agricultural Workers from the 17th to the 21st Century. Leiden: Brill, 384–407. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004529427_016.

47 Léon Jouhaux and Luigi Razza, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 50, 74.

this shared moral disapproval and redirect it towards forced labour, seeking to place it beyond the bounds of acceptable colonial practice.[48]

Yet, some workers' delegates pushed beyond general criticism and called for the immediate and uncompromising abolition of forced labour. The Indian workers' delegate B. Shiva Rao urged the ILC to "decide […] here and now to make forced labour a thing of the past" and to issue "a clear and emphatic declaration" of non-compromise.[49] Framing forced labour as the "legacy of an imperialist form of government", Shiva Rao located the practice within the broader structures of colonial domination, which he, as an anti-colonial Indian trade unionist, unequivocally condemned. The Japanese workers' delegate Komakichi Matsuoka echoed this call, arguing that the aim should not be to "limit and regulate" forced labour but "to abolish it entirely".[50] A particularly powerful intervention came from Haji Agus Salim, who joined the Dutch delegation as a technical adviser for the workers' delegate. Salim, an Indonesian journalist and prominent figure in the socialist Indonesian Islamic Union Party (*Partai Sarekat Islam*), would later join the government of independent Indonesia.[51] Speaking at the ILC, he sharply criticised the Office's report on forced labour, which, as he pointed out, relied exclusively on accounts from colonial governments. According to Salim, such governments shaped their politics to align with national public opinion, which, in colonies like the Dutch East Indies, was systematically suppressed. As a result, he saw it as his

48 Since its formal abolition in the British Empire, slavery has consistently functioned, and continues to function, as a powerful negative point of reference in the discourse surrounding coercive labour systems. The rhetorical invocation of slavery has often been used to critique exploitative labour practices by drawing on its strong moral condemnation. For instance, the British deployment of the concept of "new slavery" in reference to Chinese indentured labourers in South Africa has been examined by Tu T. Huynh (2025): 'New Slavery' vs. *Huagong*. Chinese Indentured Labor in South Africa in the Chinese Press, 1903–1905. In: *ZANJ. The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 8(1–2), 53–78. https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobsoutstud.8.1.0005. The more recent resurgence of the concept of "modern slavery" to describe forms of coercion in the twentieth-first century has been critically analysed by Orlando Patterson & Xiaolin Zhuo (2018): Modern Trafficking, Slavery, and Other Forms of Servitude. In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 44(16), 1–33. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041147.

49 B. Shiva Rao, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 47.

50 Komakichi Matsuoka, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 56.

51 Laffan, Michael Francis (2003): Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia. The Umma Below the Winds. London: Routledge, 181–189. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203222577. At the time of the ILC, the spelling of Indonesian names still followed the Dutch-based spelling system, under which Agus Salim was spelled Agoes Salim. The change from "oe" to "u" follows contemporary Indonesian spelling rules.

duty to present "the truth as it appeared to [him]" and to speak for the colonised populations who depended entirely on "the conscience of the West". He condemned forced labour as "unjust", rooted in "the theory of the innate inferiority of certain races" and a major "obstacle in the way of the formation of sympathetic contact between races", which was a central goal of both the League of Nations and the ILO.[52]

It is unsurprising that the most incisive critiques of forced labour at the 1929 ILC came from delegates representing dependent or colonised populations. Unlike European workers' representatives such as Léon Jouhaux or Luigi Raza, who criticised forced labour within a framework that still accepted the "civilising mission" of empire, figures like Shiva Rao and Salim embedded their arguments within an explicitly anti-colonial analysis.[53] Salim's critique of the Labour Office's reliance on colonial government data further underscored his acute awareness of the unequal power dynamics embedded within international organisations. If investigations relied solely on information provided by colonial authorities, then the very abuses committed by those same authorities would remain invisible, highlighting the epistemic inequalities produced and maintained by Eurocentric organisations operating within imperial systems of governance.

The debate nevertheless revealed the collective strength and unity typically represented by the workers' group during the ILC. Despite internal differences in argumentation due to different racial positionalities, workers consistently aligned themselves in opposition to the positions advanced by governments and employers. This dynamic was particularly evident in the ILC's tripartite Forced Labour Committee, which brought together governmental, employers' and workers' representatives from various member states to further refine the draft convention. Within this smaller forum, workers' delegates unitedly introduced the issue of freedom of association into the colonial debate and defended it against resistance from governments and employers. They argued that freedom of association for colonised workers was an indispensable precondition for any effective strategy to combat forced labour.[54] Although these

52 Agus Salim, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 69.

53 Jouhaux, for example, criticised the conditions of forced labour, but nonetheless was convinced that it was "a fact that these races must be raised" and "that they must be taught to work". Léon Jouhaux, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 50.

54 Roberts, Christopher M. (2025): Re-Covering Forced Labour. Colonial Foreclosures and Forgotten Potentials. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law Research Paper 2025–1, 34. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5079594.

efforts ultimately failed to secure the inclusion of freedom of association in the convention, the episode nonetheless illustrates a shared set of interest between white and racialised workers that cut across national and imperial boundaries.

In its aftermath, this more in-depth work of the ILC's tripartite Forced Labour Committee inspired Indonesian workers' adviser Haji Agus Salim to reflect openly on the racial discrimination he had encountered during its sessions, especially from employers and governments. Addressing the full audience, once again united, he recalled:

> Only once I intervened. I protested against the libelling [sic] of those peoples who were not represented on the Committee. I received the reply I expected. The Committee was not thinking of the position of such peoples as I represent, but the position of more primitive peoples.[55]

Salim's experience illustrates the racialised and derogatory assumptions about colonial workers that permeated the debates on forced labour. For Salim, however, the ignorance of the white delegates on the committee, when confronted with their own racism, came as no surprise. Their defence, namely that they did not consider Salim to be as "primitive" as the workers under discussion, exemplified a common strategy among those in positions of power who sought to avoid confronting the implications of their discriminatory behaviour. By distinguishing Salim from the broader colonial population, they attempted to delegitimise his role as a representative of the colonised, framing his education and rhetorical skill as exceptions that invalided his claims. Such manoeuvres effectively reinforced racial hierarchies, as they denied Salim the authority to speak on behalf of his compatriots precisely because he did not conform to the colonial stereotype of the submissive and voiceless subject. Despite this conflict, Salim persisted in articulating his central demand, namely the official and immediate abolition of forced labour by colonial powers. To support his position, he invoked the image of rising anti-colonial movements and uprisings that had gained momentum globally over the past decade, which, in his view, would continue to build up pressure until their demands were fulfilled. Rejecting the paternalistic language of "pity" and "pro-

55 Agus Salim, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 409. The different understandings of "humanity" in the ILC debates about colonial labour conditions have been analysed by Julia Burova (2023): Mensch-Sein und Arbeit. Wie Vergleichspraktiken der ILO den Menschheitsbegriff beeinflussten, 1919–1939. Working Paper of the SFB 1288, No. 9. https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2980549.

tection" often employed by the white delegates, Salim reframed the issue at hand. For him, the question of forced labour was not one of humanitarian sentiment but a matter of global justice and political transformation. As he powerfully stated:

> The peoples oppressed are awakening. They will not bear indefinitely the position of inferiority in which they are placed. [...] So long as the humiliation of these peoples lasts the feeling of hatred will last. For this reason social justice is not based on pity and humanity, but on the true interests of Europe and of the whole world.[56]

In this declaration, Salim presciently anticipated the long-term consequences of colonial exploitation. Sustained oppression, he warned, would not result in passivity but would fuel resentment and ultimately lead to more violent forms of decolonisation.

One year later, in 1930, the draft of the Forced Labour Convention was presented to the ILC for final approval. During the ensuing debates, several colonial government representatives raised objections to the democratic procedures of the organisation. Specifically, they challenged the principle that all ILO member states had an equal right to participate in decision-making, even when the matter at hand, such as the abolition of forced labour, directly affected only colonial powers. The governmental representatives from Portugal and the Netherlands argued that only those delegations administering colonial territories should be permitted to vote on such issues.[57] In doing so, they openly questioned the foundational principle of equal representation within the ILO. This stance exposed the colonial powers' discomfort with being subjected to multilateral oversight and their desire to retain control over colonial policy without external interference. Although the ILO's system of representation continued to reflect the hierarchies of imperial rule, excluding most colonised populations from direct participation, it nevertheless upheld, at least in principle, a commitment to procedural equality among its members. The opposition voiced by Portugal and the Netherlands, therefore, not only revealed the limits of colonial governments' willingness to submit to

56 Agus Salim, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 410.

57 Vasco de Quevedo, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 155, M. de Vasconcellos, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 276, E. Moresco, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 290.

international scrutiny, but also signalled their anxiety about a shifting global order in which colonial authority could no longer be exercised unilaterally.

Together with other colonial governments, the Portuguese and Dutch delegations argued that the immediate abolition of forced labour, as advocated by B. Shiva Rao and Agus Salim, was unattainable for several reasons. Instead, they proposed that the draft convention should include a five-year transitional period, after which the ILO's Governing Body would reassess whether full abolition was practicable. The justifications offered for this delay were varied. Some pointed to the logistical and administrative challenges posed to colonial authorities, describing the abolition of forced labour as "a big change and a considerable operation".[58] Others relied on more insidious arguments, suggesting that, without forced labour, colonised populations would stagnate in a state of underdevelopment, malnutrition or even face extinction.[59] A particularly revealing example of this reasoning came from the Belgian employer Alphonse Cayen, who likened the experience of forced labour to compulsory schooling: "The child is unhappy for the first day or two, but that quickly passes. The same is true of the forced worker".[60] Cayen's comparison not only trivialised the violence inherent in coerced labour but also framed it as a necessary step in the moral and social "uplift" of colonial subjects. In stark contrast to the demands voiced by workers' delegates from colonised territories, governmental and employer representatives thus continued to defend forced labour through the familiar rhetoric of the so-called "civilising mission".

In the end, the convention adopted by the ILC included a transitional period of five years for the abolition of forced labour for public purposes. While the draft, as prepared by the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, prohibited forced labour for private purposes outright, it only committed to the progressive suppression of forced labour for public purposes. The convention exempted five categories from the abolition plan: military service, forced labour as a result of judicial convictions, labour imposed during cases of emergency and, the biggest loophole, work deemed part of the "normal civic obligations of the citizens" and "minor communal services [...] in the direct inter-

58 Roland Venables Vernon, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 271.

59 Michel Halewyck de Heusch, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 295, and Vasco de Quevedo, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 155.

60 Alphonse Cayen, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 318.

est of the said community".[61] These last two exclusions, in particular, left substantial room for interpretation by colonial governments and effectively legitimised many forms of continued coercion. The distinction between acceptable and unacceptable forms of forced labour, drawn within the convention, was largely artificial. Colonial administrations, particularly those practicing indirect rule such as the British in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) and Kenya, continued to exploit such loopholes to mobilise coerced labour for infrastructure and development projects.[62]

Altogether, the 1930 Forced Labour Convention contained few genuinely progressive elements and largely reflected the priorities and interests of the colonial powers. While the popularity of forced labour among colonial administrations gradually declined throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the convention itself was not a major breakthrough but rather a formal acknowledgement of changes already underway.[63] As historian Opolot Okia has argued, although the convention was framed as an "epistemological break with the past" that introduced "a new threshold for conceptualizing acceptable labor practices", its strategic ambiguities allowed coercive systems to persist.[64] The rare inclusion of anti-colonial voices, most notably through the Dutch trade unions' invitation of Agus Salim, briefly turned the ILC into a space where paternalistic justifications could be challenged. Yet the broader debates around the convention revealed less of a triumph of the ideal of free wage labour than a reconfiguration and rebranding of coercive labour practices under the guise of international reform. During the debates of the ILC, these shifting explanations and justifications became visible.

61 ILO (1930): Forced Labour Convention. In: Normlex https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID,P12100_HISTORICAL:312174,Y:NO (last accessed: June 17, 2024).

62 Kunkel, Sarah (2018): Forced Labour, Roads, and Chiefs. The Implementation of the ILO Forced Labour Convention in the Gold Coast. In: *International Review of Social History* 63(3), 449–476. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859018000524, and Opolot Okia (2019): Labor in Colonial Kenya after the Forced Labor Convention, 1930–1963. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17608-2.

63 Recently, a case study about the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast highlighted that the transformation from forced paid labour to voluntary paid labour partly pre-empted the 1930 Convention and can mostly be explained by local factors. Pont Cháfer, María José (2023): From Forced to Voluntary Labour in Rural Africa. The Transition to Paid Voluntary Labour on the Roads of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. In: *International Review of Social History* 68(2), 218. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859022000657.

64 Okia, Opolot (2019): Labor in Colonial Kenya after the Forced Labor Convention, 1930–1963. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17608-2.

3.1.4 Contract Labour and Penal Sanctions

In the years that followed, and in parallel with the deliberations of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, debates at the ILCs shifted from a primary focus on forced labour to various forms of indentured and contract labour.[65] Although formal systems of indenture had officially been discontinued by the 1930s, colonial economies continued to rely on migrant contract labour under exploitative conditions. The topic first surfaced at the ILC in 1931, when a South African workers' delegate raised concerns during a discussion on working conditions in coal mines. He reported that the South African mining industry depended heavily on contract labour, particularly from South Africa and Portuguese West Africa. These labourers, he noted, were preferred by employers for being "cheap and docile", a characterisation that, in his view, facilitated their systematic exploitation.[66] The issue returned in 1935, when the recruitment and working conditions of colonial contract labourers were officially added to the ILC agenda for the first time. Drawing on reports prepared by the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, the ILO aimed to adopt a new convention on the subject the following year. Once again, the South African delegation played a central role in the ensuing debate. This prominence stemmed in part from the particularly widespread use of contract labour in South Africa and Northern Rhodesia. In South Africa, where white dominance in agriculture, mining and the bureaucracy was institutionally entrenched, labour recruitment practices often took on especially violent and coercive forms.[67]

In an effort to influence delegates unfamiliar with the topic, South African employers used the time outside the official conference programme in 1935 to screen a propaganda film promoting their perspective on labour recruitment.[68] The film, *From Red Blanket to Civilization*, had been commissioned by the South African Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) in 1925. Divided into three sequences, it depicted African life as moving from a so-called "prim-

65 See Chapter 2.3.1.

66 Alfred Martin Merkel, in: ILO (1931): Minutes of the 15th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1931. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 375.

67 Cooper, Frederick (1996): Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 45.

68 Robert Dunlop, in: ILO (1935): Minutes of the 19th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1935. Geneva: ILO, 419. Only once before had a delegation organised a "soirée" to screen a movie: a film on "aspects of social and industrial life in Japan" in 1925. See: Clerk of the Conference (Mr. Thudichum), in: ILO (1925): Minutes of the 7th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1925. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 223.

itive" to a "modern" state, arguing that while African communities had admirable qualities, they lacked the capacity for autonomous social progress and therefore required the European guidance, particularly through institutions like labour migration. The film was screened both to colonised audiences in the Transkei and Ciskei and to white audiences in Europe.[69] The screening at the ILC was not an isolated event but part of a broader entanglement between South African mining interests and the ILO. Henry M. Taberer, the South African member of the ILO's Committee of Experts for Native Labour and Chief Labour Adviser to the NRC, was also the film's principal writer and producer. Previously, Taberer had accompanied Harold Butler, then Deputy Director-General, during his 1928 visit to South Africa, further illustrating the close relationship between the ILO and South African labour authorities. Although the British workers' delegate William George Ballinger (1894–1974) attempted to challenge the film's portrayal as misleading propaganda, the screening went ahead, underscoring how the ILO offered a platform, however tacit, for the dissemination of colonial employer interests.[70]

The following year, during the 1936 ILC, the so-called Recruiting of Indigenous Workers Convention (C50) was adopted. The debates revealed starkly contrasting views on contract labour. Workers' delegates were particularly vocal in highlighting the exploitative conditions endured by migrant workers. For example, the Chinese workers' delegate Chu Hsue-fan drew attention to the "inhuman [sic] system of recruiting" that afflicted Chinese labourers overseas.[71] Chu spoke with a sense of shared national identity, expressing solidarity with the recruited workers. Similarly, William George Ballinger, who now represented the South African workers' delegation rather than the British a year prior, challenged the racial stereotypes underpinning much of the dis-

69 Reynolds, Glenn (2007): 'From Red Blanket to Civilization'. Propaganda and Recruitment Films for South Africa's Gold Mines, 1920–1940. In: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33(1), 133–152. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070601136657, and Emma Sandon (2024): 'Mining' the Film Archive. South Africa's Mining Industry and Film Production. In: *Media+Environment* 6(1). https://doi.org/10.1525/001c.127504.

70 William George Ballinger, in: ILO (1935): Minutes of the 19th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1935. Geneva: ILO, 415. Scottish-born Ballinger had migrated to South Africa in 1928 and played a complex role in the organisation of the only Black-led trade union, the Industrial Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (ICU). For more information, see F.A. Mouton (1995): 'A Cusser when Crossed'. The Turbulent Career of William Ballinger. In: *Kleio* 27(1), 145–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/00232089585310101, and Barbara Bush (1999): Imperialism, Race and Resistance. Africa and Britain, 1919–1945. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 139–202.

71 Chu Hsue-fan, in: ILO (1936): Minutes of the 20th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1936. Geneva: ILO, 191.

cussion. He rejected the myth of Africa as a continent of "dense bush, arid desert, wild animals and untutored savages, with a few Europeans bearing the white man's burden", arguing instead that African workers operated complex modern machinery and formed the foundation of South Africa's entire economic system.[72]

Finally, in 1939, the adoption of the Contracts of Employment (Indigenous Workers) Convention (C64) and the Penal Sanctions (Indigenous Workers) Convention (C65) marked a last set of ILO regulations based on the work of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour. Among these, the question of penal sanctions for workers accused of breaching their contracts provoked especially strong reactions. From the perspective of many European employers, penal sanctions were deemed not only acceptable but necessary. Pierre de Briey of the Belgian employers' delegation argued that "there c[ould] be no contract without a sanction of some kind. There c[ould] be no rights without penalties of some kind. You c[ould not] educate the indigenous workers fully unless you [we]re going to train them to respect the given word and signature to a contract".[73] According to de Briey, unlike white European workers, colonised workers required discipline and moral instruction to become contract-worthy, as civil sanctions were, in his view, "inoperative". As in previous debates, this position reflected a deeply paternalistic conception of colonial labour, in which disproportionate punishment was legitimised through the rhetoric of civilisational uplift. The notion of a fictious labour contract served to justify coercion and violence, framed instead as educational tools for incorporating colonised workers into a capitalist labour regime.

Dissenting voices came from both Asian workers' and governmental delegates. Lou Che-ngan, representing the Chinese government, pointed out that while European colonial powers insisted on the necessity of penal sanctions, other countries had abolished such practices without any negative repercussions.[74] R.S. Nimbkar from India and Sukiman Wirjosandjojo of the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) went further. Both denounced the use of penal sanctions not only on practical grounds but also as expressions of racial discrimi-

72 William George Ballinger, in: ILO (1936): Minutes of the 20th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1936. Geneva: ILO, 288.

73 Pierre de Briey, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 303. A similar declaration was made by Gerard Leslie Makins Clauson, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 306. See Chapter 5.1.4 for more information on Pierre de Briey's engagement with the ILO's Native Labour Section in the 1940s.

74 Lou Che-ngan, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 306.

nation. Sukiman, an Indonesian physician, politician and later Prime Minister of independent Indonesia, called contract labour under these conditions "slavery in disguise".[75] He explicitly highlighted the racialised nature of the system, noting that penal contracts were enforced only on "coloured colonised peoples", thus constituting, in his words, a "colonial and race problem".[76] Sukiman's intervention was pointed and strategic. After underlining the discriminatory nature of penal sanctions, he reminded the delegates of the League of Nations' mandate ideals, including its professed mission of colonial tutelage and progress. Concluding his speech with a moral appeal, he stated that "anyone who [wa]s not altogether devoid of humanitarian sentiment must condemn outright the despicable system of penal sanctions".[77] Although initial hopes among colonised peoples for the League's promotion of racial equality and self-determination had already been severely disappointed, Sukiman used the League's own language to corner critics who, at least publicly, were unwilling to reject its ideals outright.[78] In doing so, he exposed the dissonance between international rhetoric and colonial reality. Ultimately, Convention C65 called for the abolition of penal sanctions for adult colonial workers "progressively and as soon as possible".[79] While this signalled an intention to end the practice, the phrasing left significant room for colonial governments to delay implementation. The vague temporality of "progressively" allowed colonial powers to argue that full abolition was not yet feasible, thus preserving the coercive tools of contract enforcement under the cover of gradual reform.

75 Reflecting the custom of many Indonesian communities, Sukiman Wirjosandjojo does not have a surname. In line with academic convention, he is referred to in the text as "Sukiman", as he was more commonly known by the first part of his name rather than the final. For completeness, his full name is provided in the source references. As with the case of Agus Salim, it should be noted that during the time of the ILC, Sukiman's name was still commonly spelled "Soekiman". For more on the political commonalities and differences between Agus Salim and Sukiman, see Kevin W. Fogg (2019): Indonesia's Islamic Revolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 172–174. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108768214.

76 Sukiman Wirjosandjojo, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 304.

77 Sukiman Wirjosandjojo, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 304.

78 See the introduction.

79 ILO (1939): Penal Sanctions (Indigenous Workers) Convention (C 65). In: Normlex https://webapps.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:3087355915710 7::NO::P12100_SHOW_TEXT:Y (last accessed: June 19, 2024).

3.2 Exposing the Bias. Debates on Eurocentrism at the ILC

Beyond their interventions in debates on racialised and colonised workers and labour regimes, non-white delegates to the ILC also used the conferences to challenge the ILO's Eurocentrism and the structural underrepresentation of racialised and colonised workers. In doing so, they moved beyond dissent over policy question to expose institutional imbalances that reinforced a predominantly white and European echo chamber in Geneva. Their critiques targeted, first, the lack of meaningful representation of colonial and non-Western workers within the ILO framework; second, the reluctance of colonial powers to apply adopted conventions and recommendations to their colonial and dependent territories, as permitted under Article 35 of the ILO Constitution; and, third, the frequent invocation of "special conditions" in the colonies under Article 19, which enabled the adoption of modified labour standards. These interventions, most articulated by workers' delegates rather than by other tripartite constituencies, must be understood as broader critiques of interwar internationalism. They highlighted the social and epistemic inequalities reproduced by international organisations that claimed global relevance while operating through limited global engagement and a persistently Eurocentric focus.

3.2.1 The Question of Representation. Colonised and Racialised Workers at the ILC

From the inception of the ILO in 1919 through the mid-1920s, Indian workers' delegations consistently criticised the unfair politics of representation within the International Labour Conferences. Early interventions, such as those by the Indian workers' delegate N.M. Joshi, focused on the glaring underrepresentation of non-European workers. In 1922, only one trade-unionist from the Americas, one from Africa and two from Asia were present at the conference.[80] By 1925, Joshi had grown increasingly disillusioned with the ILO. Arguing that "the interests of the special countries, of the colonies, protectorates, and the mandated territories [we]re not properly looked after by the Organisation", he posed a pointed question to the Conference:

> I should also like to know who in this Conference represents workers in the colonies, protectorates and mandated territories. Does my friend Mr. Poulton

80 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1922): Minutes of the 4th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1922. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 247.

> represent the workers in Ceylon, Malaya, the Straits Settlements, Mauritius and other colonies? Does the Dutch Workers' Delegate represent the workers in Java? If the workers in colonies are not represented in this Conference, how is the Conference likely to know what conditions of labour are in such colonies?[81]

Joshi highlighted the fact that all levels of the colonial powers' delegations, government, employers and workers, were drawn exclusively from the metropoles. In his view, this was especially troubling with regard to labour representation, as colonised and mandated workers were the most vulnerable to exploitation yet had no voice at the ILC.

In the following years, Indian and Japanese workers' delegates sharpened their appeals. Addressing their white counterparts in the workers' group directly, they emphasised shared responsibility:

> You know very well that [...] the conditions of labour among the native population and among the coloured people do require special attention. [...] The workers of the East look to you for co-operation and sympathy. They offer to you their friendship and cooperation in your work, and they expect from you the same kind of co-operation and sympathy.[82]

While critiques of the ILO's overall Eurocentrism persisted, the Indian and Japanese delegates' most pointed interventions were directed not at governments or employers, but at their fellow workers.[83] Despite their distinct national and ideological contexts, these delegates articulated a shared belief in global working-class solidarity and the necessity of collective struggle. Lala Lajpat Rai, speaking at the 1926 ILC, did not merely speak as a representative of Indian labour. He cast himself as the spokesperson of a broader group of "workers of the East" who appealed to a collective "you" of white Western workers. His rhetoric invoked the vision of a united international proletariat. This must be understood in light of the growing influence of Pan-Asian thought in the early twentieth century, which posited an alternative civilisa-

81 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1925): Minutes of the 7th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1925. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 104–105.

82 Lala Lajpat Rai, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 117–119. For more information on Lajpat's political thought, see Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav (2024): Being Hindu, Being Indian. Lala Lajpat Rai's Idea of Nationhood. Delhi: Penguin Books.

83 The Japanese perspective was, for example, voiced by Suzuki Bunji, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 60–61.

tional model to Eurocentric paradigms. Within this framework, Eastern workers were increasingly conceptualised as part of a shared Pan-Asian identity. Applied to the international labour movement, this perspective envisioned a unified working class that would synthesise the strengths of both East and West in pursuit of common rights and emancipatory goals.

In 1927, the Indian workers' delegate V.V. Giri was the first to use the instrument of resolutions to reinforce his own and his predecessors' demands for greater colonial representation. Delegates to the ILC could submit resolutions in advance, which, pending approval by a Selection Committee, would then be distributed to the conference participants and forwarded to the ILO's Governing Body. In his resolution, Giri called upon those member states of the organisation that acted as colonial or mandatory administrators to include workers from their dependent territories in their respective delegations. Furthermore, he appealed to countries in which "white people" were the ruling class over "natives and the coloured people" to ensure that "native and coloured workers" were also included.[84] The resolution was adopted without opposition. In subsequent years, related efforts followed. In 1929 and 1931, N.M. Joshi and R.R. Bakhale, both also part of the Indian workers' delegation, submitted similar resolutions. Joshi reiterated the need for adequate colonial representation and proposed that the Governing Body should instruct the Office to conduct an enquiry into "the organisations of white and non-white workers in those colonies and countries which have a majority of workers belonging to non-white races".[85] This step, he argued, was necessary to gain a clearer understanding of the situation of colonised workers who remained absent from the ILCs. Bakhale's resolution in 1931 simply called on the conference to reaffirm the earlier demands made by Giri and Joshi.[86]

The fact that these resolutions had to be repeatedly confirmed indicates their limited practical impact on the actual composition of workers' delegations in the following years. Nonetheless, their submission marked an important development. These demands were no longer just one voice among many in the spoken debates at each ILC but were more prominently recorded in the official proceedings. This turn to resolutions can be seen as a deliberate and powerful appropriation of the procedural mechanisms embedded in Eurocentric internationalism. In response to the continued marginalisation of their

84 V.V. Giri, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 335.

85 Franciszek Sokal, in: ILO (1931): Minutes of the 15th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1931. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 313.

86 R.R. Bakhale, in: ILO (1931): Minutes of the 15th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1931. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 582–583.

interventions within the general debates, Asian workers' delegates strategically adopted the formal tools typically used by Western powers to ensure that their claims were formally recorded and embedded in the institutional narrative, making them more difficult to overlook or dismiss.

Over the years, similar concerns were echoed by other delegates in conference debates. The question of colonial representation gained heightened visibility in 1929, particularly during discussions on forced labour, a topic that directly affected colonised workers. Their absence from the deliberations made this exclusion even more striking. B. Shiva Rao of the Indian workers' delegation expressed indignation at the lack of "an adequate number of representatives from the coloured peoples who are most affected by this question" and condemned the appalling treatment of African workers.[87] Notably, this criticism was, for one of the first times, publicly supported by a white Western worker. Franz Josef Furtwängler, a German trade unionist who had travelled to India and developed connections with Indian trade unionists, lamented that "no native representatives at all ha[d] been sent here from the colonies". He argued that this absence further undermined workers' confidence in the International Labour Office's research on colonial labour conditions: "Anyone who has ever been in a colony knows how little texts of this kind matter in comparison with administrative, practice and social reality".[88] Furtwängler's remarks provoked a sharp response from R.P. Paranjpye, representing the Indian government, who attempted to discredit him on the grounds that, as a foreigner, Furtwängler lacked the authority to speak on Indian labour conditions. This effort to dismiss a critical account by emphasising national and racial differences was ultimately ineffective.[89] N.M. Joshi later voiced his support for Furtwängler and accused Paranjpye of attempting to sow division among workers.[90] The alliance between Joshi and Furtwängler in opposing colonial exploitation thus transcended national and racial boundaries and highlighted class solidarity.

87 B. Shiva Rao, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 46.

88 Franz Josef Furtwängler, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 63. Furtwängler's trip to India has been studied and made available to a wide readership by Marcel van der Linden, Anna Sailer & Ravi Ahuja (eds.) (2020): 'The Distress is Impossible to Convey'. British and German Trade-Union Reports on Labour in India (1926–1928). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110682113.

89 R.P. Paranjpye, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 64.

90 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 108.

A comparable episode unfolded in 1930 during discussions on the Forced Labour Convention. Blaise Diagne (1872–1934), a Black Senegalese politician and member of the French governmental delegation, welcomed the "appeals that ha[d] been made to the hearts of the members of this Conference in favour of the race" to which he belonged, yet questioned their practical value.[91] He asserted that "the level of culture of the[se] races" remained too low, implying that they still required "assistance". While advocating for economic cooperation between "all races", Diagne simultaneously asserted that he spoke not only for France but also for "the peoples under her protection, to whom [he himself] belong[ed]".[92] Diagne thereby constructed a dual identity, presenting himself as both a representative of the French colonial government and of the colonised populations. By affirming prevailing racial stereotypes, he sought to gain the goodwill of the largely white audience, thereby bolstering France's position within the ILC.[93]

Diagne's role must be situated within the broader context of France's distinct approach to colonial citizenship. While the vast majority of French colonised subjects were governed under the repressive legal framework of the *Code de l'Indigénat* and denied full civic rights, a small number of male individuals were selectively granted access to political careers based on their perceived performance of citizenship duties, such as military service.[94] Diagne himself had played a central role in securing full French citizenship for the

91 Blaise Diagne (1872–1934) early in his life had been adopted by a French-Senegalese family and received a high-ranking education in the Senegal and France. He was the first Black member of the Chamber of Deputies of France and worked in various positions for the French government. N.N. (n.d.): Blaise Diagne. In: BnF Data https://data.bnf.fr/en/ark:/12148/cb119000883 (last accessed: June 21, 2024). For more information on his involvement with the French army during the First World War, see Jane Burbank & Frederick Cooper (2011): Empires in World History. Power and the Politics of Difference. Oxford/Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 377–391. For a comparison with other emerging Black politicians in France, see Dominique Chathuant (2009): L'émergence d'une élite politique noire dans la France du premier 20e siècle? In: *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire* 101(1), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.3917/ving.101.0133.

92 Blaise Diagne, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 291.

93 For Blaise Diagne's influence on W.E.B. Du Bois at the onset of the League of Nations and the ILO, see Fabiana Kutsche & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Discussing the 'Most Important Question of the 20th Century'. W. E. B. Du Bois and the ILO's Efforts for a Regulation of 'Native Labor' Politics, 1919–1926. In: *Zanj: The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* 8(1–2), 89. https://doi.org/10.13169/zanjglobsoutstud.8.1.0006.

94 Dunstan, Sarah Claire (2021): Race, Rights and Reforms. Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 15–16. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108764971.

male inhabitants of the so-called *Quatre Communes* of Senegal, leveraging their military service during the First World War as proof of their patriotic commitment.[95] His stance at the ILC reflected this exceptional status. While he had fought for the recognition of citizenship for a select group, he simultaneously upheld a sharp distinction between these assimilated individuals and the broader colonised population, whom he continued to view through a hierarchical lens.

Diagne's self-representation was firmly rejected by the Indonesian workers' delegate Agus Salim, who commented:

> I feel myself to be the only spokesman of the colonial populations under European domination. That motive is all the stronger since another speaker belonging to another subject race, far from protecting the peoples of his race here, has shown us the influence of a foreign government and a foreign education upon the mentality and the spirit of the peoples subjected to the European races.[96]

Despite Diagne's racial identity and his upbringing under French colonial rule, his political alignment and personal background positioned him, in Salim's view, as an adversary of the colonised workers. Salim accused Diagne of undermining the interests of Black colonial populations through his actions, interpreting Diagne's stance as a consequence of cultural alienation and internalised racism. This view was not isolated. In a 1925 essay, W.E.B. Du Bois described Blaise Diagne as "a Frenchman who [wa]s accidentally black" and suggested that he "despise[d] […] his own black Wolofs".[97] Du Bois' remarks reflected broader tensions within Black internationalist circles and illustrated the divergent strategies and ideologies shaping the pursuit of racial justice.

Within the context of the International Labour Conference, this incident illustrates that a shared experience of racialisation and racial discrimination did not automatically translate into a shared political agenda. Although opposition from white delegates was to be expected, resistance from someone with

95 Dunstan, Sarah Claire (2021): Race, Rights and Reforms. Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States from World War I to the Cold War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 24. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108764971.

96 Agus Salim, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 293.

97 Du Bois, W.E.B. (1925): The Negro Mind Reaches Out. In: Lock, A. (ed.): The New Negro. An Interpretation. New York, NY: Albert and Charles Boni, 397. The Wolof people are an ethnic group native to the Senegambia region of West Africa, making up part of today's Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania.

a similarly marginalised racial background was particularly disheartening for workers' delegates such as Salim. The episode further demonstrates that alliances within the ILC debates were often shaped less by racial identity and more by one's institutional position, whether as part of the governmental, employers' or workers' group. Salim's disappointment stemmed from the unfulfilled expectation of solidarity that should ideally characterise the international workers' movement, but which was fundamentally at odds with the role and interests of a governmental delegate like Diagne.

In sum, from the early 1920s onwards, the question of rightful representation for colonised workers became a persistent and prominent theme in the deliberations of the International Labour Conferences. Indian workers' delegates led repeated efforts to secure greater inclusion of colonial subjects in the ILO's decision-making structures. Their tactics ranged from direct appeals to Western workers' delegates to formal interventions through the submission of resolutions. Over time, their demands found support from other racialised workers, notably from Japan and Indonesia, and occasionally from white Western allies.[98] However, as the example of Blaise Diagne illustrates, not all racialised delegates embraced the same vision for colonial representation within the ILC. Differences in political alignment, institutional role and ideological orientation significantly shaped their responses to the broader struggle for racial and colonial justice within the framework of international labour policies.

3.2.2 "Special Conditions" and the Unequal Application of Labour Standards in the Colonies and Beyond

A regular item of the agenda of the International Labour Conferences was the discussion of the ILO Director-General's Annual Report. One section of the report focused on the "Application of the Conventions to Colonies", summarising responses received from member states regarding the implementation of ILO conventions in their colonial and mandated territories. In most cases, colonial governments submitted vague and formulaic replies, claiming they were still investigating the issue and therefore unable to provide definitive information. By 1925, Indian workers' delegate N.M. Joshi publicly expressed his frustration with this pattern of delay:

98 Another example thereof, which for brevity cannot be discussed here in more detail, can be found in William George Ballinger's speeches from 1936, in which he presented himself as the spokesperson of the South African "natives". William George Ballinger, in: ILO (1936): Minutes of the 20th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1936. Geneva: ILO, 287.

> It is now more than six years since the Washington Conference was held, and since the important Conventions [...] were passed. If these Governments could not come to a decision in six years, I do not know how much more time they want in order to consider these questions.[99]

Speaking also on behalf of other affected delegates, Joshi exposed this stalling as a deliberate strategy to avoid accountability, particularly towards the workers. In 1927, Irish workers' delegate Luke J. Duffy proposed that member states refusing to apply conventions to their dependencies should be categorised as "obstacle states", making it clear that he regarded such conduct as a calculated evasion of international obligations.[100]

Similar criticism was directed at the colonial powers' frequent invocation of Article 19 of the ILO Convention, which permitted the adaptation of labour conventions to account for unspecified "special conditions" in colonial territories. These conditions, often loosely defined in terms such as "climatic conditions" or "the imperfect development of industrial organisation", provided governments with ample room to justify exclusions. References to "climatic conditions" must be understood within the broader context of nineteenth-century European debates on colonialism, climate and the so-called acclimatisation question.[101] As European demand for labour in the colonies intensified, the effects of "tropical" climates on white bodies became the topic of sustained scientific scrutiny in anthropology, geography and medicine. Like "the Orient", which had been constructed in European discourse as a political and cultural counterpart to the West, "the tropics" were conceptualised as a distinct and oppositional space—culturally, politically and environmen-

99 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1925): Minutes of the 7th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1925. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 104.

100 Luke J. Duffy, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 161.

101 For an introduction into the debate in England, France and Germany, see Warwick Anderson (1992): Climates of Opinion. Acclimatization in Nineteenth-Century France and England. In: *Victorian Studies* 35, 135–157, David N. Livingstone (1999): Tropical Climate and Moral Hygiene. The Anatomy of a Victorian Debate. In: *The British Journal for the History of Science* 32(1), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087498003501, Pascal Grosse (2000): Kolonialismus, Eugenik und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland, 1850–1918. Frankfurt/New York, NY: Campus, 53–57, and Jessica Howell (2015): Exploring Victorian Travel Literature. Disease, Race and Climate. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748692958.001.0001. An overview over more recent literature is provided by Martin Mahoney & Georgine Endfield (2018): Climate and Colonialism. In: *WIREs Clim Change* 9(2). https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.510.

tally.[102] These debates frequently reinforced the assumption that each "race" possessed a fixed, biologically determined capacity to withstand certain climatic conditions. White bodies, it was argued, were ill-suited to hard physical labour in most colonies. This claim served to legitimise the exploitation of racialised and colonised people. By the late 1920s, however, this deterministic link between race and climate was increasingly being challenged. In 1924, British geologist John Walter Gregory argued that the human body was fundamentally adaptable to any climatic conditions, provided that people dressed appropriately.[103] This marked a departure from earlier deterministic views and illustrates how evolving scientific discourse could directly influence conceptualisations of colonial labour arrangements. Nevertheless, the continued reliance on references to special "climatic conditions" under Article 19 demonstrates the enduring influence of these earlier debates within international labour governance.

A particular focus of critique in the ILC debates was the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention (C1), adopted in Washington in 1919. During its drafting, a "Commission on Special Countries" had already introduced differentiated standards, assigning longer permissible working hours to workers in Japan, India and China. Although cases such as South Africa and "Tropical America" were also considered, the commission concluded that special regulations were unnecessary there. Yet when the governments of Greece and Romania later requested a three-year postponement for implementing the convention, their requests were granted, highlighting the inconsistent and politically expedient application of "special conditions" beyond the colonial context.[104] At the time of the Washington Conference in 1919, only the Japanese workers' delegate, Masumoto Uhei, openly protested against Japan's classification as a "special country". In a Minority Report submitted to the commission, Masumoto rejected the justification that climatic or developmental factors warranted Japan's inclusion in this category. Instead, he attributed the perceived inefficiency of Japanese workers to the country's repressive and exploitative labour policies, which he argued were the true cause of the difficult working conditions.[105] While no protest from the Indian workers' dele-

102 Arnold, David (1996): The Problem of Nature. Environment, Culture and European Expansion. Oxford: Blackwell, 141–168.

103 Gregory, John Walter (1924): Inter-Racial Problems and White Colonization in the Tropics. In: *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 5(8–9), 113–118.

104 ILO (1920): Minutes of the 1st Session of the International Labour Conference, Washington, 1919. Washington: Government Printing Office. Appendix, 233.

105 The internal debates and conflicts about Japan's rightful representation in the workers' delegation in 1919 have been studied by Dorothy Sue Cobble (2015): Who Speaks for

gation was recorded in the ILC proceedings, they consistently returned to the issue in subsequent years, calling for a revision of the regulations that subjected Indian and Japanese workers to longer working hours than those applied to European or other Western labourers.[106]

In a reversal of the usual narrative, the Indian workers' delegate P.C. Bose in 1928 invoked the "special conditions" of Indian labour not as a justification for exceptions, but to argue for equal treatment. Citing the "wretched physical condition" of Indian workers and the "suffocating atmospheric condition of the country", Bose questioned how it could be reasonable to demand longer working hours from workers already enduring harsher circumstances than their Western counterparts.[107] In 1931, R.W. Fulay directly challenged the cultural assumptions underpinning these exceptions, criticising "the audacity with which these remarks about Eastern civilisation are made". While affirming pride in his "Eastern" heritage, he strongly rejected the notion that "Eastern civilisation" should be associated with "longer hours of work, low wages, bad houses, [and] insecurity of service".[108] Fulay revisited the issue in 1936, asserting that India had by then gained ample experience in enforcing international conventions and arguing that the exemptions to the Washington Convention should be eliminated.[109] A similar position was taken by R.S. Nimbkar in 1939, who supplemented the moral and social arguments with an economic rationale. Citing India's status as "the eighth country in the world" in terms of industrial development, he questioned the legitimacy of continued exceptional treatment.[110] Over the course of these two decades, the delegates' experience had made clear that moral appeals alone were insufficient. Instead, they

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Workers? Japan and the 1919 ILO Debates Over Rights and Global Labor Standards. In: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 87, 213–234. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547914000271.

106 For example, N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1925): Minutes of the 7th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1925. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 106.

107 P.C. Bose, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 454.

108 R.W. Fulay, in: ILO (1931): Minutes of the 15th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1931. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 372.

109 R.W. Fulay, in: ILO (1936): Minutes of the 20th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1936. Geneva: ILO, 199.

110 R.S. Nimbkar, in: ILO (1939): Minutes of the 25th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1939. Geneva: ILO, 75. On the different measurement scales for India's industrial development, see Thomas Gidney (2022): The Development Dichotomy. Colonial India's Accession to the ILO's Governing Body (1919–22). In: *Journal of Global History* 18(2), 273–279. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022822000274.

increasingly integrated technical, economic and rhetorical strategies to confront the persistent inequities embedded in the ILO's framework.

On the other side, Indian workers' demands encountered strong resistance from both government and employer representatives, who benefited economically from maintaining prolonged working hours. R.P. Paranjpye, representing the Indian government, argued that alongside climatic factors, it was primarily the low educational level of Indian workers that precluded equal treatment. He portrayed workers as overwhelmingly "ignoran[t]" and illiterate, lacking even "the elementary principles of scientific or technical knowledge", and thus in need of special regulations.[111] Echoing this logic, S. Kasturbhai Lalbhai of the employers' delegation asserted that, from an economic point of view, "a ten-hour day in that country [India] was [...] equal to an eight-hour day in countries with more perfect industrial organisation". According to him, this justified India's exceptional status under the Washington Convention.[112]

These examples demonstrate that while racialised arguments invoking climate and geography persisted, the predominant rationale for India's differential treatment relied on class-based assumptions. Government and employer delegates deliberately constructed a narrative of "backwardness" rooted in low levels of formal education and poor productivity to legitimise continued exploitation. In contrast, workers' delegates persistently challenged this portrayal and sought to reframe the discourse around equality and capability. However, their efforts were undermined by the ILO's limited knowledge of on-the-ground conditions in Asia and its general deference to the authority of colonial governments and employers' representatives. As a result, arguments from official or business sources were often accepted at face value, while the perspectives of workers were marginalised.

3.3 Beyond Geneva. Regionalisation and the Push for Greater Inclusion

Faced with structural epistemic and political imbalances, workers' delegates from India as well as from other colonised, dependent or non-Western territories began to develop a range of strategies aimed at appropriating and redirect-

111 R.P. Paranjpye, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 461.

112 S. Kasturbhai Lalbhai, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 630.

ing the institutional mechanisms of the ILO and twentieth-century liberal international conferencing to advance their own interests. These strategies were embedded in broader political agendas and intellectual frameworks, both in their formulation and in the responses they elicited. Nonetheless, the ILCs provided an important platform for the articulation of these demands, offering a unique site where competing visions of labour, rights and representation were negotiated. In this way, the ILCs can be seen as a prism through which the diverse goals and tactics of individual actors and groups became visible and, at least in part, opened the floor for more radical anti-Eurocentric and anti-colonial sentiments.[113]

3.3.1 Investigations and Research

From the outset of the ILO's existence, Indian and Japanese workers' delegates recognised that influencing the research agenda of the Office was essential to improving the quality and scope of information available on labour conditions in their respective countries. While continuing to protest and challenge the racist assumptions voiced by other delegates during the ILCs, they understood that meaningful change in the organisation's policies required the backing of authoritative, independently produced data. As a result, the demand for specialised investigations and studies became a central pillar of their strategy to tackle the epistemic inequalities inherent in the Eurocentric international organisation, even before the Office officially began its work on colonial labour in the mid-1920s.

For instance, already in 1921, Indian workers' delegate N.M. Joshi used the discussion of the Director-General's Report to the conference to highlight the Office's lack of information on "the Asiatic countries" and stressed that it was "absolutely necessary" to expand its geographical focus beyond Europe and

113 In this respect, the varied backgrounds of the delegates make it difficult to categorise the ILCs within the typologies recently proposed by scholars of twentieth-century conferencing: liberal international conferencing, colonial, imperial and Commonwealth conferencing, or anti-colonial, non-aligned and activist conferencing. Although liberal in its origins and institutional affiliation, the ILO's tripartite structure created a space in which liberal, imperial and anti-colonial positions could, at least to some extent, co-exist. Heffernan, Mike, Jake Hodder, Stephen Legg & Benjamin J. Thorpe (2021): Towards An Historical Geography of International Conferencing. In: Heffernan, M., J. Hodder, S. Legg & B.J. Thorpe (eds.): Placing Internationalism. International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 19–29. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350254831.0007.

the United States.[114] He reiterated this request the following year, calling for a "special study of the conditions of life and work in those special countries".[115] After repeating his demand in 1925, Joshi formalised it through a resolution submitted to the conference. The text called for "an enquiry into conditions of labour in Asiatic countries", with particular attention to China, India, Japan, Persia, Siam and the colonies, protectorates and mandated territories of Asia.[116] While the envisioned "Asian Enquiry" ultimately proved more limited in scope than originally hoped, it nevertheless marked the beginning of a sustained programme of research into Asian labour conditions by the ILO, producing a series of studies over the following fifteen years.

During the 1925 ILC, moving beyond his initial focus on Asian labour conditions, Indian workers' delegate N.M. Joshi also proposed the establishment of a committee to study labour issues in colonies, protectorates and mandated territories more broadly.[117] This idea for a second, more expansive enquiry was taken up again in 1926 by Lala Lajpat Rai, who envisioned a study encompassing "the Orient and [...] the coloured world of Africa and America". He cited specific examples such as Fiji, Kenya and South Africa. In addition to the Office's general lack of information on these regions, Lala Lajpat Rai emphasised the importance of publicising certain labour conditions, particularly within the British Empire.[118] His comments suggest that beyond gathering data, he hoped the inquiry would expose exploitative practices and bring them to wider public attention. To formalise his request, Lajpat Rai submitted a resolution to the conference. Following discussion, delegates adopted an amended version that referred to the proposed Committee of Experts for Native Labour, which had begun to take shape in 1926.[119] Although combining the two proposals made sense from an administrative perspective and Lajpat Rai accepted the revision, the original resolution reflected a more critical stance than the diluted, official version ultimately endorsed.

114 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 211.

115 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1922): Minutes of the 4th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1922. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 59.

116 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1925): Minutes of the 7th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1925. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 836.

117 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1925): Minutes of the 7th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1925. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 106.

118 Lala Lajpat Rai, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 116–117.

119 W.H. Nolens, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 274.

Over the next decade, delegates continued to express high hopes for the so-called "Asiatic Enquiry". In 1927, Suzuki Bunji predicted it would broaden the organisation's perspective and highlight "the urgent need of extending [its] activities".[120] The following year, Kasama Akio of the Japanese government renewed the call for greater ILO engagement with "Eastern countries", particularly "the colonies", which had been largely overlooked.[121] In 1935 and 1936, Indian workers' delegates such as Ramaswamy Mudaliar and R.W. Fulay pushed for further studies, specifically on the working and living conditions of agricultural labourers across Asia.[122] Although substantial institutional attention to agricultural labour in colonised territories would not emerge until the late 1940s, these persistent demands illustrate how Asian workers strategically used the platform of the ILC to highlight neglected areas of labour research.[123] Some of these efforts ultimately contributed to the creation of a dedicated Section for Non-European Countries within the ILO. While the initiative was likely driven by rising interest in Latin America, the section also focused on Asia and produced a number of studies that aligned with the long-standing demands of Asian workers. However, by 1939, the section had already been dissolved, curtailing this early attempt at institutionalising broader geographical representation in the ILO's research agenda.[124]

3.3.2 Non-European Staff for the International Labour Office

Another recurring demand from Asian delegates was the employment of more non-European and non-white staff at the International Labour Office in Geneva. In 1927, the Japanese workers' delegate Suzuki Bunji openly criticised the stark underrepresentation of Asians, noting that "no consider-

120 Suzuki Bunji, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 61.

121 Kasama Akio, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 237.

122 Ramaswamy Mudaliar, in: ILO (1935): Minutes of the 19th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1935. Geneva: ILO, 260, and R. W. Fulay, in: ILO (1936): Minutes of the 20th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1936. Geneva: ILO, 199.

123 For a detailed discussion of the ILO's colonial agricultural turn after the Second World War, see Amalia Ribi Forclaz (2025): Cultivating Fields of Progress. Agriculture and the International Labour Organization, 1920s–1950s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 145–168. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191945014.001.0001.

124 Plata-Stenger, Véronique (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 71–72. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323.

ation of budgetary difficulties and no excuse" could justify "the fact that, out of nearly 400 officials in the International Labour Office", there were "only three or four permanent members from the Far East".[125] This point was echoed by R.P. Paranjpye, the Government of India's delegate, who clarified that the demand was not motivated by "mere sentiment". Instead, he argued that increasing the presence of non-European staff would enhance both the effectiveness and the reputation of the ILO in Asia.[126] While Suzuki framed the issue as a matter of fairness and equality, Paranjpye emphasised the strategic benefit such change would bring to the organisation itself. In the following years, this demand was taken up repeatedly by Indian employers' delegates. In 1928, 1930 and 1931, they vocally criticised the absence of Indian staff. Walchand Hirachand, representing Indian employers, lamented that the ILO appeared to be "worked to suit European conditions, with the European voice predominating to a degree such that the oversea, and particularly the Asiatic, interests [we]re beginning to feel that their legitimate representation [wa]s denied them".[127] These interventions illustrate a rare moment of alignment across class lines, otherwise unusual for the ILCs. Japanese and Indian workers, as well as Indian employers, collectively advocated for greater inclusion within the ILO, even if their motivations differed. Employers hoped that stronger Asian representation would shift the organisation's focus towards local conditions and potentially reduce the pressure for stringent labour regulations. Workers, on the other hand, sought to expose systems of exploitation and advocate for protections grounded in their lived realities. Despite these contrasting aims, the shared demand for representation transcended both nationality and status group divisions.

In addition to concerns over fair representation and organisational effectiveness, delegates also invoked financial arguments. India's contribution to the League of Nations, determined by population size, were substantial.[128] Indian delegates used this to strengthen their case for increased representation, pointing to a perceived mismatch between their financial support and their marginal presence in the Office. A similar line of reasoning had been

125 Suzuki Bunji, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 61.

126 R.P. Paranjpye, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 120.

127 Walchand Hirachand, in: ILO (1931): Minutes of the 15th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1931. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 163.

128 Amrithal Ojha, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 61, and Jayasankar Krishnamurty (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–c 1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 53–54.

successfully employed in India's earlier struggle for inclusion on the ILO's Governing Body. Initially composed of twelve seats, with eight reserved for countries of "chief industrial importance", the Governing Body only included Japan from Asia, leaving Africa entirely excluded. After a three-year campaign, in 1922, India succeeded in changing the criteria for "industrial importance" to include political considerations, thereby securing a permanent seat.[129] Although there was no formal link between financial contributions and staffing decisions, Indian delegates nonetheless used this precedent to justify their claim for fairer staff representation in Geneva.

From the perspective of the ILO direction, demands for greater diversification of the Office's staff were typically met with two consistent explanations: the linguistic requirements of the organisation and its limited financial resources. In 1921, in response to N.M. Joshi's request, Director-General Albert Thomas defended his hiring policy by appealing to the principles of efficiency and multi-nationality. Given that the ILO operated in English and French, he argued, most staff necessarily came from the United Kingdom and France. He claimed that otherwise well-qualified labour experts from outside Europe often lacked the necessary language skills. Nevertheless, Thomas assured Joshi that "the International Labour Office [wa]s doing all it c[ould] to make its staff as international as possible".[130] Nearly fifteen years later, in 1935, the issue resurfaced, this time under the leadership of Harold Butler. While Butler echoed Thomas in acknowledging the importance of staff diversity and stated that it was both "necessary and desirable" to include more non-European members, he cited budgetary constraints as the main obstacle to change.[131] Despite these repeated justifications, little changed over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. Among the few Office staff members of Asian origin were Ayusawa Iwao Frederick (1894–1972), who joined the Office in 1925 after representing Japan on the Governing Body, and R. Raghunath Rao (1899–1966), who joined the ILO in 1930.[132] From the perspective of non-European dele-

129 Gidney, Thomas (2022): The Development Dichotomy. Colonial India's Accession to the ILO's Governing Body (1919–22). In: *Journal of Global History* 18(2), 277. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022822000274.

130 Albert Thomas, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 213. For similar arguments concerning the staffing of the League's Secretariat and Indian protest against it, see Amy Limoncelli (2025): Britain and the International Civil Service. Empire, Internationalism and Expertise in the Twentieth Century. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 33, 36–37. http://doi.org/10.4324/9781032646596.

131 Harold Butler, in: ILO (1935): Minutes of the 19th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1935. Geneva: ILO, 391.

132 CVs of Ayusawa and Rao (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 1732 and P 2465. See Chapter 4.1.2.

gates, the composition of the Office made little headway in expanding representation from Asia or Africa and thus continued to hinder efforts to use international organisations as platforms for promoting more equitable politics through non-European representation.[133]

3.3.3 Visits to "the East"

Finally, non-European delegates employed another strategy to expand their sphere of influence by demanding that ILO officers travel to more distant member states in order to gain first-hand knowledge of labour conditions in those regions. From 1927 onwards, members of the Indian delegations from across different status groups began to invite Albert Thomas and other high-ranking ILO officials to visit India.[134] In 1928, Japan joined this initiative. The workers' delegate Yonekubo Mitsusuke suggested that the Director should "take the earliest opportunity of visiting important industrial countries such as Japan, China and India, in order to investigate the working conditions, particularly of women and children, engaged in the textile and mining industries in these countries, and find out whether they are as deplorable as the workers' representatives maintain".[135] More invitations followed in the years after.[136] Although these invitations were driven by differing agendas, there was a shared interest among workers, employers and governments in drawing the organisation's attention. For employers and government delegates, a visit by the Director-General might demonstrate that labour conditions were not as dire as some reports suggested. In contrast, workers, like Yonekubo Mitsusuke, hoped such visits would reveal the severity of the situation and lend support to their demands.

In all cases, it was a shared recognition of the ILO's limited knowledge about labour conditions in Asia that motivated these efforts. The longstanding

133 For the time of the interwar period, Daniel Maul estimates the ratio of European to non-European staff members of the Office to be 10:1. A more detailed study on the representation of different nationalities in the body of staff still needs to be conducted. Maul, Daniel (2019): The International Labour Organization. 100 Years of Global Social Policy. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter; Geneva: ILO, 74. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650723.

134 R.P. Paranjpye, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 119.

135 Yonekubo Mitsusuke, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 176.

136 Narottam Morarjee, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 180, and Ramaswamy Mudaliar, in: ILO (1935): Minutes of the 19th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1935. Geneva: ILO, 260.

Eurocentrism in Geneva, repeatedly criticised by Asian delegates at the ILC, and the persistent lack of non-European staff gave these visits a heightened diplomatic significance. They were seen as an import step towards bridging the gap between "the East" and "the West". Still, it was only in the mid to late 1920s that Albert Thomas personally began visiting the ILO's non-European member states. His first trip, in 1925, took him to Latin America, where, for various reasons, conditions appeared to him most comparable to those in Europe.[137] In the following years, Harold Butler, then Deputy Director-General, made the first official visit to South Africa, while Harold Grimshaw of the ILO's Native Labour Section conducted visits to both the Dutch East Indies and South Africa.[138] In 1928 and 1929, Albert Thomas finally travelled to Asia, visiting China and Japan.[139]

Thomas' journey first led him to Moscow—undertaken in a strictly private capacity, as he emphasised in his report—from where he boarded the Trans-Siberian Railway to travel to China. In China, he visited Peking (now Beijing), Nanking (now Nanjing), Shanghai and Canton (now Guangzhou), where he met with representatives of the Nationalist government, labour experts, employers' organisations and trade unions. The journey then continued to Japan, which, according to Thomas' report, "form[ed] a striking contrast to China", particularly in terms of its exemplary participation in the International Labour Conferences. The limited Chinese representation that Thomas criticised can be attributed to early internal disagreements

137 Maul, Daniel (2019): The International Labour Organization. 100 Years of Global Social Policy. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter; Geneva: ILO, 75. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650723. The journey was recently analysed by Paula Rosenfeld (2025): Albert Thomas' Reise nach Südamerika für die Internationale Arbeitsorganisation im Jahr 1925. University of Cologne: MA Thesis.

138 Harold Grimshaw's travel took place shortly after the one of Albert Thomas.

139 Different aspects of Albert Thomas' journey to China and Japan have been discussed by Yifeng Chen (2014): The International Labour Organisation and Labour Governance in China 1919–1949. In: Blanpain, R., U. Liukkunen & Y. Chen (eds.): China and ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Alphen aan den Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 30–31, Guy Fiti Sinclair (2017): To Reform the World. International Organizations and the Making of Modern States. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 82–84. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198757962.001.0001, Christian Müller (2018): 'And what do we know about China?' The International Labour Office, Albert Thomas and Republican China, 1919–1930. In: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China* 78(1), 111–115, and Bernard Thomann (2018): Le voyage au Japon d'Albert Thomas. Entre diffusion d'un modèle social universel et enjeux politiques locaux. In: *Revue d'histoire de la protection sociale* 11(1), 169–182. https://doi.org/10.3917/rhps.011.0169.

within the Chinese government regarding the value of participation.[140] Furthermore, travel to Geneva was costly in terms of both time and financial resources, making attendance significantly more difficult than for European countries. In Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, Thomas held meetings with government officials, employers and workers. One notable encounter was with Viscount Shibusawa Eiichi, a prominent industrialist often credited with introducing industrial capitalism to Japan.[141] In these meetings, Thomas also sought to persuade Japanese authorities to ratify key conventions and recommendations adopted at earlier ILCs. Following this, Thomas accepted an invitation from the French government to visit French Indochina, covering areas of present-day Cambodia, Laos, China and Vietnam, where discussions centred on issues of contract and plantation labour. His last stop was on the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), at the invitation of the Dutch government. On his return journey to Europe, Thomas made a brief visit to Cairo.[142]

In the report he submitted to the Governing Body, Thomas attempted to present a balanced account of the different actors he had met. Yet his narrative remained largely centred on governmental perspectives. The contrast he drew between Japan and China is telling. Japan was described as "an organised industrial country conscious of the work which lies before it", while China was characterised as "an immense agglomeration of men and of as yet untapped resources, with not proper internal organisation".[143] This comparison reveals the underlying assumption that industrial organisation within a capitalist framework represented the tacit ideal. Japan, having participated in the Paris Peace Conference and consistently having sent full delegations to the ILCs, better matched this ideal than China, whose representation had been

140 Teh, Limin (2019): The International Labour Organization and the Labour Question in Republican China, 1919–1938. In: Bellucci, S. & H. Weiss (eds.): The Internationalisation of the Labour Question. Ideological Antagonism, Workers' Movements and the ILO since 1919. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 291. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28235-6_13.

141 Shibusawa Eiichi accumulated his wealth primarily in the cement industry and was involved in a wide range of other business ventures. Donzé, Pierre-Yves & Julia S. Yongue (2024): Japanese Capitalism and Entrepreneurship. A History of Business from the Tokugawa Era to the Present. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 26, 43. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192887474.001.0001.

142 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 134–153.

143 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 150.

minimal and largely limited to government officials. Despite these criticisms, Thomas recognised China's growing global relevance due to its vast population and economic potential. He acknowledged the "increasing importance from the point of view of international competition" of maintaining a steady flow of information on labour conditions there.[144] While racial assumptions remained implicit in his descriptions, they were largely masked by an emphasis on economic and industrial "development". At the same time, Thomas became aware of emergent ideas around "'Pan-Asiatic' or 'Pan-Pacific'" cooperation.[145] Although he noted that these movements were not necessarily hostile to Europe, it was clear they envisioned international engagement outside the orbit of Geneva. To Thomas, this demonstrated the ILO's limited reach in Asia and, paradoxically, underscored the importance of reinforcing the organisation's presence and relevance in the region.

In contrast to his reports on China and Japan, Albert Thomas' account of his visits to French Indochina and the Dutch territory of Java emphasised that "traditional forms of native labour" should be regarded as entirely distinct from "methods of work in industrial States".[146] Thomas expressed enthusiasm for the efforts of the French colonial administration, particularly in the areas of settlement and industrial development, and praised the colonial officials he encountered.[147] Unlike during his visits in China and Japan, however, Thomas made no mention of meeting with colonised workers in French Indochina or Java. In the concluding remarks of his report, he drew upon stereotypical assumptions about "native labourers". According to Thomas, it was the responsibility of Europeans to "initiat[e] races which [were] frequently indifferent or apathetic to a better organisation of their activities, to needs as yet unfelt, to a way of living which in the end (in agreement with us Europeans) they w[ould]

144 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 137.

145 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 151.

146 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 150.

147 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 147.

consider more suited to human dignity".[148] This characterisation encapsulates the prevailing colonial and racialised views of the time, such as the belief in inherently "lazy" races, the idea that colonised peoples would benefit from acquiring new consumer needs and the notion that European intervention was necessary to elevate their standard of living. Altogether, these assumptions served to legitimise the "civilising mission" of colonial powers. Notably, Thomas also remarked on his surprise at discovering that even in these colonial territories, ideas of "nationality" and a "demand for immediate independence" were gaining traction—an observation that stood in stark contrast to his portrayal of colonised subjects as passive or apathetic.[149]

Thomas' travels were discussed in detail during the 1929 International Labour Conference. The Japanese government representative, Yoshisaka Shunzo, stated that the Japanese government "deeply appreciated" the Director's visit and described it as having "a profound moral significance" for Japan's relationship with the ILO. Even if Thomas had been disappointed by Japan's failure to ratify additional conventions, the symbolic importance of the visit lay in the recognition it accorded to "the East". As Yoshisaka pointed out, ten years after its founding, the ILO "could no longer afford to neglect [...] the Far East", thus reaffirming Thomas' own conclusions.[150] During the same discussion, the Indian workers' delegate, N.M. Joshi, voiced his confusion as to why Thomas had not also visited India. The Indian government's representative, Atul Chandra Chatterjee, clarified that the decision had been made jointly by the ILO and the Indian government.[151] This exchange, together with the notable absence of any meetings with colonised workers during Thomas' travels, highlights that such visits primarily served as spaces for negotiation between the ILO and national governments, despite the workers' hopes that they might draw greater attention to their struggles. Still, the Indian workers' longstanding calls for an ILO visit to India were eventually realised. In 1933, C.W.H. Weaver of the Native Labour Section undertook a tour through India, Iraq, Persia and Turkey. Finally, in 1938,

148 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 150.

149 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 151.

150 Yoshisaka Shunzo, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 190.

151 N.M. Joshi and A.C. Chatterjee, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 109, 129.

the ILO Director-General Harold Butler travelled to India himself, fulfilling a demand first articulated over a decade earlier.

3.3.4 Regionalisation: Regional Correspondents, Offices and Labour Conferences

While visits by ILO leadership to non-European member countries could undoubtedly facilitate rapprochement, they remained rare events, occurring only every few years or even decades. For this reason, non-European delegates advocated early on for the appointment of non-European official correspondents and the establishment of regional Branch Offices. As early as in 1921, Indian workers' delegate N.M. Joshi directly addressed Albert Thomas, criticising the absence of any ILO correspondents in Asia. He stressed that the collection and dissemination of information between the ILO and Asia was even more crucial than within Europe, where countries could easily stay informed through foreign newspapers. Asia, by contrast, was geographically too distant to receive reliable and timely information about international labour standards, making official correspondents an essential extension of the ILO's informational infrastructure.[152] The Japanese delegation supported this proposal.[153] In response, Thomas cited budgetary constraints and a lack of financial resources, pointedly reminding Joshi that recent budget cuts had been made at the request of non-European countries, thus implying that Joshi's criticism might be better directed at his own government.[154]

Despite this, progress slowly followed. In 1922, a Branch Office was opened in Tokyo, though the Indian delegates had to wait longer to see similar results. A resolution adopted the same year to establish an office in India yielded no immediate outcome, prompting the workers' delegate Lala Lajpat Rai in 1926 to call on the Governing Body to honour its earlier decision.[155] A breakthrough came in 1927, when the decision to establish an Indian Branch Office was finally made. The following year, Indian lawyer Purushottama Padmanabha

152 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 211.

153 Matsumoto Moto, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 231.

154 Albert Thomas, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 213.

155 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1922): Minutes of the 4th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1922. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 60, and Lala Lajpat Rai and W.H. Nolens, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 283.

Pillai (1894–1977) was appointed as its first Director. Reactions to the new office were broadly positive, with support from Indian workers, employers and the government representatives. However, its location sparked debate. While it was placed in New Delhi, some employer delegates argued that it would be more effective if situated in one of India's commercial centres, such as Calcutta (now Kolkata) or Bombay (now Mumbai). Delegates also underscored the importance of adapting to local conditions, urging that the office's publications should be made available in Hindi and other vernacular languages to reach a broader audience.[156] Shortly thereafter, a Branch Office was also established in Shanghai at the request of the Chinese government. A second Branch in Nanking (now Nanjing) followed. Yet, this development attracted considerably less attention during the ILC, largely due to little participation of Chinese delegates in the conference discussions up until 1927.[157]

Another strategy proposed to counterbalance the ILO's Eurocentrism was the convening of specialised regional International Labour Conferences in Asia.[158] These were never intended to replace the regular ILCs but rather to complement them by shifting attention from the ILCs' persistent Eurocentric bias to the specific conditions prevailing in Asia. The first proposals emerged among various workers' delegates in 1925 but were quickly shelved when political unrest in China disrupted planning. In 1927, Suzuki Bunji, representing the Japanese workers' delegation, formally proposed the organisation of "a special Session of the Conference [...] in the Far East" during the ILC, assuring the Office of strong support from the workers' side.[159] The following year, Kasama Akio of the Japanese government reiterated the idea and reinforced it by pointing out that "the liaison between the Office and these countries" still left "much to be desired", thereby putting further pressure on the ILO to act.[160] Despite

156 G.D. Birla and R.P. Paranjpye, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 53, 119.

157 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, March 1929, 137, and Limin Teh (2019): The International Labour Organization and the Labour Question in Republican China, 1919–1938. In: Bellucci, S. & H. Weiss (eds.): The Internationalisation of the Labour Question. Ideological Antagonism, Workers' Movements and the ILO since 1919. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 280. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28235-6_13. I thank Lucas Tse for providing me with more information about the history of the Chinese Branch Offices.

158 See Chapters 4.1.2 and 4.2.3.

159 Suzuki Bunji, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 61.

160 Kasama Akio, in: ILO (1928): Minutes of the 11th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1928. Vol 1. Geneva: ILO, 237.

these repeated calls, the ILO showed little initiative. In response, Indian workers' delegates submitted two formal resolutions to the ILC in 1930 and 1931, reiterating the call for an Asian Regional Labour Conference. While the 1930 resolution failed to meet the required quorum, the 1931 proposal was eventually adopted.[161] Although no follow-up negotiations were made public, the Office did pursue the 1931 proposal further, albeit without success at the time. When no tangible steps followed, frustration mounted. As a result, in 1934, Japanese, Indian and Sri Lankan workers independently convened an Asiatic Labour Congress in Colombo. Although a few ILO officers attended informally, the organisation remained on the margins of the event.[162]

The ILO's reluctance became even more conspicuous two years later, in 1936, when it organised the first official regional labour conference for American member states in Santiago de Chile. This decision revealed that the obstacle to regionalisation in Asia was not conceptual opposition to decentralisation itself but rather of political nature. The growing influence of Pan-Asianist and anti-imperialist movements rendered an Asian Regional Labour Conference politically sensitive.[163] Up to the mid-1930s, both the League of Nations and the ILO generally viewed regional arrangements with scepticism, fearing they might dilute the universalist ethos of international organisations. Still, attitudes began to shift slowly. By 1934, C.W. Jenks (1909–1973) of the ILO acknowledged the emerging reality and suggested the drafting of a model constitution for regional labour organisations, should they become "a serious possibility in any area".[164] Yet, while cooperation with Latin America expanded in the 1930s, efforts by Asian delegates towards regionalisation

161 S.C. Joshi, in: ILO (1930): Minutes of the 14th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1930. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 471. R.R. Bakhale, in: ILO (1931): Minutes of the 15th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1931. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 581–583.

162 Stolte, Carolien (2012): Bringing Asia to the World. Indian Trade-Unionism and the long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937. In: *Journal of Global History* 7(2), 271. https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281200006X.

163 Plata-Stenger, Véronique (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 61–90. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323. For the role of Pan-American ideas in the League of Nations, see Anne-Isabelle Richard (2012): Competition and Complementarity. Civil Society Networks and the Question of Decentralising the League of Nations. In: *Journal of Global History* 7(2), 239–241. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022812000058.

164 C.W. Jenks (1934): "The Problem of Coordination between regional labour organisation and the ILO", ILO Archives, RL 01/4.

continued to be ignored. When pressed again in 1936 during the ILC, Director-General Harold Butler merely stated that although he was aware of the repeated demands for an Asian Regional Labour Conference, "the time [wa]s not yet ripe" and "there had not yet been a suitable occasion".[165] This dismissive stance persisted despite the fact that Asian countries had been advocating for a regional labour conference well before their Latin-American counterparts. It was not until 1947, more than two decades after the first proposals, that the ILO finally convened the first official Asian Regional Labour Conference.[166]

To conclude, this chapter has demonstrated the persistence of racialised discourses within International Labour Conference debates between 1919 and 1939. In a forum dominated by white, male and predominantly European delegates, many interventions rested on racialised and, at times, explicitly racist, assumptions about colonised populations. Such hierarchies were particularly prominent in contributions by white governmental representatives and employers discussing non-white labour, revealing the close intersections of race and class within the ILC's tripartite structure. At the same time, moments of disruption to colonial norms became visible. In certain instances, worker delegates acted collectively across racial lines, defending labour interests against those of capital. In others, class emerged as a distinctive marker even in exchanges involving racialised employers and workers. The chapter also traced the emergence of counter-narratives, highlighting the ILCs as significant forums where early critiques of Genevan Eurocentrism were voiced and contested. Indian delegates, often supported by Japanese, Chinese and occasionally Indonesian counterparts, developed shared strategies to enhance their visibility and political influence within the ILO and beyond, crossing boundaries of nationality and, at times, class interest. Yet the prominent role accorded to African colonial labour in racialising portrayals, combined with its relative absence from later debates, underscores the limits of the ILC's empowering potential. Such possibilities remained largely confined to territories with established ILO membership or, as in the case of Agus Salim representing colonial Indonesia, to contexts in which workers' delegations actively challenged colonial hierarchies.

165 Harold Butler, in: ILO (1936): Minutes of the 20th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1936. Geneva: ILO, 256.

166 See Chapter 7.2.4.

CHAPTER 4

India and the ILO, 1919–1939

As the only non-sovereign member state, India held a unique status within both the League of Nations and the ILO. Its membership allowed participation in international affairs and presented a remarkable opportunity for early assertions of autonomy from British colonial rule. At the same time, India's imperial dependency constrained the ability of domestic interest groups, such as the Indian labour movement, to freely define and advocate national priorities. Examining the Indian case enriches the broader analysis of the ILO's conceptualisation and governance of colonised and racialised labour. While the British Raj (1858–1947) was shaped by specific historical circumstances distinct from British colonial governance in Africa and the Caribbean, it nonetheless reveals critical insights into Western perceptions of dependent labour and the anti-colonial resistance to imperialist and capitalist power structures. Within this context, emerging Indian trade unions were often viewed with suspicion, frequently accused of political subversion or communist alignment, and were therefore subject to heavy repression by the colonial state. Both the British authorities and, to some extent, the ILO expected legitimate trade unions to operate as apolitical bodies focused narrowly on industrial disputes. This definition either misunderstood or deliberately ignored the inherently political nature of labour relations within imperialism and capitalism.

Moving beyond the public diplomatic strategies of Indian workers' delegates to the ILCs examined in the preceding chapter, this chapter explores Indian labour perspectives on the ILO and the Office's evolving engagement with the Indian labour movement. By examining a broader spectrum of voices, both supportive and critical of the ILO, and the varied strategies adopted by different fractions of the Indian labour movement to navigate or resist imperial and capitalist constraints, the chapter contributes to wider debates in Indian labour historiography. It is structured around three chronological sub-chapters, outlining the development of this relationship from the founding of India's first national labour federation in 1920 to the eve of the Second World War.

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4.1 Indian Labour Organisation and the Shaping of ILO Relations, 1919–1928

The establishment of large-scale industries in India under British colonial rule can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. One of the first cotton mills was founded in Bengal in 1818, followed by the establishment of a jute mill in 1854.[1] The formation of the Assam Tea Company in 1839 marked the beginning of large-scale tea plantation labour, while the exploitation of coal resources also commenced during this period.[2] Consequently, textile production, tea plantations and coal mining emerged as the dominant sectors through which British private monopoly capital extracted profit from Indian resources.[3] In addition, the expansion of global shipping networks and the construction of railways became crucial industries, both heavily dependent on Indian labour.[4] These sectors also provided the initial context for early

1 The histories of Indian cotton and jute industries are too vast to be covered in detail. For an introduction, see Dipesh Chakrabarty (1989): Rethinking Working-Class History. Bengal, 1890–1940. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Samita Sen (1999): Women and Labour in Late Colonial India. The Bengal Jute Industry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay (2004): Existence, Identity and Mobilization. The Cotton Millworkers of Bombay, 1890–1919. New Delhi: Manohar, Prashant Kidambi (2009): Contestation and Conflict. Workers' Resistance and the 'Labour Problem' in the Bombay Cotton Mills, C. 1898–1919. In: van der Linden, M. & P. Mohapatra (eds.): Labour Matters. Towards Global Histories. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 106–127, and Anna Sailer (2022): Workplace Relations in Colonial Bengal. The Jute Industry and Indian Labour, 1870s–1930s. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

2 The histories of Indian mining and tea industries are too vast to be covered in detail. For an introduction, see C.P. Simmons (1976): Recruiting and Organizing an Industrial Labour Force in Colonial India. The Case of the Coal Mining Industry, c. 1880–1939. In: *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13(4), 455–485, Dhiraj Kumar Nite (2009): Work, Family, and the Reproduction in the Early Industrialisation. Jharia Coalfields 1890s–1940s. In: van der Linden, M. & P. Mohapatra (eds.): Labour Matters. Towards Global Histories. New Delhi: Tulika Books, 82–105, Rana P. Behal (2014): One Hundred Years of Servitude. Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam. New Delhi: Tulika Books, Nitin Varma (2017): Coolies of Capitalism. Assam Tea and the Making of Coolie Labour. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, and Mircea Raianu (2021): Tata. The Global Corporation That Built Indian Capitalism. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674259553.

3 Gupta, Bishnupriya (2015): The Rise of Modern Industry in India. In: Chaudhury, L., B. Gupta, T. Roy & A.V. Swamy (eds.): A New Economic History of Colonial India. London: Routledge, 69.

4 On railways, shipping and seafarers, see Ian Kerr (1995): Building the Railways of the Raj, 1850–1900. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Stuart Sweeney (2011): Financing India's Imperial Railway, 1875–1914. London: Pickering & Chatto. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315656007, Gopalan Balachandran (2012): Globalizing Labour? Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870–1945. Oxford: Oxford University Press, and Ali Raza & Benjamin Zachariah (2012): To

labour organisation. Prior to the formalisation of trade unions, industrial strikes emerged spontaneously, such as the notable strike at Empress Mills in Nagpur in 1877, which is considered one of the earliest industrial strikes in India.[5] Despite these developments, the majority of the Indian population continued to rely on agriculture, remaining largely disconnected from industrial labour and organisation.[6] The outbreak of the First World War significantly stimulated Indian industry, mostly due to the disruption of foreign imports. This led to substantial profits in sectors like cotton milling and to a general increase in industrial employment, occasionally accompanied by modest wage growth. However, these gains rarely translated into significant improvements in workers' living conditions.[7] When the ILO was established in 1919, the Indian industrial working class stood at the threshold of formal labour organisation, with trade unionism only beginning to take shape.

4.1.1 Representing Indian Labour in Washington, Geneva and Beyond, 1919–1920

For the first International Labour Conference in 1919, the Indian government nominated Narayan Malhar Joshi (1879–1955) to represent Indian workers' interests in Washington. N.M. Joshi, who already featured prominently in the debates on colonial labour discussed in the previous chapter, grew up in Goreagon, on the outskirts of Bombay (now Mumbai), then a centre of the Indian cotton mill industry. After graduating, Joshi worked as a high school teacher before becoming increasingly involved, from 1909 onwards, in a variety of organisations engaged in social reform and welfare work, including the Servants of India Society, the Social Service League, the Bombay Presidency

Take Arms Across a Sea of Trouble. The 'Lascar System,' Politics and Agency in the 1920s. In: *Itinerario* 36(3), 19–38. https://doi.org/10.1017/S016511531300003X.

5 Gupta, Prem Sagar (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 4. For more information on the emergence of organised strikes in Kanpur around 1919, see Chitra Joshi (2003): Lost Worlds. Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 178–207.

6 For an introduction, see Latika Chaudhary, Bishnupriya Gupta, Tirthankar Roy & Anand V. Swamy (2015): Agriculture in Colonial India. In: Chaudhury, L., B. Gupta, T. Roy & A.V. Swamy (eds.): A New Economic History of Colonial India. London: Routledge, 100–116, and Nikolay Kamenov (2021): The Agrarian History of Colonial South Asia. In: Fischer-Tiné, H. & M. Framke (eds.): Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia. London: Routledge, 331–341. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431012-31.

7 Kooiman, Dick (1980): Bombay Communists and the 1924 Textile Strike. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 15(29), 1224.

Social Reform Association and the Bombay Corporation.[8] His first substantial contact with the working classes of Pune and Bombay occurred through the Servants of India Society.[9] This form of social engagement was typical for members of Joshi's social background at the time. Throughout the nineteenth century, upper-caste Indians had taken part in "social reform" movements aimed at transforming or eliminating "traditional" indigenous practices perceived as incompatible with Western notions of "civilisation" and "modernity".[10] By the turn of the twentieth century, the reformist focus expanded and the Anglophone, high-caste intelligentsia increasingly turned their attention to the conditions of the urban working poor.[11] Concerns such as alcohol abuse, gambling, sex work and public hygiene featured prominently, echoing discourses central to the colonial "civilising mission". Nevertheless, despite their shared emphasis on promoting "civilised" values, these social reform organisations operated within a nationalist milieu critical of colonial rule. While undoubtedly influenced by Western ideals and global philanthropic discourses, historian Carey Anthony Watt argues that their values equally drew on "deep-rooted 'living traditions'", complicating any simplistic explanation based on colonial influence.[12] In the case of the Servants of India Society, founded in 1905 by the liberal reformer and early nationalist Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866–1915), the overarching aim was to train well-educated Indians as "national missionaries in the service of India".[13] Their long-term goal was to

8 Karnik, Vasant Bhagwant (1972): N. M. Joshi. Servant of India. Bombay: United Asia Publications, 12–19.

9 Karnik, Vasant Bhagwant (1972): N. M. Joshi. Servant of India. Bombay: United Asia Publications, 20–23. Joshi's way into contact with labour is in no way singular but can be seen in the examples of many other trade unionists, too. Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan (1998): Imperial Power and Popular Politics. Class, Resistance and the State in India, ca. 1850–1950. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 293.

10 For a discussion of the concept of indigeneity within Indian society, see Chapter 6.2.3.

11 Kidambi, Prashant (2011): From 'Social Reform' to 'Social Service'. Indian Civic Activism and the Civilizing Mission in Colonial Bombay, c. 1900–1920. In: Watt, C. & M. Mann (eds.): Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia. From Improvement to Development. London: Anthem Press, 217–218. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9780857288301.008, and Priyanka Srivastava (2018): The Well-Being of the Labor Force in Colonial Bombay. Discourses and Practices. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 109–152. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66164-3.

12 Watt, Carey Anthony (2005): Serving the Nation. Cultures of Service, Association and Citizenship. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 13. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195668025.001.0001.

13 Valdameri, Elena (2022): Indian Liberalism between Nation and Empire. The Political Life of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 181. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003037422.

reshape India into a more self-reliant and independent entity, gradually undermining the legitimacy of the colonial state while still engaging with it.[14] Over the following decade, Joshi used his activism and a growing body of published work to publicly position himself as a key spokesperson for Bombay's industrial labour force.[15]

Consequently, when the Indian government was required to nominate a representative of Indian workers for the first ILC in 1919, the choice fell on N.M. Joshi. This selection did not fully align with the ILO's established protocol, which stipulated that both the workers' and employers' delegates had to be nominated by the most representative national organisations within their respective sectors. The Indian government, however, argued that no unified trade union body existed at the national level and therefore a direct governmental appointment was the only viable solution.[16] Although the decision was ultimately accepted without objection by the ILC's Credentials Committee, it was not without domestic controversy.[17] Several Indian trade unions challenged the legitimacy of Joshi's appointment. In a joint statement, the Indian People's Union and the *Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha* addressed the ILO to protest what they saw as unrepresentative and undemocratic selection practices. Their criticism rested on two interrelated points. First, they argued that Joshi, a well-educated high school teacher and philanthropic social reformer, was not himself part of the working class and "had never mixed with workingmen or identified himself with their grievances".[18] Second, they pointed to Joshi's caste background. As a Brahmin, he was seen to embody the socio-cultural elite whose reformist engagement with the working classes was often viewed as paternalistic rather than emancipatory. From the perspectives of these contesting unions, organisations such as the Servants of India Society were primarily vehicles of elite benevolence, "entirely financed by capitalists and Mill-owners" and thus structurally incapable of representing labour interests in any

14 Watt, Carey Anthony (2005): Serving the Nation. Cultures of Service, Association and Citizenship. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 15. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195668025.001.0001.

15 Karnik, Vasant Bhagwant (1972): N. M. Joshi. Servant of India. Bombay: United Asia Publications, 34.

16 Gupta, Prem Sagar (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 13.

17 The case of India is not even mentioned in the Report of the Commission on Credentials to the International Labour Conference. ILO (1920): Minutes of the 1st Session of the International Labour Conference, Washington, 1919. Washington: Government Printing Office, 206–208.

18 The People's Union to Albert Thomas (September 21, 1919), The Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha to Albert Thomas (September 21, 1919), both ILO Archives, D 601-201-33.

genuine sense.[19] This claim was not unfounded. Reform organisations like the Social Service League often relied on charitable contributions from industrial elites, including Bombay's powerful mill-owning class.[20] In contrast, the *Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha*, founded in 1909, positioned itself explicitly as a working-class organisation and a counter-model to the predominantly Brahmin-led social reform movements. Among its central concerns was the caste-based exploitation of workers within colonial labour structures.[21]

Thus, N.M. Joshi's long-standing association with the ILO, which would extend well into the 1950s and see him emerge as a prominent critic of colonial labour exploitation and the discriminatory treatment of Asian workers, was not always equally welcomed by the very workers he sought to represent in Washington and Geneva. This ambivalence was created through the intersecting influences of class, caste and religion within Indian society. These internal divisions would increasingly shape the relationship and, at times, tension, between social reformers, political agitators and trade unions, ultimately affecting the perceived role of Geneva from the perspective of Indian workers. As an immediate consequence of the ad hoc and controversial appointment of Joshi in 1919, there arose a growing demand for a more representative and democratically legitimised national trade union body. This culminated in the founding of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) on October 31, 1920.[22]

In the years that followed, AITUC gradually established itself as the principal platform for labour coordination in colonial India, forging connections with existing trade unions across the country. At its annual conferences, held in various cities, the organisation elected General and Assistant Secretaries to oversee its activities. During this early phase, AITUC's central focus lay in nominating workers' representatives to the ILCs. However, the articulation of a broader programme beyond engagement with Geneva progressed only slowly.[23] Simultaneously, the influence of organised communism within the

19 The People's Union to Albert Thomas (September 21, 1919), The Kamgar Hitwardhak Sabha to Albert Thomas (September 21, 1919), both ILO Archives, D 601-201-33.

20 Kidambi, Prashant (2011): From 'Social Reform' to 'Social Service'. Indian Civic Activism and the Civilizing Mission in Colonial Bombay, c. 1900–1920. In: Watt, C. & M. Mann (eds.): Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia. From Improvement to Development. London: Anthem Press, 233. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9780857288301.008.

21 Kambale, Babasaheb (2022): Non-Brahmin Labour Movement in Bombay and Indian National Movement. In: *Economic & Political Weekly Engage* 57(44–45), 5.

22 Gupta, Prem Sagar (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 1.

23 Gupta, Prem Sagar (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 18–21.

Indian labour movement began to grow. The ideological and strategic overlap between communist activists and moderate trade unionists, many of whom remained socially distant from the industrial working class, generated tensions within the movement. A defining moment in this development was the Kanpur (Bolshevik) Conspiracy Case, during which several "revolutionaries" were arrested by the colonial authorities under charges of conspiring to incite violent revolution. The trial led to the imprisonment of four prominent communists and forced many leftist activities underground, albeit temporarily.[24] In the aftermath, AITUC's moderate wing resumed its work with renewed visibility. Between 1920 and 1925, the organisation's affiliated unions recorded steady growth in membership. Yet, despite this numerical expansion, AITUC struggled to establish enduring structures at the grassroot level of the Indian working class. Its leadership remained largely confined to educated elites and urban centres, limiting its capacity to act as a truly mass-based labour movement.[25]

4.1.2 The "Asiatic Enquiry" and First Ideas for an Asian Regional Labour Conference, 1925–1928

While in India the question of authentic workers' representation within AITUC remained unsolved, AITUC delegates, alongside other Asian workers' representatives, advocated in Geneva for a stronger presence of Asian labourers' perspectives within the ILO. The ILC functioned as a strategic arena where various interest groups could publicly voice their demands, thereby generating political pressure on their opponents. These debates fostered transnational solidarities, especially among workers' representatives, but also highlighted the limitations of the conferences themselves. It became increasingly evident that meaningful negotiations and decisions often occurred outside the formal sessions. In the Indian context, two initiatives particularly illustrate this dynamic: the workers' representatives' call for a systematic investigation into

24 The imprisoned were Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta, Shaukat Usmani and S.A. Dange. Maclean, Kama (2019): Comrade Ryan, International Trade Unionism and White Australia. Global Communism, Trade Unionism and Empire in Interwar India. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47(6), 1128–1129. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1576834. For a broader overview over the political spectrum of Indian revolutionaries at the time, see Kama Maclean (2015): A Revolutionary History of Interwar India. Violence, Image, Voice and Text. London: Hurst & Company.

25 Kooiman, Dick (1980): Bombay Communists and the 1924 Textile Strike. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 15(29), 1228.

Asian labour conditions (the "Asiatic Enquiry") and the proposal for a dedicated regional labour conference in Asia.[26]

When N.M. Joshi introduced the idea for an "Asiatic Enquiry" at the 1925 ILC, it had already been discussed by the British Colonial Office and the Ministry of Labour. Anticipating such a demand, Colonial Office official C.W. Dixon expressed concern that agreeing to the study could be construed as acknowledging the right of the ILO to intervene in colonial affairs, a position the Colonial Office was unwilling to endorse. Nevertheless, Dixon recommended that Britain should avoid overt opposition at the conference itself. Instead, he suggested that resistance should be voiced by India or by other "Eastern members" of the ILC.[27] This tactic reveals the ongoing influence of the British government on the Indian delegation and underscores the limitations of Indian governmental autonomy in international forums. Despite British reservations, the resolution for the "Enquiry" was passed. The British delegates withheld open resistance, opting instead to evaluate the nature of the Office's follow-up actions. Should the study involve direct investigative missions, Britain planned to refuse cooperation. If, however, it amounted only to the distribution of statistical questionnaires, they would refrain from objection.[28]

Ultimately, the "Asiatic Enquiry" never reached the scale originally envisioned by its proponents and by its critics. Although the ILO had initially contemplated a comprehensive, single-volume report, such a publication never materialised.[29] Instead, the Office produced several smaller regional studies over the following two decades. These included *Industrial Conditions and Labour Legislation in Japan* (1926), a series of articles on labour legislation, female workers and child labour in British India and the Indian States, and a

26 A note on terminology: In the primary sources consulted, the terms "conference" and "congress" were often used interchangeably by the historical actors involved. Carolien Stolte, whose work constitutes the most comprehensive research on the history of the idea, draws a clearer distinction between the two: a "conference" being organised in cooperation with the ILO and a "congress" independently. However, this distinction is not supported by the evidence examined here, which is why "Asian Regional Labour Conference" is used primarily. "Asiatic Labour Congress" then only refers to the specific event in 1934. Stolte, Carolien (2012): Bringing Asia to the World. Indian Trade-Unionism and the long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937. In: *Journal of Global History* 7(2), 262. https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281200006X.

27 C.W. Dixon to R.G. Somervell (May 13, 1925), Kew Archives, LAB 2/967/2/1928.

28 E.B. Boyd to D.A. Woozley (September 30, 1925), Kew Archives, LAB 2/967/2/1928.

29 Ayusawa Iwao F. (1926): Industrial Conditions and Labour Legislation in Japan. Geneva: ILO, Prefatory Note.

more extensive report on *Labour Conditions in Indo-China*.[30] The reasons for this scaled-down outcome remain unclear. Nonetheless, the concept of the enquiry retained symbolic value within the ILO. It provided an important reference point that enabled the Office to justify its expanding research into Asian labour conditions, particularly in the face of continued resistance from imperial governments. The initial mandate, granted by the 1925 ILC resolution, thus evolved into a broader research agenda, shaping the Office's actions in the years to come.

By 1927, the call for a more active engagement of the ILO in Asia was further advanced at the ILC, where Japanese workers' delegate Suzuki Bunji formally proposed the convening of a regional labour conference.[31] While the broader discussion of this proposal at the ILC was addressed in the previous chapter, this section focuses on the internal deliberations that followed. A few months after the conference, ILO Director-General Albert Thomas reached out to Suzuki for clarification, uncertain whether the delegate was advocating for a gathering of trade union organisations or for a conference dedicated to presenting the findings of the ongoing "Asiatic Enquiry". Thomas had already received reports that moderate Japanese trade unions had embraced the idea of a "Far Eastern Labour Conference" and had begun preliminary negotiations with Chinese counterparts. In his letter, Thomas expressed strong support for the initiative, suggesting that the "Asiatic Enquiry" could serve as a vehicle to facilitate such a conference and assuring Suzuki of his readiness to "consider with the utmost care every possibility of action" on the matter.[32]

Although Suzuki's reply has not been preserved, the idea was not left dormant. At the beginning of 1928, ILO official Ayusawa Iwao Frederick (1894–1972), likely the only Japanese staff member at the Genevan Office at the time, was tasked with compiling a memorandum on the feasibility of a "Far-Eastern

30 Ayusawa Iwao F. (1926): Industrial Conditions and Labour Legislation in Japan. Geneva: ILO, Rajani Kanta Das (1930): Labour Legislation in India. In: *International Labour Review* 22(5), 599–622, Rajani Kanta Das (1931): Woman Labour in India: I. In: *International Labour Review* 24(4), 376–409, Rajani Kanta Das (1931): Woman Labour in India: II. In: *International Labour Review* 24(5), 536–572, Rajani Kanta Das (1933): Child Labour in India: I. In: *International Labour Review* 28(6) 796–832, Rajani Kanta Das (1934): Child Labour in India: II. In: *International Labour Review* 29(1), 43–83, Rajani Kanta Das (1938): Labour Legislation in Indian States. In: *International Labour Review* 38(6), 794–818, ILO (1938): Industrial Labour in India. Geneva: ILO, and ILO (1938): Labour Conditions in Indo-China. Geneva: ILO.

31 Suzuki Bunji, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 61.

32 Albert Thomas to Suzuki Bunji (August 11, 1927), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

or Asiatic Labour Conference" under ILO auspices.[33] His assessment, however, was sobering. Aside from the limited initiatives, such as the establishment of Branch Offices in Japan and India and the preliminary steps of the "Asiatic Enquiry", Ayusawa concluded that the organisation had accomplished "but little which would specially interest the Asiatic workers". More troublingly, Ayusawa identified several factors contributing to the ILO's diminishing relevance in the region. Among them were the perceived rise of communism, widespread suspicion towards Western-dominated international institutions and the emergence of rival organisations, most notably the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) in Honolulu, which were seen as more responsive to Asian concerns.[34] He warned his colleagues that the ILO's "neglect of the political and social developments in the Far East and the Pacific region" was resulting in a "gradual loss of [...] prestige". Ayusawa proposed two responses to this decline. First, he endorsed Albert Thomas' plan to undertake an official visit to East Asia in late 1928 and early 1929. Second, he expressed strong support for the idea of an Asian Regional Labour Conference, believing that worker participation could be secured. He remained cautious, however, regarding the willingness of Japanese employers and the national government to cooperate. Still, Ayusawa hoped that the incoming government following Japan's 1928 general election would adopt a more liberal and internationalist stance. Strategically, he suggested that the proposed conference should be scheduled to

33 Ayusawa Iwao Frederick was born and raised in Tokyo and later pursued his higher education in the United States, earning an undergraduate degree from Haverford College and a PhD from Columbia University, New York. Before formally joining the Office in 1925, he was already involved with the ILO as a member of the Japanese delegation to the ILC in 1919 and the Governing Body. He went on to hold various positions within the Office and from 1934 until 1939 led the Tokyo Branch Office. During the Second World War, Ayusawa was employed by the Japan Economic Federation. After the war, Ayusawa first served on the Central Labour Relations Board, later became professor of Labour Problems at the International Christian University in Mitaka and published on Japanese labour history. See CV of Ayusawa (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 1732, N.N. (n.d.): Professors Emeriti. In: ICU https://www.icu.ac.jp/en/about/organization/honor.html (last accessed: May 29, 2025), Ayusawa Iwao F. (1941): Elements of Stability. A Japanese View. In: *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 215(1), 24–28, and Ayusawa Iwao F. (1966): A History of Labor in Modern Japan. Honolulu: East-West Center Press.

34 For more information on the history of the IPR, see Tomoko Akami (2001): Internationalizing the Pacific. The United States, Japan, and the Institute of Pacific Relations in War and Peace, 1919–45. London: Routledge. A later cooperation between the ILO and the IPR is discussed by Véronique Plata-Stenger (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 142–146. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323.

coincide with the publication of the "Asiatic Enquiry's" findings and, if possible, with the report of the ILO's Committee of Experts for Native Labour. In this vision, the conference would not only elevate the ILO's regional profile but also anchor its activities more firmly in the realities of Asian labour conditions.

Thus, through the intervention of Ayusawa Iwao, the ILO's leadership was alerted to the precarious status of its reputation in "the East". In his memorandum, Ayusawa moved beyond merely echoing the demands raised by Asian workers' delegates during the ILCs. Instead, he offered a systematic and critical diagnosis of the multiple factors contributing to the ILO's declining influence in Asia. His intellectual linkage of the proposed Asian Regional Labour Conference with the Office's initiatives on the "Asiatic Enquiry" and the "Native Labour Question" revealed a sophisticated understanding of how institutional legitimacy in non-Western contexts hinged on questions of racial inclusion and political self-determination. Ayusawa's analysis underscored the structural connection between the underrepresentation of non-Western staff within the Office and the organisation's broader failure to resonate with Asian constituencies. From his perspective, only a dual strategy, combining intensified empirical engagement with non-Western labour conditions and a visible commitment to addressing Asian critiques, could ensure long-term cooperation with labour movements and governments in the region. For Ayusawa, this was not merely a matter of institutional survival, but of moral responsibility. As he argued, "concentrated attention paid by the Organisation to these problems which, if existing only locally, [we]re certainly of urgent interest to the whole world, [wa]s bound to have good effects".[35] In this statement, he reframed local labour problems as emblematic of global concerns, thereby pressing the ILO to reconceptualise its mission in genuinely international and not merely Eurocentric terms.

4.1.3 A Partial Answer to Asian Demands. The Creation of the New Delhi Branch Office

Another proposal intended to counterbalance the ILO's Eurocentric orientation was the establishment of Branch Offices in Asia. First suggested in 1921 and reinforced by a resolution in 1922, it was not until 1926 that the ILO took meaningful steps towards implementation. Correspondence between leading ILO officers and Indian contacts reveals that, while the Office was not opposed

35 Ayusawa Iwao: Note on "A Far-Eastern or Asiatic Labour Conference organised under the auspices of the I.L.O." (April 4, 1928), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

to creating a branch in India, it relied on the cooperation of the Government of India to move forward. In May 1926, Harold Butler explained to the Indian economist Nagendranath Gangulee (1889–1954) that

> the attitude of the Indian Government is that they are not prepared to propose the creation of such an office of their own initiative, but that if we like to propose it they probably would not make any objection. This means that nothing is likely to be done in the immediate future, as we should not feel justified in making a proposal which will involve a substantial addition to our budget unless we had the active support of the Government of India. Nor indeed, if we made the suggestion, would the Governing Body be likely to accept it unless it was pressed upon them by the Indian representative. If therefore you can do anything at Simla to lead them to take a more active interest in the question, we shall certainly be grateful.[36]

Although it remains unclear whether Gangulee influenced the Government of India, which during the summer months resided in Simla (now: Shimla) in the Himalayan mountains, by October 1926, Albert Thomas had also discussed the matter with Atul Chandra Chatterjee (1874–1955), then High Commissioner of India. Chatterjee, a senior civil servant from Malda in West Bengal with a longstanding connection to the ILO, had represented the Government of India at nearly all ILCs and, since 1926, served on the ILO's Governing Body. He reassured Thomas of his support for the endeavour.[37] A decision was finally reached in 1927 to establish a regional ILO office in India.[38] While Indian industrialists urged Thomas to locate the office in one of the country's industrial capitals, such as Calcutta or Bombay, the choice ultimately fell on New Delhi due to its proximity to the Government of India during most of the year.[39]

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36 Harold Butler to Nagendranath Gangulee (May 25, 1926), ILO Archives, XR 33/1/9.

37 A.C. Chatterjee to Albert Thomas (October 28, 1926), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (A). See also J.C.B. Drake & K.D. Reynolds (2004): Chatterjee, Atul Chandra. In: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32382.

38 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1921): Minutes of the 3rd Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1921. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 211, N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1922): Minutes of the 4th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1922. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 60, Lala Lajpat Rai and W.H. Nolens, in: ILO (1926): Minutes of the 8th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1926. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 283.

39 G.D. Birla and R.P. Paranjpye, in: ILO (1927): Minutes of the 10th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1927. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 53, 119, and G.D. Birla to Albert Thomas (December 27, 1927), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (C).

The Indian Branch Office of the ILO officially opened in 1928 under the direction of Purushottama Padmanabha Pillai (1894–1977), a lawyer from Thiruvananthapuram in the Princely State of Travancore. Educated at the University of Madras, Pillai received a PhD from the London School of Economics in 1923 for his dissertation "Industrial Conditions in India".[40] In 1924, he joined the Economic Section of the League of Nations' Secretariat as its first Indian staff member and transferred to the ILO in 1927.[41] In preparation for his new role, he undertook a study tour in the summer of 1928 to the ILO's Branch Offices in Paris, London and Berlin, and visited both the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) in Amsterdam and the Employers' Federation in Brussels.[42] He was also briefed by Harold Butler, who offered practical guidance on his responsibilities. According to Butler, correspondents had to remain "completely independent", while also behaving with the discretion of a diplomatic representative, especially in relation to the host government:

> [T]hey must – like any other diplomatic representative – be exceedingly careful to avoid doing or saying anything which might be construed as working in opposition to the Government. Moreover, a great part of their value to us lies in their knowing the official mind and what is passing through it sufficiently well to be able to warn us in time of any snags on the horizon.[43]

Butler considered the correspondent's role particularly delicate with regard to employers due to their general scepticism towards labour protection and the ILO's goals. By contrast, he expressed no concern about relations with Indian trade unions, noting that the ILO could count on "a number of good friends in Joshi, Chaman Lall and others".[44] From these remarks, a nuanced picture of Pillai's position emerges. He was to act as a representative of the ILO in India, a liaison among the tripartite constituents, workers, employers and government, and a discreet yet effective advocate for the organisation's interests on the ground. Nevertheless, Butler's private correspondence with Andrew Gour-

40 Pillai, Purushottama Padmanabha (1923): Industrial Conditions in India. London School of Economics: PhD Thesis. Later published as Purushottama Padmanabha Pillai (1925): Industrial Conditions in India. London: Routledge. See also Jayasankar Krishnamurty (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 53–61.

41 CV of P.P. Pillai (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 2135.

42 N.M. Joshi actively supported the appointment of Pillai. See N.M. Joshi to Harold Butler (March 17, 1927), and P.P. Pillai, Minute Sheet (July 7, 1928), both ILO Archives, P 2135.

43 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (October 13, 1928), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

44 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (October 13, 1928), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

lay Clow (1890–1957) of the Indian Department for Industries and Labour also reveals reservation in Geneva. Butler conceded that "without having seen him [Pillai] at work on his own", it was "impossible to be certain in advance that he was really up to the job". Still, given the alternatives, he judged that Pillai was "better than anybody else who seemed available" and thus deserved the opportunity to prove himself.[45]

Pillai's official start in New Delhi was scheduled for November of that year. However, even before he could formally assume his work, the New Delhi Branch Office encountered its first minor crisis. Owing to the acute housing shortage in New Delhi, Pillai was unable to secure suitable premises for the office. The Government of India was at a loss to assist and a temporary solution emerged only when Bhupendra Nath Mitra (1875–1937), a senior government official and future High Commissioner of India, suggested using space on the site of the Chelmsford Club. Founded in 1917 as an exclusive recreational venue for the colonial elite, the Chelmsford Club had recently moved into new premises during the summer of 1928.[46] Pillai later described the club as "by no means comfortable", but noted that it placed him in close proximity to key Indian politicians who regularly frequented the location.[47] While no precise date is recorded for the office's eventual relocation, records suggest that the New Delhi Branch Office continued operating from the Chelmsford Club at least until 1930.[48] In addition to the expectations outlined by Harold Butler, Pillai was tasked, beginning in January 1929, with producing monthly reports on labour developments in India. These reports encompassed a broad array of topics, including recent governmental initiatives, summaries of press coverage related to the League of Nations and the ILO, accounts of labour disputes, updates on the activities of trade unions and employers' organisations, as well as reviews of newly published research and other relevant literature on labour conditions.[49]

45 Harold Butler to Andrew Gourlay Clow (October 12, 1928), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

46 N.N. (n.d.): Club History. In: Chelmsford Club https://www.chelmsfordclub.in/club-history.php (last accessed: November 4, 2024).

47 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (November 15, 1928), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1. The centrality of the Chelmsford Club as a space for influencing public opinion in the interest of the British government is illustrated in an anecdote referenced by Kama Maclean (2015): A Revolutionary History of Interwar India. Violence, Image, Voice and Text. London: Hurst & Company, 38.

48 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (March 27, 1930), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

49 ILO, New Delhi Branch (1929): Report for January 1929. In: CeMIS Göttingen https://owncloud.gwdg.de/index.php/s/vhVdk8T9DumUIS5#pdfviewer (last accessed: November 6, 2024).

Through the establishment of the Delhi Office, the ILO responded to calls for a stronger presence on the ground in Asia. Despite his Indian heritage, Pillai's personal profile in many ways mirrored that of other ILO officers from the Native Labour Section. Like them, he had been educated at the LSE, the contemporary centre for reformist colonial thought and the study of imperial governance through political science. His doctoral research, which examined industrial conditions in India, aligned with the LSE's vision of improving colonial administration through empirical study. From the ILO's perspective, Pillai embodied the ideal intermediary figure envisioned by Ayusawa Iwao in his memorandum—someone capable of translating the Office's institutional goals into practice within an Asian context. Pillai's position within the Anglophone Indian elite, combined with his years of experience in Europe and familiarity with international bureaucratic structures, made him well suited to represent the ILO in India. Yet the effectiveness and actual utility of his primary responsibility, the monthly labour reports, need to be reconsidered. While these reports offer historians valuable insights into contemporary labour conditions, their immediate practical relevance to the ILO's work appears limited. Though Butler and others in Geneva occasionally referred to the reports, suggesting that they were at least partially read by senior staff, there is little evidence that the time-intensive reporting translated into meaningful policy follow-up or engagement on the ground. More broadly, this raises the question of whether the ILO's emphasis on data collection genuinely addressed the core issue identified by Ayusawa and frequently reiterated by Asian workers' delegates: the need for authentic, visible engagement with local workers. Rather than building a relationship of trust and responsiveness with the Indian labour movement, the Office's physical and social proximity to government officials and employers underscored Butler's earlier assessment that worker relations were not a strategic priority. In this light, the report-writing may be seen less as a mechanism of inclusion and more as a tool to satisfy the ILO's bureaucratic wish for information, without necessarily converting knowledge into action.

4.2 Boycott or Cooperation? Indian Trade Unions and the ILO, 1928–1936

As a result of the establishment of the New Delhi Branch Office in the persona of Pillai, the ILO now possessed a valuable middleman who could improve Geneva's knowledge about developments in the Indian labour milieu as well as someone who could actively mediate between governments, employers

and workers in India alike. Over the following years, the growing competition between moderate trade unionists, outspoken anti-imperialists and communists and a repressive imperial government led to various political unrests in India that made Pillai's position increasingly important to the ILO. From the perspective of the workers' representatives, however, the previous period of formalisation of the Indian labour movement also led to an increased questioning of the usefulness of a close cooperation with organisations like the ILO that were, despite their well-meaning efforts, still entangled within imperial networks and power structures.

4.2.1 Between Reform and Revolution. The AITUC Split

With the continuous growth of AITUC since the early 1920s, its internal political diversification also intensified. While Indian trade union delegates in Geneva presented a unified front externally, internal disagreements gradually escalated into a major crisis. At the December 1928 meeting of AITUC in Jharia, a neighbourhood of Dhanbad in Eastern India, one major item on the agenda, proposed by Dewan Chaman Lall, was the idea of convening an Asian Regional Labour Conference. This initiative stemmed from earlier discussions between N.M. Joshi, Suzuki Bunji, Dewan Chaman Lall and Yonekubo Mitsusuke during the 1925 and 1928 ILCs in Geneva. Although the resolution passed with a narrow majority, the underlying tensions within AITUC were already apparent.[50] P.P. Pillai, attending the conference on behalf of the ILO, later described an "ugly mood" among the delegates.[51]

The proposal to organise an Asian Regional Labour Conference was part of a much larger ideological debate concerning the future direction of the Indian workers' movement. Central to this debate was the question of anti-imperialism. Should AITUC collaborate with international organisations entangled in imperialist structures or should it pursue a strictly anti-imperialist path, even at the cost of international isolation? At a more fundamental level, could an unjust system, such as the racial and economic hierarchies embedded in the League of Nations and the ILO, be reformed from

50 In this detail, P.P. Pillai's observations clash with Carolien Stolte's interpretation of the Jharia session, during which, according to her, the resolution for the Conference was "received with enthusiasm". Stolte finds it even more surprising that the topic would soon after cause trouble for the unity of AITUC, which is less surprising when taking into account Pillai. Stolte, Carolien (2012): Bringing Asia to the World. Indian Trade-Unionism and the long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937. In: *Journal of Global History* 7(2), 263. https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281200006X.

51 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (January 3, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).

within, or only dismantled through boycott and resistance? For years, these questions had deepened the divide within AITUC. On one side stood trade unionists like N.M. Joshi, who believed that the ILO, despite its flaws, offered genuine opportunities to improve working conditions across member states, provided it was met with critical and consistent engagement. Since 1919, Joshi had regularly used the ILCs to raise sharp critiques and propose reforms. For him, the proposed Asian Regional Labour Conference represented the culmination of these efforts: a concrete step towards reshaping the ILO into a more equitable and inclusive institution. On the other side stood AITUC's increasingly powerful left wing, which aligned itself with communist ideology and envisioned a radical transformation of the global order. Trade unionists like D.R. Thengdi, Keshav Nilkanth Joglekar, Bhopinath Dutto and Aftab Ali saw the ILO as irredeemably compromised by imperialist influence. Rather than working through Geneva-based institutions, they sought alliances with organisations such as the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS) and the League Against Imperialism (LAI).[52]

Next to its entanglement with the ILO, the Indian trade union movement also attracted growing interest from Moscow's Comintern. Both the Comintern and the First International Congress of Revolutionary Trade and Industry Unions, also known as the Profintern or Red International Labour Union, had initiated contact with AITUC as early as 1922.[53] This communication was likely facilitated by Manabendra Nath Roy (1887–1954), founder of the Communist Party of India (CPI).[54] At the time, M.N. Roy was a key figure in the transnational circulation of revolutionary ideas, having travelled extensively across Asia, Europe, the United States and Mexico. He served as a critical intermediary between European communist hubs and Indian nationalist and labour activists. These connections became visible during AITUC's December 1928 meeting in Jharia, where representatives from PPTUS and LAI were present. Among them was the Australian trade unionist Jack Ryan, representing

52 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (January 3, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).

53 Stolte, Carolien (2012): Bringing Asia to the World. Indian Trade-Unionism and the long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937. In: *Journal of Global History* 7(2), 264. https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281200006X.

54 Among the more recent scholarly portrayals of M.N. Roy are Kris Manjapra (2010): M. N. Roy. Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism. New Delhi: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367818623, Choi Chatterjee (2017): Imperial Subjects in the Soviet Union. M. N. Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, and Re-thinking Freedom and Authoritarianism. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 52(4), 913–934. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009417716754, and Leonie Wolters (2024): Cosmopolitan Elites and the Making of Globality. M. N. Roy and Fellow Anti-Colonial, Communist and Humanist Intellectuals, c. 1915–1960. London: Bloomsbury. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350377073.

PPTUS. A prominent member of the Australasian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), Ryan had joined the PPTUS, which had only recently been founded in 1927 as a Cominternbacked initiative to promote solidarity among workers across the Asia-Pacific region.[55] His goal in Jharia was to secure AITUC affiliation with the PPTUS, but this effort ultimately proved unsuccessful due to the slight, yet fading majority of moderates present in the meeting.

The League Against Imperialism, however, was more successful with AITUC. Formed after a February 1927 international congress against imperialism at the Palais d'Egmont in Brussels, the LAI had since evolved into a permanent global organisation. Headquartered in Berlin, it was led by an International Secretariat including the German communist Willi Münzenberg, the Indian revolutionary Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and the Hungarian communist Louis Gibarti.[56] While the LAI received support from Moscow, it was not fully under Comintern control.[57] Nonetheless, when American communist John "Jack" Wilson Johnstone travelled to India, he did so with a Comintern mandate. Before his departure, Johnstone had met the LAI leadership in Berlin and then travelled to Moscow, where he received instructions to represent the LAI in India. At the Jharia conference, he forcefully advocated for AITUC affiliation with the LAI. He criticised the ILO for focusing solely on working conditions in imperialist countries and neglecting the voices of colonised peoples.[58] His appeal resonated with AITUC's left wing, which increasingly opposed cooperation with the ILO and viewed an Asian Regional Labour Conference as a distraction from more radical, anti-imperialist objectives. Shortly after his intervention, Johnstone was arrested and deported by the colonial authorities—an incident that became known as the "Johnstone

55 Maclean, Kama (2019): Comrade Ryan, International Trade Unionism and White Australia. Global Communism, Trade Unionism and Empire in Interwar India. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47(6), 1127. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1576834.

56 Louro, Michele, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter & Sana Tannoury-Karam (2020): The League Against Imperialism. Lives and Afterlives. In: Louro, M., C. Stolte, H. Streets-Salter & S. Tannoury-Karam (eds.): The League Against Imperialism. Lives and Afterlives. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 17–19.

57 Louro, Michele, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter & Sana Tannoury-Karam (2020): The League Against Imperialism. Lives and Afterlives. In: Louro, M., C. Stolte, H. Streets-Salter & S. Tannoury-Karam (eds.): The League Against Imperialism. Lives and Afterlives. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 23–24.

58 Louro, Michele (2018): The Johnstone Affair and Anti-Communism in Interwar India. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53(1), 53. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009416688257.

Affair".[59] In response and as an expression of solidarity, AITUC voted to affiliate with the LAI for one year.[60]

Despite mounting communist criticism, the memorandum proposing an Asian Regional Labour Conference in cooperation with the ILO was adopted by a two-thirds majority at AITUC's Jharia meeting. Nevertheless, P.P. Pillai, representing the ILO in India, already foresaw the divisions that would erupt at the next meeting. In his view, "the more moderate elements [of the AITUC executive council] had neither unity of programme nor unity of action, and, if they obtained a majority in voting, it was more the result of chance combination than of any organised effort".[61] Writing to Harold Butler, he warned:

> It is to be very much feared that the communists are gaining ground in the All India Trade Union Congress, and that next time they will make an even more serious attempt, perhaps a successful one, to capture the congress machinery. In that case, the labour movement in India will have a serious set-back, and the I.L.O.'s position here will become increasingly difficult.[62]

In the following weeks, Pillai also discussed the situation with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India. When asked for his assessment of communist influence among trade unionists, Pillai advised a measured response. Rather than repressive action, he urged the colonial administration to improve working conditions and ensure stricter enforcement of existing labour laws. He expressed concern, however, that the government would opt for greater repression.[63] Harold Butler shared these concerns and underscored the ILO's position. In his view, "[t]he only real answer to communism [wa]s social reform of the kind which the I.L.O. ha[d] promoted".[64]

Still, the Government of India responded with sweeping repression against what was constructed as an attack on British imperialism. In March 1929, it arrested thirty-two activists, revolutionaries and trade unionists, accusing them of conspiring to overthrow the government and endangering the king-emperor's authority. The charges, brought against a politically heterogenous group, culminated in a legal process that lasted four years and became known as the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the most expensive trial in British imperial

59 Louro, Michele (2018): The Johnstone Affair and Anti-Communism in Interwar India. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 53(1), 45–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009416688257.
60 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (January 3, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).
61 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (January 3, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).
62 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (January 3, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).
63 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (January 24, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.
64 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (January 29, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

history.[65] Alongside the Comintern, the League Against Imperialism and the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, nineteen prominent AITUC members were named among the accused.[66] In the aftermath of the arrests, P.P. Pillai, who had been present when the news reached the Indian Legislative Assembly, received unexpected visits from the relatives of the detained.[67] Members of Bombay's *Girni Kamgar Union* approached him, hoping the ILO might intervene on behalf of their imprisoned kin. However, Pillai, firmly opposed to any alignment with the communists, stated bluntly that "Geneva [wa]s not interested in any sort of revolutionary movement, and that in any case, the constitution of the Labour Organisation ma[de] it impossible for it to interfere in cases of this nature".[68] In his reply, Harold Butler fully agreed, speculating that the visitors were not truly seeking assistance but merely "the desire to find another weapon with which to attack the Office".[69] As historian Carolien Stolte has argued, the Government of India, through its clear attack against the communist wing of AITUC, effectively answered the question of affiliation from above. While cooperation with the ILO was tolerated, if not quietly welcomed, any affiliation with the LAI and the PPTUS was explicitly condemned

65 Stolte, Carolien & Michele Louro (2013): The Meerut Conspiracy Case in Comparative and International Perspective. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 310. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378103. The most detailed analyses of various aspects of the case have been provided by Ali Raza (2013): Separating the Wheat from the Chaff. Meerut and the Creation of 'Official' Communism in India. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 316–330. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378112, Michele Louro (2013): 'Where National Revolutionary Ends and Communist Begins'. The League against Imperialism and the Meerut Conspiracy Case. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 331–344. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378121, Carolien Stolte (2013): Trade Unions on Trial. The Meerut Conspiracy Case and Trade Union Internationalism, 1929–32. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 345–359. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378130, and Franziska Roy & Benjamin Zachariah (2013): Meerut and a Hanging. 'Young India,' Popular Socialism, and the Dynamics of Imperialism. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 360–377. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378139.

66 Stolte, Carolien (2013): Trade Unions on Trial. The Meerut Conspiracy Case and Trade Union Internationalism, 1929–32. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 350. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378130.

67 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (March 21, 1929), P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (April 4, 1929), both ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

68 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (April 4, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

69 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (April 23, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

and punished.[70] The responses of Pillai and Butler reveal that, for ILO officials, only the moderate wing of AITUC was seen as a legitimate partner. Butler went so far as to claim that the communists' sole objective was to "destroy the infant labour movement in India".[71] His stance left little room to recognise anti-imperialists or communists as valid actors within India's diverse labour movement. This underscores the ILO's clear opposition to revolutionary politics and its selective approach to collaboration, namely one that defined which colonised labourers were considered worthy of engagement.

As a consequence of escalating internal tensions and intensified government repression, the split within AITUC became definitive at its tenth session held in Nagpur in November 1929. Chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru, until recently an outsider to the organisation, and attended by representatives from 50 of 51 affiliated unions, the session marked a turning point in the trajectory of India's organised labour movement.[72] Central to the dispute were the moderates' engagement with international institutions such as the ILO and the Whitley Commission, both of which will be discussed in more detail in the following. Faced with a communist majority, the moderate faction around N.M. Joshi chose to secede from AITUC.[73] In a private letter to P.P. Pillai, Albert Thomas expressed both concern and support for the moderate secessionists:

> Que vont faire nos amis? D'après les journaux, ils doivent créer un nouveau groupement. Je crois que c'est la seule solution. Notre devoir est, discrètement et indirectement, de les aider de toutes nos forces. [What will our friends do? According to the press, they are to create a new group. I believe this is the only solution. Our task is to help them discreetly and indirectly with all our force.][74]

The "friends", as Thomas referred to them affectionally, indeed began laying the groundwork for a new organisation. Impaired by the illness of N.M. Joshi, it were primarily V.V. Giri and R.R. Bakhale who spearheaded the effort to estab-

70 Stolte, Carolien (2013): Trade Unions on Trial. The Meerut Conspiracy Case and Trade Union Internationalism, 1929–32. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 350. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378130.

71 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (April 23, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

72 For more information on Nehru's internationalist nationalism, the influence of the League Against Imperialism and the Indian National Congress, and his short presidency over AITUC, see Michele Louro (2018): Comrades Against Imperialism. Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19–139, especially 127–132. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108297615.

73 Summary of P.P. Pillai's report on the AITUC Meeting in Nagpur (November 1929), ILO Archives, D 600/746/5.

74 Albert Thomas to P.P. Pillai (December 11, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).

lish the new Indian Trade Union Federation (ITUF).[75] Reporting back to Thomas, P.P. Pillai expressed doubts about the initiative's viability, noting that "the politics of the country [we]re in so perturbed a condition" that the founding of the ITUF would face considerable challenges. To support the formation of the new federation, Pillai entered into correspondence with Tin Tut, then Deputy Secretary in the Indian Department of Industries and Labour. He urged that, in appointing a workers' representative, the Government of India should look to the new organisation around Joshi rather than to the increasingly radicalised AITUC or to unaffiliated unions.[76] Despite these efforts, it was not until July 1931 that the ITUF was formally established.[77]

4.2.2 Strategic Alliances and Institutional Tensions. The ILO and the Royal Commission on Labour ("Whitley Commission")

Historical research on the trial against Indian communist trade unionists following the Meerut Conspiracy Case has shown that the Government of India first explored the possibility of constructing a major conspiracy case as early as August 1927.[78] It was not until March 1929, however, that the case was finalised and the arrests were carried out. Coinciding with these public repressions against Indian left-wing trade unionists and communists, the government also announced the launch of a comprehensive study of Indian labour conditions, to be undertaken by a royal commission. Since 1085, and throughout British history, numerous royal commissions, best described as ad hoc independent expert committees, have been appointed by the government to investigate specific issues or to fulfil advisory functions. Upon completing their inquiries, these commissions reported their findings but possessed no legislative authority. Any subsequent action based on their recommendations rested with the government.[79] While the Meerut case clearly signalled the

75 Some of the literature also calls the new federation the All India Trade Union Federation (AITUF). See Sanjay Upadhyaya (2022): Evolution of Trade Union in India. Noida: V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, 11–12. This does not correspond to the source material sighted during the research for this book, as, for example, R.R. Bakhale to Affiliated Unions (April 12, 1931), PMML, N.M. Joshi Papers 63.

76 P.P. Pillai to Albert Thomas (January 23, 1930), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).

77 Gupta, Prem Sagar (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 167.

78 Stolte, Carolien (2013): Trade Unions on Trial. The Meerut Conspiracy Case and Trade Union Internationalism, 1929–32. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33(3), 351. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2378130.

79 Lauriat, Barbara (2010): 'The Examination of Everything'. Royal Commissions in British Legal History. In: *Statute Law Review* 31(1), 25–26. https://doi.org/10.1093/slr/hmq001.

government's preference for a trade union movement aligned with cooperation with Geneva and opposed to anti-imperialist affiliations, the establishment of the royal expert commission served a complementary purpose. It likely aimed to further steer moderate trade unionists towards cooperation with the state by demonstrating a supposed commitment to labour reform. This initiative, which led to the first major investigation of Indian labour conditions, was at least indirectly tied to the ILO and its methods of expertise and intervention. Yet, strikingly, the relationship between the Royal Commission on Labour and the ILO has so far received only little attention in historical scholarship.[80]

In November 1928, John Henry Whitley (1866–1935), a former Speaker of the British House of Commons and member of the British Liberal Party, was invited to head the forthcoming industrial commission.[81] At the time, Whitley was well known across Britain for his role in mediating during the First World War strike waves, particularly through his leadership of a committee promoting joint industrial councils (later known as "Whitley councils"). While these councils had limited success in the heavy industry, they proved more effective in the public sector.[82] Despite his lack of imperial experience, Whitley was considered a suitable choice for the royal commission due to his moderate, tripartite approach. Crucially, when the Government of India approached Whitley, it directly referenced the ILO, highlighting the organisation's standing as an authoritative institution for labour information. According to official communications, prior to their contact with Whitley, the Government of India had consulted the ILO on Indian labour conditions and had received recommendations on potential reforms, including minimum wage policies and sickness and unemployment insurance schemes that should guide the royal com-

80 Apart from Stolte's article, the most important ones bringing the ILO and the Whitley Commission together are Ravi Ahuja (2019): A Beveridge Plan for India? Social Insurance and the Making of the 'Formal Sector'. In: *International Review of Social History* 64(2), 220–225. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859019000324, and Jayasankar Krishnamurty (2023): Pioneers in Indian Labour Studies, 1900–1930. In: *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 66, 961–974. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-024-00475-8.

81 Panesar, Amerdeep, Amy Stoddart, James Turner, Paul Ward & Sarah Wells (2018): J. H. Whitley and the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1929–31. In: Hargreaves, J.A., K. Laybourn & R. Toye (eds.): Liberal Reform and Industrial Relations. J. H. Whitley (1866–1935), Halifax Radical and Speaker of the House of Commons. London: Routledge, 129.

82 Patmore, Greg (2018): Industrial Relations and Joint Industrial Councils. The UK and Beyond 1916–39. In: Hargreaves, J.A., K. Laybourn & R. Toye (eds.): Liberal Reform and Industrial Relations. J. H. Whitley (1866–1935), Halifax Radical and Speaker of the House of Commons. London: Routledge, 86–102.

mission.[83] These suggestions most likely came from Harold Butler.[84] From the outset, then, the Secretary of State for India, who was the political head of the India Office responsible for the governance of the British Indian Empire, Lord Peel, positioned the ILO as a source of expert advice on colonial labour policy.

The Royal Commission on Labour in India was first mentioned in the ILO's correspondence between P.P. Pillai and Harold Butler in February 1929. At that time, Butler had already been contemplating a visit to India for some time, driven by his desire to "obtain some first-hand idea as to the actual conditions in Indian industry".[85] Yet, he was becoming increasingly hesitant due to the country's volatile political climate. The disruption of the trade union movement and the escalating repression of communist and revolutionaries, soon to culminate in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, were not the only concerns. Equally destabilising was the fallout from the Simon Commission. Formally known as the Indian Statutory Commission, the Simon Commission had been dispatched in 1928 to evaluate the working of the 1919 Government of India Act and propose constitutional reforms. However, the commission, composed entirely of white British politicians under Sir John Simon, was widely boycotted and met with mass protest across India well into 1929.[86] Against this backdrop, Butler questioned whether his own visit would be prudent, especially if the newly planned Royal Commission on Labour, also addressing industrial questions, would be travelling through the country simultaneously.[87] P.P. Pillai shared Butler's concerns, noting that the Indian public had expected a much smaller inquiry. Following what he called the "wanderings of the 'Simon Seven'", there was, he wrote, only "little enthusiasm" for the Viceroy's plans. According to New Delhi rumours, the idea for the Royal Commission had originated with Sir Louis Kershaw, Assistant Under-Secretary of

83 Lord Peel to J.H. Whitley (November 23, 1928), British Library, IOR/L/PO/1/38. Cited in Amerdeep Panesar, Amy Stoddart, James Turner, Paul Ward & Sarah Wells (2018): J. H. Whitley and the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1929–31. In: Hargreaves, J.A., K. Laybourn & R. Toye (eds.): Liberal Reform and Industrial Relations. J. H. Whitley (1866–1935), Halifax Radical and Speaker of the House of Commons. London: Routledge, 130.

84 In a letter from March 1929, Butler tells P.P. Pillai that he was "as a matter of fact, consulted about it [the commission] unofficially some months ago". Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (March 27, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

85 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (February 11, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

86 Venkatraman, V. (2019): Simon Go Back! Reflections of the Indian Press on the Boycott of the Simon Commission in the Madras Presidency, 1928–1930. In: *SSRN*. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3440022, and Stephen Legg (2023): Round Table Conference Geographies. Constituting Colonial India in Interwar London. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 14–15. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009215329.

87 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (February 11, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

the State and member of the ILO's Governing Body, while the Indian Government had allegedly preferred a "less pretentious" enquiry, underscoring the precarious standing of the commission amid the country's increasingly heated political climate.[88] As a result, Butler's planned travels were postponed.

By March 1929, the names of the commission's members were released, and on July 4, the Royal Commission was officially constituted.[89] In contrast to the Simon Commission, the new commission was deliberately structured to include six Indian members alongside six British ones, a clear response to the earlier backlash.[90] Notably, seven of the twelve members had, to varying degrees, previous connections with the ILO (Table 4.1), suggesting the growing institutional influence of the ILO in shaping colonial labour policy.[91]

TABLE 4.1 Connections between Members of the Royal Commission on Labour in India (1929–1931) and the ILO.

Name	Institutional Affiliation	Connection to the ILO
John Cliff	Assistant General Secretary, British Transport and General Workers' Union	No documented ILO affiliation
Andrew Gourlay Clow	Officer, Indian Civil Service	Representative of the Government of India at the ILC 1923 and 1929; in regular correspondence with Harold Butler

88 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (February 14, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

89 N.N. (1929): The Whitley Commission. Likely Personnel. Wide Terms of References. In: *The Hindustan Times* (March 8, 1929).

90 Panesar, Amerdeep, Amy Stoddart, James Turner, Paul Ward & Sarah Wells (2018): J. H. Whitley and the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1929–31. In: Hargreaves, J.A., K. Laybourn & R. Toye (eds.): Liberal Reform and Industrial Relations. J. H. Whitley (1866–1935), Halifax Radical and Speaker of the House of Commons. London: Routledge, 132.

91 Based on Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (March 27, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1 and the referenced ILC minutes.

TABLE 4.1 Connections between Members of the Royal Commission on Labour (*cont.*)

Name	Institutional Affiliation	Connection to the ILO
Alexander Robertson Murray	Former President, Bengal Chamber of Commerce Former Chairman, Indian Jute Mills Association Former President, Indian Mining Association	Representative of the Indian employers' delegation at the ILC 1919 and 1924
Beryl Millicent La Poer Power	Officer, British Civil Service	Known to Harold Butler
Ellice Victor Sassoon	Owner, E.D. Sassoon & Co Limited	No documented ILO affiliation
John Henry Whitley (Chair)	Member, British Liberal Party	No direct ILO affiliation, but met with Albert Thomas and Harold Butler
Kabeer-ud-Din Ahmed	Delegate, Indian Legislative Council	No documented ILO affiliation
Ghanshyam Das Birla	Delegate, Indian Legislative Council	Representative of the Indian employers' delegation at the ILC 1927; in infrequent correspondence with Albert Thomas
Narayan Malhar Joshi	Member, AITUC/ITUF	Representative of the Indian workers' delegation at the ILC 1919, 1921, 1922, 1925 and 1929; in regular correspondence with Albert Thomas and Harold Butler
Dewan Chaman Lall	Member, AITUC/ITUF	Representative of the Indian workers' delegation at the ILC 1925 and 1928

TABLE 4.1 Connections between Members of the Royal Commission on Labour (*cont.*)

Name	Institutional Affiliation	Connection to the ILO
Ibrahim Rahimtoola	Delegate, Indian Legislative Assembly Member, All-India Muslim League	No documented ILO affiliation
Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri	Founder, Indian Liberal Party	Met with Harold Butler in South Africa in 1927

On the British side, Andrew Gourlay Clow (1890–1957), at the time serving in the Government of India's Department of Industries and Labour, had been part of the governmental delegations to the ILC in 1923 and 1929. As discussed in Table 4.1, he also maintained regular contact with Harold Butler and P.P. Pillai. Alexander Robertson Murray (1872–1956), a British industrialist and President of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, had long been active in the Indian textile industry and represented employers at the ILC in 1919 and 1924. Beryl Millicent La Poer Power (1891–1974), the only woman on the commission, was a British civil servant. While her direct connection to Harold Butler remains unclear, he praised her selection, noting her "wide experience of factory conditions both in Great Britian and the United States" and calling her "an excellent appointment".[92]

On the Indian side, Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894–1983), a leading industrialist and owner of Birla Jute Mills in Calcutta (now Kolkata), had represented Indian employers at the ILC in 1927. The trade unionist N.M. Joshi (1879–1955), one of the ILO's key contacts in India, had participated in several ILCs. Dewan Chaman Lall (1892–1973), like Joshi a founding member of the AITUC, had participated in the ILC in 1925 and 1928. Finally, Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri (1869–1946), an Indian politician and independence advocate, had met Harold Butler in 1927 during his tenure as India's Agent to the Union of South Africa.[93]

92 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (March 27, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1, and Elaine Harrison (2016): Power, Beryl Millicent Le Poer. In: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/45653.

93 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (March 27, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

The ILO thus had access to first-hand information from several members of the commission. While its contact with Power, Birla and Sastri was more limited, Clow, Joshi and Chaman Lall were in regular correspondence with Geneva. These extensive ties suggest that the British government intentionally selected individuals who had previously represented Indian labour interests at the ILO, figures considered moderate and amenable to the official agenda of reform. At a time when anti-imperial and communist trade unionists were subject to severe repression, the inclusion of Joshi and Chaman Lall signalled to Geneva that the Government of India remained committed to a form of labour representation it deemed politically acceptable. Their appointment can therefore be read as both a strategic concession and a signal of alignment with ILO norms.

The close alignment between the Royal Commission and the ILO, both in terms of personnel and research aims, prompted discussions about possible collaboration. The idea was debated within the International Labour Office and among British officials. In March 1929, Harold Butler opposed formal affiliation, arguing that prevailing political tensions would lead the commission's work to be judged "on political rather than industrial grounds", rendering an official ILO association undesirable.[94] By July, however, ILO attitudes began to shift. During a meeting in London, Albert Thomas and Harold Butler conferred with J.H. Whitley and William Wedgwood Benn (1877–1960), the newly appointed Secretary of State for India. The conversation confirmed that the primary concern of the British government in Indian labour affairs was the containment of communist influence. Wedgwood Benn proposed supporting moderate trade unions as part of a broader anti-communist strategy. In this context, the prospect of collaboration with the ILO resurfaced. While Whitley expressed interest in accessing ILO research data for the commission's use, he remained opposed to involving ILO officials directly in the commission's fieldwork. His reluctance unsettled Thomas, who now feared that even minimal cooperation, such as keeping P.P. Pillai informed, might be blocked.[95] Although Whitley's personal resistance to closer ties with the ILO remains opaque, the broader discussions between the ILO, the Royal Commission and the India Office revealed a shared political goal: the containment of communism within India's labour movement.

94 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (March 27, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

95 Albert Thomas to A.C. Chatterjee (July 10, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (A). On the same conversation, see also Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (July 18, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

It was not only Albert Thomas who sought a connection between the Royal Commission and the ILO. By August 1929, Dewan Chaman Lall, one of the commission's labour representatives, invited Pillai to join part of the commission's tour. Although this invitation did not originate with J.H. Whitley, as Pillai observed himself, it nevertheless reflected the commission's labour representatives' general sympathy towards the ILO. Pillai, however, remained hesitant. On the one hand, such a decision would require approval from Geneva; on the other, his sense of institutional pride had been wounded by Whitley's earlier refusal to consider appointing an official ILO representative.[96] Given the political climate, Butler advised Pillai to refrain from engagement so as not to become a target of public protest.[97] When the commission arrived in New Delhi in November, members reiterated their welcome to Pillai. Whitley, however, remained firmly opposed, a stance Albert Thomas deeply regretted: "Nous avons fait tout notre possible, Butler et moi, pour obtenir la représentation du Bureau. M. Whitley y était délibérément hostile. [We, Butler and I, did everything possible to secure representation of the Office. Mr. Whitley was deliberately hostile.]".[98] Eventually, following internal pressure, Whitley grudgingly allowed Pillai a limited role, though his influence remained marginal. When the 1929 AITUC session convened in Nagpur later that November, Pillai was fully absorbed in union affairs and, apart from a brief meeting, found little time to engage further with the commission.[99]

The commission's first tour extended from October 1929 to March 1930 and included visits to the North Indian Provinces, New Delhi, Bombay, Central India, the United Provinces, Bengal and southern India. After a short break in April and May, the commission reconvened in London from June to August 1930. A second journey followed in October and November, covering Ceylon and Burma. The final meeting took place in New Delhi, where the official report was completed and published in 1931.[100] Beyond the formal proceedings, private sources, such as J.H. Whitley's scrapbook and Beryl Power's photo albums, offer glimpses into the lived experiences of the commission's travels. As Amerdeep Panesar et al. have shown, the commission's encounters with Indian labour were often filtered through an orientalist and imperial

96 P.P. Pillai to Albert Thomas (August 22, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).
97 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (October 22, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.
98 Albert Thomas to P.P. Pillai (December 11, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).
99 P.P. Pillai to Albert Thomas (January 23, 1930), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).
100 Royal Commission on Labour in India (1931): Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India. London: H.M. Stationary Office.

gaze, casting working conditions as "exotic" and deficient.[101] Apart from official duties, members also took part in touristic activities: visiting historical monuments, attending leisure clubs and exploring local bazaars.[102] These materials, while anecdotal, underscore the cultural and political lens through which the commission interpreted the colonial world. The travels of the Royal Commission remain a promising site for further inquiry into the intersections of imperial governance, social reform and global labour politics.

One tangible way in which the ILO contributed to the work of the Royal Commission was through the submission of a substantial manuscript compiled by Rajani Kanta Das (1881–?), a junior official at the International Labour Office.[103] As Albert Thomas explained:

> [W]e wished to help the Commission in its work. For this purpose we submitted to it the whole of the enormous enquiry which has already been carried out by Mr. Das on Indian questions. We await the report of the Whitley Commission with great interest, and we shall take it as one of the bases of our survey of working conditions in India for our Asiatic enquiry.[104]

Thomas' account to N.M. Joshi presents the decision as a collaborative gesture by the ILO to support the Royal Commission. Yet this sense of collective contribution was not shared by all involved, especially not by R.K. Das himself. During a visit to New Delhi in March 1931, Das and his wife met with several officials of the Government of India. In these conversations, Das emphasised the extent of his intellectual input and requested that his work would be properly acknowledged, ideally, he insisted, as co-authorship of the final report. The aftermath of these visits left P.P. Pillai concerned. Wary of reputational fallout for the ILO in India, he wrote to Harold Butler to report that the Geneva visitors had "left an unpleasant impression on some of the people

101 Panesar, Amerdeep, Amy Stoddart, James Turner, Paul Ward & Sarah Wells (2018): J. H. Whitley and the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1929–31. In: Hargreaves, J.A., K. Laybourn & R. Toye (eds.): Liberal Reform and Industrial Relations. J. H. Whitley (1866–1935), Halifax Radical and Speaker of the House of Commons. London: Routledge, 134–135.

102 McCarthy, Helen (2014): Women of the World. The Rise of the Female Diplomat. London: Bloomsbury, 125–128.

103 Rajani Kanta Das was an Indian labour economist. After studying in India and the USA, he received his PhD in 1917 and worked as a lecturer at several universities. In 1925, he became a member of the ILO and worked there until 1940. Afterwards, he moved to the USA. Little is known about his life and death there. Krishnamurty, Jayasankar (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 57–58.

104 Albert Thomas to N.M. Joshi (December 11, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (A).

whom they saw". He asked for clarification as to whether Das' contribution had indeed been significant.[105] Butler confirmed that Das had shared his full manuscript but downplayed its importance, wondering "how much use it was to them".[106] In the published report, the Royal Commission ultimately thanked only Albert Thomas. Das' dissatisfaction about this fact appears justified. As economist Jayasankar Krishnamurty has shown, Das had long contributed pioneering research on Indian labour and economics, providing novel insights, ideas and material to the field.[107] Yet his contributions remained largely uncredited.

With regard to the contents of the commission's report, P.P. Pillai took a pragmatic view. While the commission's report did not propose any "drastic changes" and instead championed the "principle of 'gradualness'", he welcomed several recommendations, such as the reduction of working hours in factories from 60 to 54 per week. He also noted that the ILO received a significant amount of attention in the report and that a tribute was "paid to it for having stimulated labour legislation in this country".[108] Das, by contrast, found the commission's references to his material "scanty" and felt they failed to acknowledge "its real service to the Commission".[109] He also lamented the lack of a broader vision connecting labour reform to questions of social policy, which he considered essential. While he acknowledged that the commission's recommendations might contribute to future policy developments, he ultimately regarded them as overly cautious.[110] In the end, while both Pillai and Das viewed the report as moderate and largely reformist, they diverged sharply in their evaluations of the ILO's recognition. Das, having shared extensive original material, felt sidelined by a commission led by J.H. Whitley, who, notably, had no prior experience with Indian labour conditions. Meanwhile, for Pillai, Butler and Thomas, the report's positive portrayal of the ILO was sufficient. The failure to credit a junior ILO official did not merit further.

The ILO's attempts to collaborate with the Whitley Commission reveal key aspects of its evolving role as a producer and disseminator of knowledge on

105 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (March 9, 1931), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

106 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (April 1, 1931), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

107 Krishnamurty, Jayasankar (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 57–58, and Jayasankar Krishnamurty (2023): Pioneers in Indian Labour Studies, 1900–1930. In: *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 66, 971–973. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41027-024-00475-8.

108 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (March 9, 1931), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

109 R.K. Das, Analysis of Report of the Royal (Whitley) Commission of Labour in India (November 11, 1931), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/8 (B).

110 R.K. Das, Analysis of Report of the Royal (Whitley) Commission of Labour in India (November 11, 1931), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/8 (B).

colonial labour. As explored in previous chapters, the Office began in the second half of the 1920s to position itself as an authoritative voice in this field. R.K. Das' research on Indian labour formed part of this broader endeavour. At the same time, the ILO remained dependent on the cooperation and often the goodwill of colonial administrations, particularly those within the British imperial sphere. This dependency is clearly reflected in its efforts to engage with J.H. Whitley and the Royal Commission in India. When Whitley resisted a formal partnership, the Office's leadership sought alternative forms of collaboration. In this context, Das' research became a form of diplomatic currency: by offering his material, the ILO secured a favourable representation within the commission's final report, thus safeguarding its institutional reputation in colonial circles.

Crucially, this transactional arrangement concealed a deeper asymmetry. The epistemic inequality underlying the ILO's knowledge production remained largely invisible until Das himself travelled to India and openly asserted his claim to intellectual authorship. His intervention briefly disrupted the institutional narrative, exposing the fragile position of non-European researchers in the emerging domain of colonial labour studies. Das' experience thus illustrates the precarity and marginalisation that shaped the roles of non-white staff within the ILO, even as their work underpinned its global authority. Similar tensions would later surface in the 1940s, when the first Black officers began contributing to the study of colonial labour, once again raising the question of who could claim ownership of institutional knowledge.

4.2.3 An Asian Regional Labour Conference to Fight Communist Propaganda?

As discussed, the proposal for an Asian Regional Labour Conference under the auspices of the ILO was a central topic at the AITUC meetings in Jharia (1928) and Nagpur (1929). Despite opposition from the communist wing, the 1928 meeting saw the majority of trade unions endorse a resolution calling for an Asian Regional Labour Conference composed of Indian, Chinese, Japanese and "other Eastern" workers. The goal was to hold annual meetings, beginning in 1929 in Bombay, to discuss the ILC's agenda alongside shared regional labour concerns.[111] From the outset, however, the conference proposal faced criticism from the communist and anti-imperialist wing of the Indian labour

111 Gupta, Prem Sagar (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 138.

movement, who rejected the ILO as an imperialist institution. At Nagpur in 1929, AITUC passed a resolution to affiliate with the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and officially annulled plans to participate in an Asian Regional Labour Conference.[112] While the communist faction opposed the initiative and the moderate groups that had seceded from AITUC focused on consolidating ITUF and participating in the Royal Commission on Labour, preparations for a potential Asian Regional Labour Conference continued within the ILO.

During discussions between Albert Thomas, Harold Butler, William Wedgwood Benn and J.H. Whitley concerning cooperation on the Whitley Commission, Thomas also suggested the idea of an Asian Regional Labour Conference as a way to insulate moderate trade unionists from communist influence.[113] Wedgwood Benn, recently appointed Secretary of State for India, responded positively and expressed that he was "very favourably impressed" by the proposal. Nevertheless, he insisted that the initiative should originate from the ILO, at which point the Government of India would offer a "very friendly reception".[114] Encouraged by this response, Ayusawa Iwao of the International Labour Office prepared a second memorandum, which was due to be presented to the ILO's Governing Body meeting in October 1929. However, the Government of India soon grew cautious and requested that the discussion should be deferred until early 1930, citing the need for more time to prepare.[115] By December, Wedgwood Benn clarified that the Government of India believed an exclusively Asian conference would be ineffective as long as the Whitley Commission's investigation was ongoing and its results unpublished.[116]

In the months that followed, the discussion continued to shift back and forth. Albert Thomas remained firmly committed to the idea and moved to place it on the agenda of an upcoming ILC at the earliest opportunity. In his view, such a conference was vital not only to reinforce the ILO's relationship with moderate trade unionists in India and Japan but also to counter the fre-

112 Gupta, Prem Sagar (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 150.

113 Albert Thomas to A.C. Chatterjee (July 10, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (A). On the same conversation, see also Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (July 18, 1929), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

114 William Wedgwood Benn to Albert Thomas (July 31, 1929), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

115 William Wedgwood Benn to Albert Thomas (October 1, 1929) and Albert Thomas to William Wedgwood Benn (October 14, 1929), both ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (C).

116 William Wedgwood Benn to Albert Thomas (December 17, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (C).

quent criticism of the organisation's Eurocentrism. To persuade the Government of India, Thomas strategically framed the initiative as a tool in the global struggle against communism—a central pillar of the ILO's identity since its founding. He argued that the conference would "strengthen the hands of those who [were] maintaining [their] point of view against the Communists" and would help "impress a certain number of workers with the reality and value" of the ILO's work.[117] From the perspective of the Indian government, however, it was precisely the threat of communism that argued against holding such a conference. In a conversation with P.P. Pillai, B.N. Mitra of the Department of Industries and Labour warned that contact between Indian labour delegates and counterparts from other Asian countries, such as the Dutch East Indies, where "communism [wa]s said to be rampant", could prove dangerous. Even though, as Pillai noted, Indian communists would likely boycott any ILO-sponsored conference, Mitra remained concerned that even members of the moderate Joshi group might adopt radical positions during the event. He feared that "impossible demands" raised by the delegates could be rejected and thereby inflame tensions between the government, employers, politicians and workers.[118] A further argument against holding the conference in the near term stemmed from the uncertain outcome of the Indian Round Table Conferences. In response to widespread protests following the all-white composition of the Simon Commission, the British government had promised to convene a series of conferences with representatives from British India, the Princely States and the British government to discuss constitutional reform. The first of these was scheduled between November 1930 and January 1931.[119] In February 1930, officials in the Indian government, including B.N. Mitra, argued that holding an Asian Regional Labour Conference before the conclusion of the Round Table Conference might provoke negative public reactions and compromise the reception of the regional initiative.[120] Consequently, Mitra proposed postponing the conference until at least early 1932.[121]

Between 1930 and 1932, discussions surrounding the proposed conference continued, yet they failed to produce concrete results due to the Indian gov-

117 Albert Thomas to N.M. Joshi (December 11, 1929), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (A).

118 P.P. Pillai to Albert Thomas (February 20, 1930), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).

119 Legg, Stephen (2020): Imperial Internationalism. The Round Table Conference and the Making of India in London, 1930–32. In: *Humanity* 11(1), 33. https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2020.0006. See also Stephen Legg (2023): Round Table Conference Geographies. Constituting Colonial India in Interwar London. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009215329.

120 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (February 28, 1930), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

121 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (March 15, 1930), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

ernment's reluctance. Albert Thomas, increasingly frustrated, expressed his sense of the growing incompatibility between the ILO's aspirations and governmental resistance:

> D'une part, on nous demande de maintenir ou même de ranimer l'intérêt des pays transocéaniques pour le Bureau international du Travail [...]. Si nous ne le faisons pas, on nous accuse d'être exclusivement européens. Mais voici qu'au moment où nous faisons cet effort, nous nous heurtons à toutes les résistances et à toutes les appréhensions, et notre initiative se trouve compromise. Vraiment, c'est rendre notre tâche presque impossible. [On the one hand, we are asked to maintain or even revive the interest of overseas countries in the International Labour Office [...]. If we don't do this, we are accused of being exclusively European. But as soon as we make this effort, we encounter all sorts of resistance and apprehensions, and our initiative becomes compromised. It really makes our task almost impossible.][122]

What remained unstated in Thomas' commentary was the fundamental contradiction between the objectives of the Asian workers' representatives and those of their mostly colonial governments. For the trade unionists, who had initially proposed the idea, the conference represented a critical opportunity to foster a more responsive and regionally attuned relationship with the ILO. A regional platform would not only elevate their concerns as workers' representatives but also give voice to the lived experiences of colonised peoples under imperial rule. For the Government of India, by contrast, such proximity between international organisations and organised labour posed a political risk, potentially undermining state authority and exposing its handling of labour issues to international scrutiny. Nonetheless, as government participation was essential to the ILO's tripartite framework, Thomas sought to move forward by soliciting official input. In February 1932, he sent a circular letter to the relevant governments and ILO correspondents, requesting their views on the general concept of the conference, its potential agenda, the list of invited states and the proposed composition of those delegations.[123]

Over the summer, responses to the ILO's inquiry began to arrive, though most were marked by hesitation or outright rejection. Only China expressed unequivocal support, proposing the conference should be convened as early

122 Albert Thomas to P.P. Pillai (February 4, 1932), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).

123 Albert Thomas to Various Governments (February 5, 1932), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

as the following year, ideally in the Dutch East Indies.[124] In contrast, the Government of India, while claiming to be "in sympathy with the objects underlying the resolution and the proposals made", cited ongoing domestic political instability, particularly the Round Table Conferences, as the main obstacle to organising such a meeting in the near future.[125] Both India and Japan also referred to escalating international tensions between Japan and China as a reason to postpone.[126] Other responses were lukewarm. Siam and Persia stated they saw only little immediate benefit in participating and would, if at all, send only governmental delegates, repeating a familiar pattern of excluding employers' and workers' representation, as seen previously at the ILC.[127] The Dutch government declined to give a position at that time, while France expressed strong opposition.[128] The French Ministry of Labour warned that convening an Asian Regional Labour Conference risked fragmenting the organisation and would serve only a symbolic, not practical, function.[129] Britain and Portugal ignored the request and later issued formal rejections.[130] Given the overall lack of enthusiasm, the International Labour Office decided, unsurprisingly, to defer the project, opting instead to "keep the question alive" until a more favourable political and economic climate emerged.[131]

Between 1929 and 1932, most Asian governments, particularly those under European colonial control, obstructed the ILO's efforts to organise an Asian Regional Labour Conference. This episode laid bare the contradictions inherent in colonial participation within an international organisation like the ILO. While mechanisms such as the adaptation of conventions and recommendations to the "special conditions" of colonies served colonial governments, there was little space for the expression of dependent peoples' interests.

124 Permanent Office of the Chinese Delegation to the League of Nations to Harold Butler (July 5, 1932), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

125 A.G. Clow to India Office London (May 5, 1932), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

126 Shunzo Yoshisaka to Harold Butler (August 5, 1932), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

127 Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Harold Butler (July 11, 1932), Ministère des Affaires Etrangères to Harold Butler (July 21, 1932), both ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

128 Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Arbeid to Harold Butler (September 2, 1932), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

129 Ministère du Travail to Harold Butler (August 17, 1932), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

130 The reply from the British Government has not been kept in the ILO file, but a few years later, R.V. Venon made a reference to the letter, saying that he had drafted the reply in 1932 "with the object of killing the idea of a special Asiatic Conference", perceiving it as "rather an effective letter". R.V. Vernon to H. Cowell and John Shuckburgh (January 21, 1937), Kew Archives, CO 323/1429/8.

131 C.W.H. Weaver, Minute Sheet (June 13, 1932), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

When Asian workers' representatives called for a regional forum to exchange ideas and shape shared priorities, colonial governments were able to exploit institutional inertia, delaying or deflecting ILO procedures to prevent its realisation. Albert Thomas' strategy of framing the conference as a means to combat communist influence thus proved ineffective.

At the same time, a regional shift became evident. In the 1920s, Japanese workers' representatives, often in alliance with Indian trade unionists, had been key proponents of Pan-Asian labour solidarities and of the proposed conference, enjoying support from their government.[132] However, by 1932, in response to Albert Thomas' circular letter, China emerged as the strongest advocate for the initiative, while Japan showed signs of disengagement from international cooperation. This reversal must be understood in the context of the 1931 "Manchuria incident", during which Japan staged a bombing on its own railway line and used it as a pretext to invade Manchuria, a region encompassing parts of present-day northeast China, eastern Mongolia and the Russian Far East. The event escalated into years of armed conflict between Japan and China and ultimately led to the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. Japan's withdrawal from the conference plans thus foreshadowed its full exit from the League of Nations in 1934.[133] In this way, the failure to convene the Asian Regional Labour Conference reflected both colonial obstruction and rising geopolitical tensions in East Asia.

4.2.4 Taking the Matter into Their Own Hands. The 1934 Asiatic Labour Congress

On the side of the Indian workers, the split of AITUC in Nagpur temporarily stalled the moderate separatists' plans for an Asian Regional Labour Conference. However, as it became increasingly apparent over the following years that the governments involved were actively blocking any efforts to organise such a conference, Asian workers' delegates took independent initiative dur-

132 This interpretation contrasts with that of Ulrike Davy, a scholar of public and comparative law, who argues that Japan "barely engaged" in ILC discussions initiated by India and China throughout the 1920s. Davy, Ulrike (2023): Decolonizing Equality – The Legacies of Anti-Colonial Struggles at International Labour Conferences, 1920–1940. In: *Human Rights Law Review* 23(3), 1–2, Footnote 1. https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngad017. In contrast, the findings of Chapters 3 and 4 suggest that, at least among workers' representatives, Japan and India closely cooperated until rising geopolitical tensions in the 1930s.

133 On Japan's role in the League of Nations, see the introduction of this book and Thomas W. Burkman (2008): Japan and the League of Nations. Empire and World Order, 1914–1938. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824829827.001.0001.

ing the 1933 ILC in Geneva. At two informal gatherings over lunch and dinner, Indian workers' delegate Aftab Ali met with Japanese workers' representatives Sakamoto Kozaburo and Ogishima Toru, Chinese delegates Li Yung-hsiang and Cheng Hai-feng, and ILO officials R. Raghunath Rao and Ayusawa Iwao to discuss the matter.[134] Aftab Ali (1907–1972), a Bengali sailor and trade unionist involved in the Calcutta-based Indian Seamen's Union since 1925, represented Indian labour at the ILC in 1933, 1936, 1944 and 1946.[135] Despite rising political tensions between Japan and China, all participants agreed that "the[ir] interests [...] were common" and that only close cooperation could overcome diplomatic obstacles.[136] In this spirit, Aftab Ali passionately proposed that workers should "take the matter into their own hands and hold a conference of only the workers' representatives, as a preliminary measure to official action"—a suggestion that was met with enthusiasm.[137] The proposal was strongly supported by ILO officers Ayusawa and Rao, the latter an Indian economist who had joined the ILO in 1930.[138] Their presence proved instrumental, as their shared regional and cultural backgrounds allowed them to engage more meaningfully with the concerns and ambitions of the Asian workers' representatives. This episode highlights the practical value of long-standing calls by Asian labour representatives for greater inclusion of non-European staff within the Office. When formal channels failed, informal solidarities, facilitated by representation, helped keep the project alive.

In May 1933, the Indian Trade Union Federation (ITUF) merged with several formerly independent railway unions, resulting in the formation of the National Trades Union Federation (NTUF).[139] This marked a first step towards trade union unity in the aftermath of the AITUC split. At its first session in Bombay in December 1933, NTUF passed a resolution expressing regret over the "opposition or lukewaramness [sic] of some of the Asiatic countries" regarding an Asian Regional Labour Conference and declared support for convening such a conference in 1934, limited to the workers' dele-

134 Ayusawa Iwao & R. Raghunath Rao, Note (n.d.), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/2.

135 N.N. (n.d.): Aftab Ali. In: Making Britain Database https://www5.open.ac.uk/research-projects/making-britain/content/aftab-ali (last accessed: November 15, 2024).

136 Ayusawa Iwao & R. Raghunath Rao, Note (n.d.), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/2.

137 Ayusawa Iwao & R. Raghunath Rao, Note (n.d.), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/2.

138 R. Raghunath Rao (1899–1966) started in the editorial section of the ILO, then moved to the Non-European Section and later became the first Indian Assistant Director-General in 1948. Krishnamurty, Jayasankar (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 58–59.

139 National Trades Union Federation, General Secretary's Report (1933), ILO Archives, D 600/746/9/1.

gations of India, Japan, China and other interested Asian countries.[140] With this decision, concrete planning began. R. Raghunath Rao of the Office welcomed the development and assured Indian trade unionist R.R. Bakhale that the initiative had the full support of the Office. Particularly, the recently established Extra-European Section and Director-General Harold Butler expressed strong interest. The ILO also facilitated communication with workers' organisations in countries not yet involved. For example, A. Staal of the Workers' Organisations Service forwarded trade union contacts from the Dutch East Indies. Rao emphasised that the earlier ILO-led efforts and the current workers' initiative were not "mutually exclusive" but rather "two separate organisations, differently constituted and by somewhat different means serving the same purpose".[141]

Ultimately, the Asiatic Labour Congress was held at the headquarters of the Ceylon Labour Union in Colombo on May 10, 1934. Founded in 1922 by A.E. Goonesinha and affiliated with the Ceylon National Congress advocating for self-government, the union hosted the event.[142] Colombo was chosen for its accessibility and, possibly, its distance from interference by communist AITUC in India.[143] Workers' delegations from India, Japan and British Ceylon attended. Other Asian ILO members, like Siam or Persia, as indicated in 1932, did not participate. Although China had expressed support, it was unable to send a delegation due to the ongoing Sino-Japanese crisis. The ILO was represented by P.P. Pillai from New Delhi and Ayusawa Iwao, who had just returned from a mission to Japan.

In his opening speech to the congress, N.M. Joshi reflected on the origins of the initiative, linking it to the early years of the ILO. He described the marginalisation of Asian delegates at the ILCs as a "humiliating situation", particularly given the tendency to view the perceived inferiority of Asian labour conditions as a barrier to improving those in Europe. This imbalance, he argued, placed Asian countries in a persistently "weaker position" in the ILO and compelled them to seek a "remedy" through unified action. The

140 R.R. Bakhale to R. Raghunath Rao (January 1, 1934), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/2.

141 R. Raghunath Rao to R.R. Bakhale (February 3, 1934), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/2.

142 Kearney, Robert N. (1968): The Partisan Involvement of Trade Unions in Ceylon. In: *Asian Survey* 8(7), 577, and Visakha Kumari Jayawardena (1972): The Rise of the Labor Movement in Ceylon. Colombo: Sanjiva Prakashana, 240.

143 Stolte, Carolien (2012): Bringing Asia to the World. Indian Trade-Unionism and the long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937. In: *Journal of Global History* 7(2), 269. https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281200006X.

workers' Asiatic Labour Congress, he explained, was born from this need.[144] Among the resolutions adopted during the congress were calls for direct representation of workers from the colonies and dependencies, consistent application of ratified conventions in those territories, the convening of the first tripartite Asian Regional Labour Conference and increased representation of Asian workers on the Governing Body.[145] These demands highlighted the perceived interconnection between Asian labour and "native labour". For the congress participants, whether from independent or dependent territories, the path towards meaningful change lay in collective advocacy that linked racial representation with national self-determination.[146]

Joshi presented the congress' resolutions to the ILO Governing Body in September 1934, arguing they demonstrated the need for an official ILO Asian Regional Labour Conference. In response, Harold Butler maintained that the Office had done "all that was in its power" but had received only little encouraging replies from governments. He stressed that further pressure would need to come from Indian labour representatives themselves.[147] Although a second meeting of the Asiatic Labour Congress was held in Tokyo in May 1937, its impact was minimal. Participation was limited to Indian and Japanese trade unionists and the ILO was represented solely by Ayusawa Iwao, by then Director of the ILO's Tokyo Branch Office.[148] As Japan's geopolitical isolation deepened due to its continued military aggression in Manchuria, the prospect of meaningful Pan-Asian labour coordination had all but dissipated.

By the late 1930s, it had become evident that the efforts of Indian and Japanese workers to persuade the ILO to convene a tripartite Asian Regional Labour Conference had ultimately failed. While the discussions at the International Labour Conferences initially suggested that this failure stemmed from insufficient initiative on the part of the ILO, it became clear that the

144 N.M. Joshi, Speech held at the Asiatic Labour Congress in Colombo (May 10, 1934), PMML, AITUC Papers 19.

145 Resolution proposed by N.M. Joshi and E. Suzuki at the Asiatic Labour Congress in Colombo (May 10, 1934), PMML, AITUC Papers 19.

146 A more in-depth analysis of the congress' speeches and press coverage is given by Carolien Stolte (2012): Bringing Asia to the World. Indian Trade-Unionism and the Long Road Towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937. In: *Journal of Global History* 7(2), 271–274. https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281200006X.

147 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1934): Minutes of the 68th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, September 1934. Geneva: ILO, 300, and Harold Butler, in: ILO (1934): Minutes of the 68th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, September 1934. Geneva: ILO, 303.

148 Harold Butler to Asiatic Labor Congress (n.d.), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/4.

primary impediment lay in the resistance of Asian governments and colonial powers. These governments weaponised the fear of communist agitation to block any attempt to engage with Asian labour conditions on an equal footing among governments, employers and workers. Although Asian workers' representatives took the initiative to organise their own labour congresses, building a limited but significant Pan-Asian solidarity among Indian, Ceylonese, Chinese and Japanese trade unionists, these grassroot efforts were soon undermined by rising political tensions in the region.

4.3 Visiting the Colonies. Harold Butler's Asian Tour, 1937–1939

After the failure to persuade the governments concerned to agree on an Asian Regional Labour Conference, at least for the time being, the ILO redirected its efforts to other strategies for improving its relationship with India. One such initiative was the proposal, first raised in June 1936, to establish a small Asian Committee within the ILO's Governing Body.[149] While this suggestion addressed the issue of Asian representation from a new institutional angle—following earlier demands for increased representation within both the International Labour Office and the ILCs—an even more significant development in this period was the Director-General's journey to South and Southeast Asia during the winter of 1937 and 1938. Although Albert Thomas had visited China, Japan and the Dutch East Indies a decade earlier, Harold Butler was the first Director-General to travel to India. This journey, which has received little attention in existing scholarship, offers a valuable case for closer study. In the late 1930s, at a time when the League of Nations was increasingly perceived as entering decline, the visit of a senior ILO official to Asia functioned as both an act of institutional publicity and a tool to reinforce ties with the colonial governments overseeing large parts of the region.

4.3.1 Framing the Mission. Harold Butler's Tour of South and Southeast Asia

For decades, Indian workers' representatives had repeatedly called for a visit by a senior ILO official, ideally the Director-General, to India. When Albert

149 N.N. (1936): Appendix VII. Seventh Item on the Agenda. Effect to be given to the resolutions adopted by the Conference at its twentieth Session. In: ILO (1936): Minutes of the 77th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, Geneva, 12–14. November 1936. Geneva: ILO, 131.

Thomas undertook his journey to China, Japan, French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies in 1928, these same representatives strongly criticised the Government of India for not issuing him an official invitation.[150] Thomas had indeed considered a brief stopover in India, but was discouraged by Indian governmental representative Atul Chandra Chatterjee, who argued that the political situation in the country was inopportune.[151] Through the correspondence of P.P. Pillai and his contacts in New Delhi, it later became clear that an additional reason for this reluctance was the government's preference for a future visit by Harold Butler rather than Albert Thomas. As B.N. Mitra explained to Pillai, "since English was the official language here, [Butler's] presence would prove more advantageous both to the Government and to the Geneva office".[152] Yet this reasoning seems only partly convincing. While Thomas was indeed a native French speaker, he was also widely known for his idealist leanings and moderate socialism, and for taking a sincere interest in colonial labour conditions. In the context of India's political climate in 1928, on the eve of a large-scale attack on left-wing trade unionists, the government may have feared that a visit by the outspoken Thomas could provoke unwelcome scrutiny.

Although Mitra had indirectly raised the prospect of inviting Harold Butler, no such visit took place for several years. Instead, various lower-ranking ILO officials travelled to India, including Ms. Hage in 1931, C.W.H. Weaver in 1933 and K.M. Kuriyan in 1934.[153] When the idea of a visit by Butler resurfaced in 1932, Mitra again voiced opposition, expressing concern that the Indian public might misinterpret the purpose of the trip, and warning that it "might even lead to a division in the Labour Movement".[154] Once more, the spectre of unrest within the Indian labour movement served to justify the government's reluctance. When planning Weaver's 1933 mission, A.G. Clow of the Government of India dismissed the idea of Butler accompanying the trip by remarking that "the idea seemed to be to give someone a holiday in India at the I.L.O.'s expense".[155] This statement underscores the persistent hostility within the Indian administration towards the ILO's activities and its perceived interference in domestic political affairs.

150 N.M. Joshi, in: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 12th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1929. Vol. 1. Geneva: ILO, 109.

151 Albert Thomas to A.C. Chatterjee (September 27, 1928), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/1 (A).

152 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (November 15, 1928), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

153 P.P. Pillai to Albert Thomas (February 12, 1931), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/4 (A).

154 R. Raghunath Rao, Note for the Director (May 4, 1932), ILO Archives, XR 33/1/2.

155 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (October 31, 1932), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

In the spring and summer of 1937, a shift occurred. Possibly prompted by mounting pressure to improve relations with the ILO, particularly in light of renewed calls for a tripartite Asian Regional Labour Conference, in a chain reaction, one Asian ILO member after another extended invitations to Director-General Harold Butler. In May, Butler received unofficial invitations from both Japan and India; a month later, a similar invitation followed from China.[156] By August, the Dutch government had also invited him to visit the Dutch East Indies.[157] However, with the escalation of tensions between Japan and China, Butler decided by September to decline both the Japanese and Chinese invitations.[158] Simultaneously, he was urged to accept an invitation to French India, having already refused to travel to French Indochina.[159] This flurry of diplomatic gestures was clearly shaped by inter-imperial rivalries, with each colonial power with stakes in Asia, such as Britain, the Netherlands and France, seeking to cast itself as a progressive and benevolent force in the region.

Butler, accompanied by his wife Olive Augusta Butler (née Newenham), also brought along his colleague P.W. Martin. A former British civil servant, Percival William Martin (1893–1972) had joined the ILO in 1919 and held various posts throughout his career. Outside the ILO, he was a published author on topics in industrial economics.[160] During the mission, Martin's primary task was to strengthen the Office's ties with the colonial departments responsible for economic and social policy. Butler justified his inclusion by arguing that it was "impossible to understand the social problems of India without a better knowledge of the economic conditions than [the Office] at present possess[ed]".[161] Martin was thus tasked with collecting official information and translating it internally into knowledge usable by the Office. His emphasis on the economic dimensions of labour issues foreshadowed a trend that would later re-emerge in Butler's account of his experiences in Asia and align with the ILO's growing focus on economic development, further reinforced during and after the impending war.

The journey to Asia began on October 29, 1937, when the party boarded the SS Sibajak in Marseille. Two weeks later, they arrived in Singapore, continuing

156 Keinosuke Zen to Harold Butler (May 11, 1937), ILO Archives, G 900-3-52, Cecil Kisch to Harold Butler (May 29, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1, and Li Ping-heng to Harold Butler (June 26, 1937), ILO Archives, G 900-3-50.

157 A. Loudon to Harold Butler (August 27, 1937), ILO Archives, G 900-3-56.

158 Cheng Hai-feng to Harold Butler (October 9, 1937), ILO Archives, G 900-3-50.

159 Harold Butler to A.G. Clow (September 27, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

160 CV of P.W. Martin (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 19.

161 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (August 23, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

on to Kuala Lumpur in British Malaya before returning to Singapore and proceeding to the Dutch East Indies.[162] In Jakarta, they were joined by Jelle Woudstra (?–?), a lawyer in the ILO's Native Labour Section who had arrived a week earlier to consult with Dutch officials.[163] Woudstra, previously employed by the Department of Justice in Batavia, focused on labour issues in the Dutch colonies and served as a knowledgeable guide for Butler.[164] Following their stay on Java, the group visited Medan on the island of Sumatra. On December 4, they boarded the SS Sibajak once again, this time bound for Colombo, Ceylon. Throughout this first part of the trip, Butler maintained a rigorous schedule that included visits to a wide range of industrial sites: a tin mine, smelting works, pineapple canning and engineering factories, rubber, sago, gum, saw and oil mills, various plantations, two mountain stations, a recruiting depot for colonised workers and a pathological laboratory. The delegation also met with British and Dutch governors and numerous colonial officials.

While little is known about Harold Butler's private impressions of Singapore, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, it is noteworthy that he expressed particular admiration for the Dutch colonial administration. In a letter to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, he wrote:

> I am leaving Java greatly impressed by the splendid system of colonisation which have made the Netherlands Indies justly famous, and also by the successful efforts of the Government to improve the hygiene & labour conditions of the native population. [...] I believe that I have acquired experience which will contribute greatly to directing the work of the International Labour Office in connection with native labour on sound & progressive lines.[165]

This sentiment, reiterated in Butler's official report discussed later in this subchapter, reveals his uncritical alignment with the Dutch colonial narrative. Unlike Albert Thomas, who during his 1929 visit to the Dutch East Indies acknowledged the existence of anti-colonial and communist opposition to Dutch rule, Butler appears to have accepted a more curated and idealised

162 For a different account of the travel, see Véronique Plata-Stenger (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 114–117. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323.

163 Harold Butler, in: ILO (1938): Minutes of the 82nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, February 1938. Geneva: ILO, 169.

164 CV of Jelle Woudstra (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 2305.

165 Harold Butler to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies (December 3, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

image of the colony. In this account, the Dutch administration was portrayed as a benevolent force committed to the welfare of the colonised population, effectively omitting the complex social tensions and dissents that Thomas had previously noted.

After four days at sea, Butler and his delegation arrived in Colombo, Ceylon on December 8, 1937, where they were joined by R. Raghunath Rao of the ILO.[166] During his time in Ceylon, Butler met with government officials, trade union representatives and plantation owners, and visited various industrial sites, including coconut and tea plantations. On December 11, the group boarded the Indo-Ceylon Express to Madras (now Chennai), arriving two days later. There, P.P. Pillai welcomed them to India. The visit began with a series of meetings involving provincial government representatives, employer organisations such as the Southern India Chamber of Commerce and the Employers' Federation of Southern India, as well as trade union leaders at the Madras Provincial Labour Conference.[167] On the evening of December 14, Butler and Rao travelled approximately 150 km "over a baddish road in the dark" to Pondicherry (now Puducherry), the economic centre of French India.

Upon finally reaching the Government House after a four-hour car journey, Butler was confronted with an open labour dispute. Even en route, a delegation of workers had approached him, seeking assistance. Once in discussion with the Governor, Butler learned that relations between workers, employers and the administration in Pondicherry had seriously deteriorated. Until recently, there had been no labour legislation, leaving workers in the territory's rapidly expanding textile sector vulnerable to exploitation. Since July, an ongoing strike had paralysed the Gaebelé textile mills, established in 1892, after the French director, Mr. Ehny, an Alsatian, had dismissed workers without cause and refused to arbitrate under the new Labour Code.[168] A large workers' assembly had been convened and Butler, accompanied by Rao, chose to attend.

To Butler, the scene resembled something dreamlike:

> We found a wonderful scene illuminated by flares and a gorgeous tropical moon. A large arena was filled with a great concourse of natives sitting in serried rows, not less than 10,000 of them, who had waited since 6 pm. The

166 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (October 18, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

167 Harold Butler, in: ILO (1938): Minutes of the 82nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, February 1938. Geneva: ILO, 170–171.

168 Sridharan, M.P. (1997): Trade Unions and the Liberation of Pondicherry. In: *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 58, 607.

> men were mostly in white, the women in brilliant colours, while order was preserved by Congress scouts in white shirts and shorts with cheery coloured sashes and white Gandhi hats – an effective uniform. We were ushered in and garlanded amid loud applause, and I realised that our coming really had a "Messianic character" in their eyes.[169]

The language of this description, featuring dramatic contrasts of light and colour ("flares", "tropical moon", "brilliant colours", "cheery coloured") and spiritual motives ("garlanded", "Messianic character") reveals Butler's deep fascination with the spectacle before him and evokes an orientalist perspective. The crowd estimate of 10,000 is almost certainly an exaggeration, likely shaped by the heightened atmosphere and Butler's unfamiliarity with such mass gatherings.[170] His reference to the assembly as a "great concourse of natives" in "serried rows" further underscores the way in which he perceived the group as a homogenous, undifferentiated mass, both exoticised and depersonalised in his imagination.

After Butler's address to the workers, R. Raghunath Rao followed with a speech in Tamil, a decision which Butler later acknowledged as "an excellent idea", underscoring the importance of linguistic and cultural proximity in building trust. However, the atmosphere was briefly jeopardised by a "querulous" and "hectoring" intervention from a labour inspector, which, according to Butler, "nearly ruined" Rao's effort. The event was soon brought to a close. The following day, Butler and Rao met with various trade union delegations, including local labour leaders Gurusamy ("Guruswami") and Varadarajulu Kailasa Subbiah (1911–1993), and became involved in the ongoing legal negotiations.[171] At Butler's request, a diplomatic statement was drafted, which ulti-

169 Harold Butler to Edward Phelan (December 16, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

170 On the history of the Gaebelé mills, see Jean-Baptiste Prashant More (2023): Towards Freedom in Pondicherry. Society, Economy and Politics under French Rule (1816–1962). London/New York, NY: Routledge, 47–49.

171 In Butler's letter, the labour leader is referred to as "Guruswami", though the exact identity is uncertain. It is likely he meant Rao Sahib L.C. Gurusamy (1885–1966), an Arunthathiyar politician and educator from Madras. Varadarajulu Kailasa Subbiah, by contrast, was a prominent communist politician and trade unionist in French India. His activism and confrontations with colonial authorities are discussed in detail by Jean-Baptiste Prashant More (2023): Towards Freedom in Pondicherry. Society, Economy and Politics under French Rule (1816–1962). London/New York, NY: Routledge. For a theoretical examination of Subbiah's anti-colonial Marxism, see Kristin Plys (2024): Anti-colonial Marxism in French and Portuguese India Compared. Varadarajulu Subbiah and Aquino de Bragança's Theories of Colonial Independence. In: Plys, K., Priyansh & K. Goonewardena (eds.): Marxist Thought in South Asia. Leeds: Emerald Publishing, 153–179. https://doi.org/10.1108/S0198-871920230000040009.

mately persuaded the previously intransigent employer to accept arbitration. While Butler expressed greater sympathy for Gurusamy, whom he viewed as a "well-educated" and respected interlocutor, he later wrote to Edward Phelan with a softened assessment of the employer, noting that "Ehny [...] was not really at all a bad fellow". Following the settlement, the Governor hosted Rao and Butler for what Butler described as "a first-rate dejeuner with some really good champagne" before the group returned to Madras.[172]

This episode, which Butler jokingly referred to as the ILO's first strike settlement, albeit "in rather dramatic circumstances", sheds light on his attitudes towards Indian labour.[173] Though he expressed sympathy for leaders like Gurusamy and Subbiah (the latter's communist politics likely unknown to him), Butler's narrative framed the resolution as the result of the sudden appearance of two "messianic" ILO officers, one of them white and British. The underlying suggestion was that this intervention alone had resolved a months-long labour conflict that had deeply affected the local workforce. Yet it were not Butler's negotiating skills that shifted the outcome but rather the symbolic authority attached to his whiteness and institutional status, which altered the terms of engagement with the French mill director. The fact that Butler, in retrospect, chose to absolve the employer of significant blame and highlight his enjoyment of champagne with the colonial governor further underscores the imbalance of power between himself, Ehny and the local administration on one side, and the mass of unnamed "natives" on the other. The stark asymmetry of this resolution illustrates the limitations and inherent hierarchies of colonial-era international labour diplomacy.

On December 17, the group arrived in Calcutta (now Kolkata), where they met with the Viceroy, large delegations from the Government of India, Indian employers, trade unions and several philanthropic organisations. Harold Butler was also interviewed by a local radio station. A one-day excursion followed to Jamshedpur, home to one of the world's largest steel mills operated by the Tata Iron and Steel Company. The group then visited a variety of registered and unregistered factories before continuing to Patna. On December 24, the delegation reached Allahabad (now Prayagraj), where Butler fulfilled a personal ambition to meet Jawaharlal Nehru. Having recently read Nehru's autobiography, Butler regarded him as "probably one of the most interesting and important of Indian politicians".[174]

172 Harold Butler to Edward Phelan (December 16, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

173 Harold Butler to Edward Phelan (December 16, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

174 List of contents of cases (n.d.) and Harold Butler to A.G. Clow (September 3, 1937), both ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

While no detailed record of their conversation survives, Butler expressed admiration for the INC's leadership. He noted that Congress ministers were "doing a very good job under very difficult circumstances" and considered it fortunate that "it was they rather than the British" who now faced the "appaling [sic] problem" of Indian poverty. Though he avoided referencing Indian independence explicitly, these private reflections, deliberately omitted from his official report, reveal a recognition of British limitations and a tacit endorsement of a gradual transfer of responsibility to Indian hands, believing that the huge task of transforming the country could not be done by "anybody except the Indians" themselves.[175]

Over Christmas, the delegation visited Cawnpore (now Kanpur) and Lucknow (now Lakhnau). From December 27 to 31, they stayed in New Delhi, where they met several key figures from earlier correspondence, including A.G. Clow of the Government of India, B. Shiva Rao of NTUF and staff of the ILO's Indian Branch Office. In addition to visiting cotton mills and other industries, a notable portion of the time in New Delhi was dedicated to public relations, with Butler giving interviews to both the press and radio. The following weekend, the group made a brief touristic visit to Agra to see the "incomparable monuments of the Moghuls". From there, they continued via Ahmedabad to Bombay, where Butler was received by N.M. Joshi and members of the Servants of India Society. Additional visits included cloth mills, housing estates and low-income urban areas. On January 8, 1938, Butler departed Bombay aboard the SS Ranpura, arriving in Port Said, Egypt, before returning to Geneva on January 29.

Overall, Butler characterised his impressions of India as "fascinating and bristling with insolutable [sic] problems". Among the contrasts he encountered, he remarked that India was "far poorer and dirtier" than any other places he had previously visited, yet "much more industrial and much more alive". Reflecting on the British government's long-standing hesitation to approve his visit, largely justified by fear of unrest and communist agitation, Butler confessed in a letter to Edward Phelan that he had found nothing "explosive" about the political atmosphere in India.[176] In contrast, he expressed surprise at the "undoubted prestige" the ILO appeared to enjoy in every country he had visited. Both employers and workers, he noted, "look[ed] to Geneva for assistance and guidance", as he later reported to the Governing Body.[177] These

175 Harold Butler to F.C. Gimson (April 30, 1938), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

176 Harold Butler to Edward Phelan (December 16, 1937), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1.

177 Harold Butler, in: ILO (1938): Minutes of the 82nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, February 1938. Geneva: ILO, 173.

observations contributed to constructing an image of the visit as a success. While Butler acknowledged the severe social and economic challenges facing the region, he painted the relationship between the ILO and Asian labour as uniformly positive. Notably absent from his account were any references to the protracted debates over equitable Asian representation within the organisation or the persistent tensions with colonial governments. His whitewashed narrative reframed the journey as a diplomatic and technical triumph, sidestepping the geopolitical complexities already destabilising the region. Butler similarly sought to convey this optimistic framing to the local press. However, the ILO's efforts to generate favourable publicity for its broader mission met with limited success.

4.3.2 Unmasking the Mission. Press Reactions to Butler's Tour

The significance of press coverage during Harold Butler's tour of South and Southeast Asia is already evident in his itinerary. Across several stops, time was reserved for interviews with journalists and radio broadcasters, underscoring the importance attached to shaping public perception of both the Director-General and the ILO. For the colonial powers, inviting Butler served as a gesture of reconciliation after prolonged resistance to the proposed Asian Regional Labour Conference. For Butler and the ILO, in turn, the journey offered a chance to repair the organisation's image in Asian regions that had long felt marginalised. Yet a closer look at selected press responses reveals that Butler's own optimistic appraisal of the ILO's reputation across Asia was only one narrative among others. Critical perspectives questioned the success of his visit as a public relations effort.

For example, the transregional Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* (General Commercial Journal) offered a scathing commentary on Butler's appearance in the Dutch East Indies. In the journalist's view, Butler came across as "an extremely reserved and cautious man" who failed to connect meaningfully with the public. His vague and uninspiring public statements, the article argued, left the Dutch public "completely in the dark" about the purpose and the significance of the visit. Compared to Albert Thomas, who had toured the region in 1928 and left a vivid impression, Butler was portrayed as "the personification of diplomatic equilibrium", lacking charisma and vitality.[178] This critique, focused less on policy than on personal presence, highlights the extent to which leadership within international organisations was

178 N.N. (1937): Harold Butler Says Little. In: *Algemeen Handelsblad* (December 7, 1937). English translation by ILO, original Dutch title unknown. ILO Archives, G 900-3-56-2.

also a performance of visibility, accessibility and affective resonance. In this respect, Butler was seen to fall short, and his visit, in the eyes of the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, risked becoming an exercise in diplomatic irrelevance.

A few weeks into Harold Butler's tour of India, his presence became the subject of political satire in the *Hindustan Times*. On December 30, 1937, the newspaper published a cartoon titled "I.L.O. & The League", with the subtitle "Mr. Harold Butler, Director of International Labour Office, has arrived in Delhi" (Figure 4.1). Founded in 1924 and today one of India's largest English-language dailies, the *Hindustan Times* was, during the 1930s, closely aligned with the nationalist movement led by Mohandas Ghandi. His son, Devdas Gandhi, served as a Chief Editor at the time.[179] The cartoon was drawn by the staff cartoonist Shankar Pillai (1902–1989), a prominent satirist who had joined the paper in 1933.[180] The cartoon offered a pointed critique of Butler's visit, casting it as a symbolic exercise amid the declining credibility of international institutions like the League of Nations. At the image's centre stood a small wooden gatehouse labelled "I.L.O.". Looming in the background was a much larger stone building, its front column inscribed with "League of Nations". The League building was engulfed in thick black smoke, suggesting a fire. In the foreground, Harold Butler was shown tending the ILO gatehouse with a watering can labelled "publicity", his sleeves rolled up. Next to him stood P.P. Pillai, stout and straining under the weight of a bucket, seemingly supplying more "publicity" water.

The cartoon must be understood in the context of growing disillusionment with the League of Nations in India and across the non-European world. The League's failure to respond effectively to Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1936 had caused a serious blow to its credibility, seemingly unable to prevent the imperial violation.[181] Jawaharlal Nehru, reflecting

179 The *Hindustan Times* was for long closely associated with the Congress party. Over the last decade, however, the newspaper has aligned itself closely with the current Modi government. Dev, Atul (2019): History Repeating at Shobhana Bhartia's Hindustan Times. In: *Caravan Magazine* (December 1, 2018) https://caravanmagazine.in/media/history-repeating-shobhana-bhartias-hindustan-times (last accessed: November 20, 2024).

180 Khanduri, Ritu Gairola (2014): Caricaturing Culture in India. Cartoons and History in the Modern World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 94. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107338029.

181 Framke, Maria (2017): India's Freedom and the League of Nations. Public Debates, 1919–1933. In: Zachmann, U.M. (ed.): Asia after Versailles. Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919–33. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 126, and Joseph McQuade (2020): Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy. India at the League of Nations, 1919–1946. In: *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48(2), 275. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1689617.

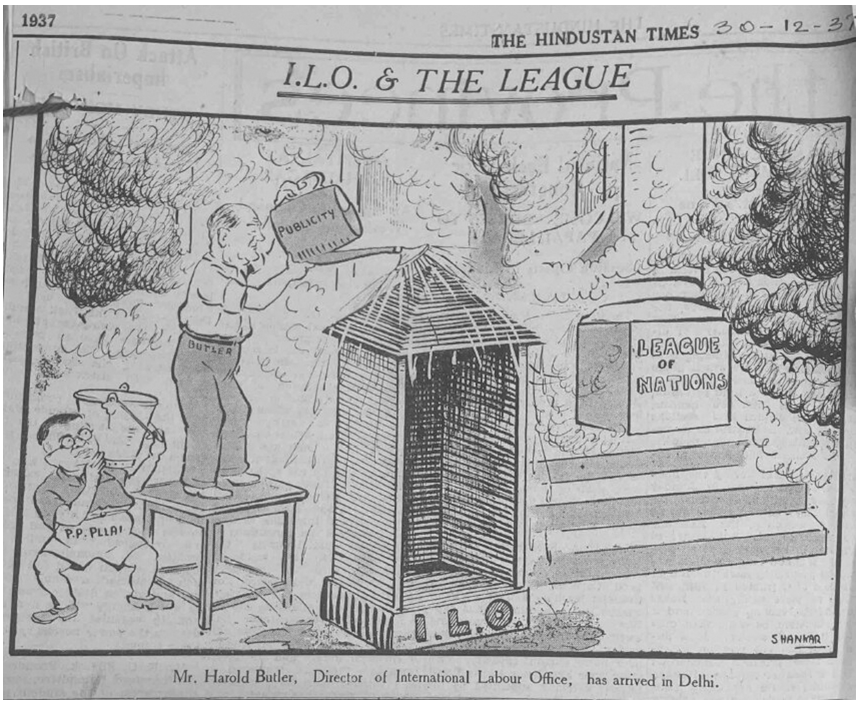

FIGURE 4.1 Pillai, Shankar (1937): I.L.O. & The League. In: The Hindustan Times (December 30, 1937). ILO Archives Geneva, XT 33/2/1.

this sentiment, observed that the League had "fallen very low [...] as an instrument for the preservation of peace" and that India had "no enthusiasm for it whatever".[182] At the same time, Indian trade unionists, nationalist politicians and even business leaders expressed mounting frustration over India's substantial financial contributions to the League and the limited returns received.[183] In both public discourse and government circles, the ILO was seen as an extension of the League, not a distinct organisation, and thus subject to the same criticisms. This perception was reinforced by the fact that both organisations drew their operating funds from the same government

182 Nehru, Jawaharlal (1941): Toward Freedom. The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru. New York, NY: The John Day Company, 419.

183 Press statement by Rameswar Prasad Bagla, printed in: *The Statesman* (July 31, 1931). Cited in: ILO, New Delhi Branch (1931): Report for July 1931. In: CeMIS Göttingen https://owncloud.gwdg.de/index.php/s/4zpptgJ6PZ5ZMPd#pdfviewer (last accessed: November 21, 2024). See also R. Raghunath Rao, Note for the Director (May 4, 1932), ILO Archives, XR 33/1/2, and K.N.V. Sastri to Harold Butler (October 28, 1937), ILO Archives, G 900-3-54.

budget. Within the ILO, however, there was a strong desire to distinguish itself from the League's declining reputation. As early as in 1928, Harold Butler had insisted to P.P. Pillai that the ILO did "not at all want to be made the whipping-boy of the League".[184] Against this backdrop, Butler's trip to India was interpreted by parts of the press not as a genuine gesture of engagement, but as a publicity effort designed to salvage the ILO's image and to deflect attention from the League's failures.

The cartoon also underscored the strained relationship between India and the ILO, particularly as embodied in the dynamic between P.P. Pillai and Harold Butler. The marked disparity in size and posture between the two ILO officers visually expressed a deeper power asymmetry that extended beyond their respective ranks within the organisation. While Butler, as Director-General, naturally assumed a leading role during the official visit, his prominence in the cartoon can also be read as a commentary on the broader imperial hierarchy in which he operated. In contrast, Pillai was depicted carrying the visible burden of upholding the ILO's image in India, symbolised by the weighty bucket, while Butler appeared at ease, dispensing only light gestures of goodwill in the form of a few drops of "publicity" from a watering can. The visual juxtaposition highlighted not only the unequal distribution of labour and responsibility within the ILO but also the colonial framing of international representation.

Altogether, Harold Butler's visit to India was not interpreted as a sincere attempt to strengthen the ILO's ties with Asia through the historic first visit of a Director-General. Rather, it was perceived as a performative diplomatic manoeuvre, shaped by ongoing geopolitical tensions within the League of Nations. In contrast to the Dutch article's critique of Butler's personal style, the *Hindustan Times* cartoon offered a more pointed political commentary, questioning both the ILO's broader direction and the authenticity of Butler's engagement. Taken together, these responses suggest that the ILO's interwar efforts in Asia were not only constrained by colonial structures but also scrutinised by a press increasingly critical of superficial gestures and symbolic diplomacy.

Approximately ten days after the *Hindustan Times* published its critical cartoon, *The Times of India* offered a markedly different take on Harold Butler's visit.[185] This contrast is unsurprising, given that *The Times of India* was, at the time, British-owned and exhibited a consistent bias in favour of the British

184 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (November 29, 1928), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

185 N.N. (1938): Mr. Butler's Visit. In: *The Times of India* (January 11, 1938).

Empire.[186] Like the *Hindustan Times*, the anonymous author of this article situated Butler's journey within the broader context of the League of Nations' declining reputation. However, rather than blaming the League or the ILO, the article shifted responsibility onto the public, arguing that the architects of the 1919 Peace Treaty could not have foreseen the "extent to which international morality would decline", which had undermined the effectiveness of international institutions. The article explicitly endorsed Butler, praising his "balanced mind" and background as a "one-time British Civil Servant", in pointed contrast to "the fiery idealist" Albert Thomas. Butler's visit to India was welcomed as an opportunity to improve India's image in Europe, thus inverting the ILO's official rationale, which was to improve the Office's standing in Asia. The article particularly emphasised Butler's commentary on the Indian trade union movement. While Butler had publicly acknowledged the positive development of the unions and linked their future success to improved worker education, the article itself adopted a markedly more paternalistic tone. It criticised Indian trade unions as having been infiltrated by "so-called labour leaders" intent on inciting unrest and singled out Ahmedabad's unions as mere extensions of the INC, lacking genuine worker support.[187] In this framing, trade unions were portrayed not only as politically suspect but as threats to social order and colonial governance. The critique extended implicitly to the broader Indian nationalist movement, casting Congress-aligned labour activism as illegitimate. Butler's perceived aloofness and reserved demeanour, which had been criticised in other accounts, were here reframed as signs of professionalism and leadership—qualities the author saw as necessary to temper the political passions of Indian activists. In this light, the article reveals how colonial loyalist media sought to recast Butler's mission as a reaffirmation of imperial authority, using his visit to delegitimise Indian political and labour activism.

4.3.3 Concluding the Mission. Butler's Reflections and the Legacy of *Problems of Industry in the East* (1938)

After his return, Harold Butler presented a short report on his journey to the Governing Body at its February 1938 session. While generally well received, two points of criticism were raised. First, David S. Erulkar, the Indian employ-

186 Paul, Subin & David Dowling (2020): Gandhi's Newspaperman. T. G. Narayanan and the Quest for an Independent India, 1938–46. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 54(2), 480. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X18000094.

187 N.N. (1938): Mr. Butler's Visit. In: *The Times of India* (January 11, 1938).

ers' delegate, challenged Butler's portrayal of the political situation in India. While welcoming Butler's praise for the newly elected Congress ministries, Erulkar criticised the omission of the systematic obstruction these governments faced from the Indian Civil Service, which in Butler's depiction had been left unmentioned.[188] Second, Dutch workers' delegate Evert Kupers objected to Butler's overly positive depiction of labour conditions on plantations in the Dutch East Indies.[189] Drawing on official Dutch sources, including factory inspectorate reports and statements by the Prime Minister, Kupers cited continued abuses and exploitation and urged that colonised labourers should be granted direct representation at future International Labour Conferences.[190] His critique was echoed by *Hetvolk*, a Dutch social-democratic newspaper, which condemned Butler's "far too optimistic account" as dangerously misleading and likely to be exploited by Dutch employers defending exploitative systems.[191] These criticisms suggest that Butler's report leaned heavily on official colonial narratives, particularly those of the Government of India and the Dutch administration, without adequate engagement with workers' perspectives. As a result, his account fell short of the critical distance expected from an independent international body like the ILO, underscoring the epistemic inequalities that shaped its knowledge production in colonial contexts, as discussed in earlier chapters. The episode also highlighted the risks of short, symbolically charged visits, which could end up reinforcing rather than challenging colonial labour conditions.

By the time of the Governing Body's April meeting, where Butler had originally intended to present a fuller analysis of his impressions from South and Southeast Asia, he instead announced his resignation as Director-General of the ILO.[192] Officially, his departure was attributed to personal reasons and his long-held desire to return to England. In reality, however, it was accelerated by a conflict with the French government regarding the appointment of a new

188 David S. Erulkar, in: ILO (1938): Minutes of the 82nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, February 1938. Geneva: ILO, 47.

189 For more information on the ILO's policies regarding colonial plantation labour, see Chapter 6.2.3.

190 Evert Kupers, in: ILO (1938): Minutes of the 82nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, February 1938. Geneva: ILO, 48.

191 N.N. (1938): Verdoezelde waarheid! In: *Hetvolk* (February 11, 1938). English translation by ILO, ILO Archives, G 900-3-56-2.

192 Harold Butler, in: ILO (1938): Minutes of the First Sitting (Private). Minutes of the 83rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, April 1938. Geneva: ILO, 4.

Director for the ILO's Paris office.[193] In June, the American John Gilbert Winant (1889–1947) was elected as Butler's successor and officially assumed the role in 1939. As one of his final official acts, Butler published an 80-page report titled *Problems of Industry in the East*, summarising his observations on labour conditions in British India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. The report addressed a broad range of topics, including labour legislation, working conditions, industrial relations, trade unions, wages, industrial productivity, education, health and general living standards.[194] Drawing on both personal observations and empirical data, the report offers valuable insights into Butler's view of colonised and racialised workers, his assumptions about race and development and his broader vision for labour in Asia.

In Butler's portrayal, "the East" stood at a pivotal moment of transformation. Its past, however, was cast in dismal orientalist imageries. He referred to "the immemorial passivity and fatalism of the Orient" and the region's "economic lethargy of the past centuries".[195] Throughout the report, "the East" and "the Orient" functioned as cultural and political opposites to "the West". These tropes were not confined to his general framing but also shaped more specific country analyses. For example, in his section on British India, Butler described the population as "until recently at any rate extremely conservative in thought and outlook" and unused to modern living standards. Village life, he wrote, was marked by "the most insanitary hovels" and a widespread unfamiliarity with "any form of modern social organisation".[196] Across the reports, notions of passivity, lethargy, fatalism and conservatism were positioned in contrast to Western ideals of progress and modernity, reinforcing a narrative of "Eastern backwardness", albeit one that, in Butler's view, could be overcome through external guidance and gradual reform.

According to Butler, one of the most crucial pathways towards modernity and progress in Asia lay in increasing workers' overall productivity. In several instances, Butler evoked the pervasive colonial stereotype of the "lazy native".

193 Elsmark, Ivan M.C.S. (2019): The Resignation of Harold B. Butler, Second Director of the ILO, 1932–38. In: Blog of the Section of Former Officials of the ILO. ILO Staff Union https://anciens-bit-ilo.org/en/2019/07/16/the-resignation-of-harold-b-butler-second-director-of-the-ilo-1932-38-ivan-m-c-s-elsmark/ (last accessed: November 28, 2024).

194 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO; simultaneously published in French as *Problèmes de travail en Orient*.

195 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 65, 68.

196 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 8.

His repeated references underscore the enduring influence of this trope in colonial labour discourse. For example, Butler noted that the low productivity of Indian workers was often attributed to climatic conditions, poor health and stamina, or even "the natural indisposition of the Indian to work regularly and unintermittently [sic]". While he acknowledged that each of these causes "contain[ed] some element of truth", he argued they failed to fully explain the problem.[197] Although Butler did not fully reject the stereotype of inherent laziness, he reframed the problem in socio-economic rather than racial terms. In his view, inefficiency primarily stemmed from "a combination of the factors of poverty, ill-health and illiteracy", conditions so pervasive that they appeared to be "as indigenous as the climate itself".[198] By rooting these challenges in material deprivation rather than racial essentialism, Butler departed from the older colonial paradigm that posited inherent and immutable inferiority among colonised populations. Instead, he stressed that these conditions could be improved through targeted social policy.[199] In particular, Butler identified public health as a priority. Poor health, he argued, underpinned many of the vices "so often alleged against him [the worker]", such as alcohol and drug use or "even plain laziness".[200] Here, his interpretation diverged from more openly racialised views still voiced during ILC debates, such as the 1928 statement by an Indian employer, who blamed workers' alcohol abuse on their supposed inability to handle money responsibly.[201] In contrast, Butler advocated for reform through government and employer cooperation in social welfare initiatives. While his language remained shaped by colonial discourse, his call for structural change marked a partial shift towards a developmentalist rather than strictly racial framework.

In Butler's vision for Asia's successful future, science played a pivotal role. He repeatedly praised the application of what he considered modern and scientific methods, particularly in the context of plantation labour— a form of expertise recently termed "plantation knowledge" by historians Ulrike Lindner and Nicholas B. Miller.[202] In Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, for

197 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 22.

198 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 23.

199 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 23.

200 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 28.

201 See Chapter 3.1.1.

202 Miller, Nicholas B. & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Introduction. Plantation Knowledge. Concept, History, and Research. In: Miller, N.B. & U. Lindner (eds.): Plantation Knowledge.

instance, Butler described a "triumph of science" that had led to a "superabundance" of natural resources.[203] These colonies, he argued, were "admirable example[s]" where scientific advancement had raised "the level of civilisation in the East".[204] This language clearly echoed colonial tropes of the "civilising missions". Yet, unlike earlier ILO debates, which focused on expert knowledge as exemplified by the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Butler's emphasis was less on individual expertise than on the broader role of science as a transformative force within colonial empires. For Butler, the early Dutch colonisers were "pioneers" who had overcome environmental obstacles and unlocked the economic potential of the colonies.[205] Medical science featured prominently in this narrative. Describing his visit to a "pathological laboratory" in Medan (East Sumatra), operated by a planters' association, Butler praised the "foresight and system" through which the Dutch had tackled disease and, in doing so, increased the physical resilience of the colonised population, ultimately raising their productivity.[206] In this framing, the primary function of science was not emancipatory but instrumental to enhance labour capacity. Scientists were exclusively white Europeans and science itself was imagined as inherently Western, with progress originating in the European metropole and being disseminated to the periphery.[207]

Another key theme in Butler's report was workers' education. In contrast to his view of science as a Western export, he conceded that education might also be delivered by local teachers. Yet his conception diverged sharply from the general notion of workers' education as "education of workers by workers

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Agricultural Colonization, Exploitation, and Exchange since 1500. New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.140649.

203 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 2.

204 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 48.

205 The complex role of ideas of agrarian development in the British Empire has been discussed by Joseph Morgan Hodge (2007): Triumph of the Expert. Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 90–116.

206 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 49, 2, Revised Programme of Director's Visit to the Netherlands Indies and India (n.d.), ILO Archives, XT 33/2/1. For the history of the specific laboratory that Butler visited, see Budi Agustono, Junaidi & Kiki Maulana Affandi (2021): Pathology Laboratory. An Institution of Tropical Diseases in Medan, East Sumatra, 1906–1942. In: *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 8(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1905261.

207 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 52.

for purposes they themselves determine", as coined by historians of the field.[208] Rather than a process of empowerment and self-organisation, Butler imagined education as a top-down intervention, beneficial to workers, but even more so to employers and colonial authorities interested in boosting productivity. This dynamic reinforced an underlying racial hierarchy with white European officials as benefactors and colonised and racialised workers as passive recipients. Education, in this view, was not a means of self-determination but an instrument of social engineering aimed at making labour more efficient and compliant.

While Butler prioritised general education and the expansion of literacy, he also stressed the need for technical training. This became particularly evident in his description of Indian workers, whom he imagined as emerging from villages "where life has moved sluggishly along grooves of custom and tradition for centuries" and suddenly thrust into "the vortex of factory life with its insistence on speed, precision and punctuality". Unsurprisingly, Butler remarked, such workers exhibited symptoms of mental strain when confronted with the unfamiliar demands of "mechanical civilisation". He further lamented that in most Indian factories, workers were "not the masters but the servants of their machines".[209] Here, Indian labourers were cast as passive and overwhelmed, wholly subjugated to the pace of industrialisation for which Butler deemed them mentally unprepared. Although similar observations had been made about the temporal and psychological upheavals of industrialisation in Europe and the United States, Butler's framing carried a distinctly racialised undertone. His narrative of cognitive mismatch between "Eastern" workers and "Western" machinery echoed broader orientalist tropes of lethargy and cultural backwardness.[210]

Taken as a whole, *Problems of Industry in the East* encapsulated the ambivalence of the ILO's colonial discourse on the eve of the Second World War. On one hand, Butler reproduced long-standing stereotypes of "native labour" and offered a sanitised account of colonial rule, particularly in territories such as

208 Merrill, Michael & Susan J. Schurman (2016): Toward a General Theory and Global History of Workers' Education. In: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 90, 5. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547916000259.

209 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 24.

210 The historical literature on changing conceptions of time in relation to labour and industrialisation is extensive and cannot be fully reviewed here. A classic and widely cited contribution, however, is Edward Palmer Thomas (1967): Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism. In: *Past & Present* 38(1), 56–97. https://doi.org/10.1093/past/38.1.56.

the Dutch East Indies, which he portrayed as models of enlightened administration. On the other hand, he acknowledged a dawning transformation in Asia, linking industrialisation to a broader process of modernisation. His emphasis on technical training, in particular, anticipated a future direction in the ILO's post-war engagement with Asia, foreshadowing the increasing centrality of vocational education and productivity campaigns in the region.[211]

While Butler's report received limited attention in the European press, likely influenced by the increasingly unstable political situation on the continent, the reception in India was markedly different. There, the ILO's Indian Branch Office launched an extensive press campaign, distributing approximately 2,200 copies of *Problems of Industry in the East* to members of the Indian government, provincial administrations, ILC delegates, employers' and workers' organisations, economists, scholars, social welfare organisations and media outlets. P.P. Pillai of the New Delhi office meticulously tracked the press reception. Between September 1938 and February 1939, he recorded more than ninety articles commenting on or referencing the report.[212] In most cases, however, the report was not reviewed in depth. Instead, Butler's observations were used as a foil to a contemporaneous publication by Thomas Ainscough, the British Senior Trade Commissioner in India. In his report, Ainscough warned against the INC's plans for industrialisation, predicting that India lacked the capacity to become a fully industrialised nation and should remain reliant on imported goods.[213] In contrast, Butler was portrayed in the press as a more liberal and sympathetic voice who endorsed India's industrial aspirations. His report was framed as supporting the INC's economic vision, implicitly challenging British economic dominance.[214] This positioning was not accidental. Correspondence between Pillai and Butler reveals that Pillai

211 Plata-Stenger, Véronique (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 117. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323, and, for an introduction to the role of technical assistance after the war, see Daniel Maul (2016): The ILO, Asia and the Beginnings of Technical Assistance, 1945–1960. In: Jensen, J.M. & N. Lichtenstein (eds.): The ILO from Geneva to the Pacific Rim. West Meets East. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 110–133. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137570901_6. See Chapter 8.

212 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (September 15, 29, November 3, December 15, 1938; January 12, February 2, 1939), ILO Archives, PS 650/1/01.

213 N.N. (1939): Indian Industrial Policy. Futile Warnings by British Economists. In: *The National Call* (January 19, 1939).

214 For a short analysis of Butler's position in comparison to other English-language writings on India's future economy, see also Silke Martini (2017): Postimperiales Asien. Die Zukunft Indiens und Chinas in der anglophonen Weltöffentlichkeit 1919–1939. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 344–346. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110464382.

himself anonymously authored and influenced some of the critical responses to Ainscough, using Butler's report as a rhetorical tool.[215] As a result, *Problems of Industry in the East* was not widely read as a paternalistic or colonial document, despite its embedded assumptions. Instead, it was utilised by supporters of the INC to underscore their economic planning ambitions with ILO approval. The more favourable reception may also reflect the fact that by the time of its publication, Butler had stepped down as Director-General of the ILO.

In conclusion, this chapter traced the evolving relationship between the unified Indian trade union movement and the ILO from its inception around 1920 to the eve of the Second World War. The ILO played a formative role in encouraging the establishment of AITUC, while also revealing the limits of the organisation's ability to engage with the anti-imperialist wing of the Indian labour movement. A major impediment to deeper cooperation was the spectre of communism, which colonial governments, especially the Government of India, instrumentalised to suppress regional solidarity and limit engagement with the ILO. Finally, Harold Butler's 1937/38 tour of South and Southeast Asia illustrated the growing importance of cultivating diplomatic relations and public image in Asia at a time when the League of Nations' authority was waning. Butler's subsequent publication, *Problems of Industry in the East*, revealed the persistence of colonial stereotypes alongside emerging elements of developmentalist discourse, capturing a moment of transition in the ILO's engagement with racialised labour. This chapter was built on the themes introduced in earlier chapters by showing how institutional practices, political constraints and epistemic hierarchies shaped the ILO's engagement with colonial contexts. The Indian case is particularly instructive because it brought together key issues explored throughout the study, such as tripartism under imperial conditions, tensions between reformist and revolutionary labour politics, and the ILO's contradictory positioning between knowledge production and diplomatic utility.

215 For example, Pillai anonymously wrote an article titled "Industrial Planning" (January 22, 1939) for the *Hindustan Times*, in which he responded to an article published in *The Statesman* a day earlier. P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (February 2, 1939), ILO Archives, PS 650/1/01.

PART 2

CHAPTER 5

The International Labour Office and Racialised Labour, 1940–1958

Chapter 5 focuses on the International Labour Office's engagement with colonial and racialised labour conditions between 1940 and 1957. It reconnects to Chapter 1, which traced how, under the leadership of Harold Atheling Grimshaw (1880–1929) and later C.W.H. Weaver (1887–1954), the Native Labour Section established itself as a key institution in the international production and circulation of knowledge on colonial labour in the 1920s and 1930s. Extending this trajectory into the 1940s and 1950s, this chapter builds on historian Daniel Maul's foundational study of the ILO's colonial politics during and after the Second World War, while expanding the analysis with a particular focus on the evolving role of race within the ILO's agenda.[1]

Alongside tracing the development of the Native Labour Section's successor, the Dependent Territories Division (later renamed the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section) within the broader context of the newly established United Nations (UN), this chapter also draws attention to a topic largely overlooked by historical research: the ILO's increasing interest in labour conditions in the Caribbean. As many Asian territories gained independence in the 1940s and 1950s, the "West Indies", as the region was then commonly called, emerged as a key arena for the ILO's work on racialised labour.[2] At the same time, in Africa, another key arena of the ILO's colonial labour policy, the ILO faced increasing resistance from colonial powers. Through the establishment of the Combined Commission for Technical Co-operation in Africa South of the Sahara (CCTA), these powers sought to coordinate labour policy on their own terms and restrict the ILO's influence, particularly in scrutinising exploitative practices.

1 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 31–118, 152–184. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

2 With this focus, the ILO followed larger trends of British imperial policy, as major strike waves had emerged in the Caribbean throughout the late 1930s, attracting imperial intention and leading to the passing of what became the British Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. Cooper, Frederick (1996): Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 57–58.

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Oscillating between these two fields of action, the Caribbean and Africa, this chapter traces the shifting geographic and thematic focus of the Office's colonial work. By the end of the period under consideration, the ILO's specialised treatment of colonial labour had largely been dismantled. In its place, a more regionally organised approach emerged, structured around geographic regions rather than formal dependency status. Alongside this institutional transition, the ILO's discourse on race and labour also shifted from an explicitly colonial frame to an increasingly developmentalist one. However, elements of earlier racialised logic persisted within the new framework, revealing the continuities underlying the organisation's evolving approach to postcolonial labour.

5.1 War and Post-War Studies of Colonial Labour, 1940–1947

Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, in 1940, the International Labour Office was forced to leave Switzerland. Following the French capitulation, neutral Switzerland found itself surrounded by Axis powers, making the continuation of the ILO's operations there increasingly untenable. After a series of negotiations, the organisation was granted permission to relocate to Canada. By September 1940, the ILO's leadership and a reduced number of staff had resettled on the campus of McGill University in Montreal, where the Office remained until 1947.[3] C.W.H. Weaver of the Native Labour Section also relocated to Canada. Due to the significant downsizing of staff caused by the move, his responsibilities broadened, shifting away from the earlier, more focused attention on colonial labour conditions to encompass a wider range of organisational tasks. The question of how colonial territories and labour conditions would feature in the ILO's future agenda remained unsolved. In response, Director-General John Winant (1889–1947), who served from 1939 to 1941, appointed Wilfrid Benson, a member of the Native Labour Section, to a post in London. From there, Benson monitored wartime colonial developments and advised the ILO leadership on the formulation of a post-war programme aimed at safeguarding the organisation's relevance and influence in the emerging global order.

3 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 32. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

5.1.1 Planning a Colonial Reconstruction, 1940–1944

When Wilfrid Benson (1899–1963) was stationed in Britain, he had already worked at the ILO for nearly two decades. After studying history, Benson joined the ILO in 1921 as a young man in the Diplomatic Division and, from 1927 onwards, served in its Native Labour Section.[4] Through this work and his personal political interests, he had developed strong familiarity with key official institutions in London, such as the Colonial Office and the Ministry of Labour. This made him a suitable choice to monitor wartime colonial developments from Britain and serve as the ILO's liaison. Like his predecessors Grimshaw and Weaver, Benson maintained close ties with the British philanthropic milieu. Although his official exchanges with the Colonial Office were initially limited, he soon re-established closer contact with a number of civil society organisations. These included the newly founded Colonial Bureau of the Fabian Society, the think tank Political and Economic Planning, which had focused since the 1930s on economic responses to the global depression, as well as the League of Nations Union and the Anti-Slavery Society.[5] While cooperation between the ILO and these groups had reached a high point in the late 1920s, it had waned during the 1930s as the Native Labour Section grew into a more autonomous actor within colonial affairs. With the wartime context now restricting international collaboration, these civil society organisations once again emerged as important interlocutors for Benson. Based in London rather than Geneva, he capitalised on his existing relationships and deepened his ties with this network. Early in his posting, these civil society actors proved far more receptive to his focus on colonial labour issues than the official government representatives preoccupied with the war.

During his initial months in London, Benson's primary task was to cast a wide net across British colonial circles and regularly report his observations to the ILO's temporary headquarters in Montreal. His dispatches included summaries of meetings, press clippings on colonial issues and general reflections on political sentiment in the capital. In a letter to C.W.H. Weaver, Benson

4 Wilfrid Benson to M. de Salis (January 18, 1930), ILO Archives, P-B 1167 (Pocket 1). A more prominent career of Benson within the Labour Office had been obstructed by Albert Thomas because Benson had published a novel about life in Geneva that had been considered a "gross disservice" to the Office in 1929. Ali, Aamir (2010): To Talk of Many Things. In: *Friends Newsletter* 49 https://webapps.ilo.org/public/english/friends/download/issue49/dec2010.pdf (last accessed: March 17, 2024).

5 Wilfrid Benson, The Maintenance of Native Labour Work in Great Britain (July 8, 1940) and Wilfrid Benson to C.W.H. Weaver (December 11, 1941), both ILO Archives, NL 1-25-3. See Chapters 1 and 2 for the early influence of these groups.

described his role as that of a colonial seismograph: "You may dislike the chattiness [of my reports]; it is, however, deliberate, as I think one of the services members of the staff here should attempt is to suggest general trends of feelings in this country – for feelings may prove more important than laws or thoughts".[6] Although his work in 1940 and 1941 remained primarily observational, this phase laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive vision of post-war colonial reconstruction.

As the ILO began preparations for a wartime International Labour Conference, scheduled for New York in 1941, Benson strongly encouraged the leadership to address the consequences of the war for colonised societies. He argued that the upheaval of war heightened the urgency of focusing on "economic and social affairs" in dependent territories, warning that neglect would only fuel revolutionary discontent. In his view, the wartime crisis exposed "many wartime colonial problems which we[re] beginning urgently to call for solutions instead of expedients", and anticipated that the coming years might necessitate "a practical need to replan colonial government in its widest sense".[7] Despite these warnings, the ILO's directorate in Montreal, removed from the day-to-day developments in European imperial metropoles, showed limited responsiveness. In his closing report to the 1941 conference, Acting Director-General Edward Joseph Phelan (1888–1967) outlined a reconstruction programme, but gave only marginal attention to colonial labour.[8] While Phelan acknowledged that wartime exigencies had often resulted in the suspension of labour protections in colonial territories, this was only mentioned briefly.[9] Instead, he framed the war as a catalysator for colonial industrialisation and emphasised the continued relevance of existing colonial labour conventions

6 Wilfrid Benson to C.W.H. Weaver (October 11, 1940), ILO Archives, NL 1-25-3.

7 Benson was largely inspired by the British Colonial Development and Welfare Act (CDWA) which had been passed in 1940. Wilfrid Benson, Report for May 1941, ILO Archives, NL 1-25. The CDWA will be discussed in more detail below.

8 Edward Joseph Phelan (1888–1967) was an Irish civil servant and the fourth Director-General of the International Labour Office. After studying Mathematics and Physics, he joined the British Civil Service. During the First World War, Phelan was assigned to the Ministry of Labour and was directly involved in the conceptualisation of what later became the ILO. For more information, see ILO (2009): Edward Phelan and the ILO. The Life and Views of an International Social Actor. Geneva: ILO.

9 Edward Phelan (September 11, 1941), in: ILO (1941): The I.L.O. and Reconstruction. Montreal: ILO, 66. The increase of forced labour in Africa during the Second World War is described by Babacar Fall & Richard L. Roberts (2019): Forced Labour. In: Bellucci, S. & A. Eckert (eds.): General Labour History of Africa. Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries. Woodbridge: James Currey, 108. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvd58sjm.11.

and recommendations.[10] Phelan expressed hope that these instruments would be incorporated into any future colonial charter arising from the post-war settlement and suggested that colonial social policy might serve as a future area of ILO activity.[11] Yet, overall, the report titled *The I.L.O. and Reconstruction* offered little indication of a fundamental reorientation of the organisation's approach to colonial labour. The ILO stuck with its pre-war course of envisioning moderate colonial reforms but never challenging imperial rule itself, and Benson's close observations from Europe were largely ignored in Phelan's report.

At the New York conference, however, the Office encountered a markedly more dynamic, and at times resistant, atmosphere. A key reason for this shift was the recent publication of the Atlantic Charter. In August 1941, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US president Franklin D. Roosevelt met to coordinate a common wartime strategy and issued the Charter as a blueprint for the post-war world. Among its key principles were commitments to peace, "self-determination" and the creation of a world "free of want and fear".[12] Crucially, the Charter gave new emphasis to the social dimensions of economic reconstruction.[13] As with Woodrow Wilson's earlier invocation of "self-determination" in his Fourteen Points speech (1918), this renewed language inspired actors advocating decolonisation and the dismantling of imperial structures.[14] Although Edward Phelan's reconstruction programme for the ILO directly referenced the Atlantic Charter, positioning the organisation as a cornerstone of post-war social and economic politics, it failed to centre colonial concerns. This omission drew sharp criticism, particularly from Black intellectuals tracking the conference and from delegates representing colon-

10 See Chapter 7.1.2 for Phelan's similar view on wartime industrialisation in Asia.

11 Edward Phelan (September 11, 1941), in: ILO (1941): The I.L.O. and Reconstruction. Montreal: ILO, 70.

12 The phrase "freedom from fear and want" was a loan from Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech held in January 1941. Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 41. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

13 Plata-Stenger, Véronique (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 278. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323.

14 Sherwood, Marika (1996): 'Diplomatic Platitudes'. The Atlantic Charter, the United Nations and Colonial Independence. In: *Immigrants & Minorities* 15(2), 135–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.1996.9974885, and Bonny Ibhawoh (2014): Testing the Atlantic Charter. Linking Anticolonialism, Self-Determination and Universal Human Rights. In: *The International Journal of Human Rights* 18(7–8), 842–860. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2014.951340.

ised regions.[15] During the proceedings, calls for reform came from Indian and Chinese delegates, as well as from Raden Hindromartono (1908–?), an Indonesian workers' adviser to the Dutch delegation. To demonstrate the cohesion of the Dutch Empire, the government, then in exile in London, had invited Indonesian advisers to participate in the conference. On behalf of Hindromartono, a resolution "concerning social conditions in colonial territories" was submitted, which called on colonial powers to introduce minimum labour standards, enforce minimum wages, safeguard freedom of association and establish tripartite arbitration boards in dependent territories.[16] When the resolution passed with broad support, the ILO received, for the first time, an explicit mandate to develop a post-war colonial programme.[17]

Building on this new political moment, the ILO spent the following two years articulating a vision of its expanding role within global reconstruction, one based on an "all-inclusive social mandate" that would position the organisation at the heart of reshaping the post-war world. Meanwhile, Wilfrid Benson intensified his efforts to formulate a comprehensive colonial policy. Drawing from his London experience and recent discussions within British civil society, he published an initial draft of his suggestions in the *International Labour Review*.[18] Over the next months, and with feedback from ILO colleagues and selected British experts, Benson developed a more detailed policy blueprint. At its core stood the principle that colonial powers bore a "social mandate" to improve the lives of colonised peoples, accompanied by a promise to transform colonial subjects into future citizens. In autumn 1943, as his influence within the Office grew, Benson formally relocated to Montreal, fur-

15 Among the public protestors were Harold Moody of the League of Coloured Peoples and the Pan-Africanist George Padmore. Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 45. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

16 ILO (1941): Record of Proceedings of the Conference of the International Labour Organisation, New York, 1941. Montreal: ILO, 182. For more biographical information, see John Ingleson (2014): Workers, Unions and Politics. Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s. Leiden: Brill, 274. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004264762, and Muhammad Yasin (2018): Kenali Pejuang Kemerdekaan Berlatar Belakang Hukum. In: Hukum Online (August 19, 2018) https://www.hukumonline.com/berita/a/kenali-pejuang-kemerdekaan-berlatar-belakang-hukum-lt5b795a980a093?page=all (last accessed: March 14, 2025).

17 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 46. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

18 Benson, Wilfrid (1943): A People's Peace in the Colonies. In: *International Labour Review* 47(2), 141–168.

ther cementing his leadership role in shaping the ILO's evolving colonial strategy.[19]

In preparation for the next International Labour Conference, the ILO staff in Montreal expanded Benson's earlier draft into a more comprehensive memorandum outlining the organisation's potential post-war initiatives.[20] When the conference convened in Philadelphia in April and May 1944, it marked a pivotal moment in the ILO's institutional history. The resulting "Declaration of Philadelphia", later integrated into the ILO constitution, called for a global programme of economic and social reform and introduced the concept of human rights, foreshadowing key elements of the United Nations' 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. Among its central points was the principle that "all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, ha[d] the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity".[21]

With this, the ILO explicitly endorsed the ideal of racial equality. Yet, despite its progressive rhetoric, the Declaration left colonial and imperial power structures largely intact and continued its colonial policy based on moderate reforms. It referred to colonial territories indirectly, pledging to "promote the economic and social advancement of the less developed regions of the world". Although the term "less developed" primarily signalled economic standing, it remained deeply entwined with colonial hierarchies and ideologies.[22] This moment also marked a conceptual shift in the ILO's framework. Where racial and cultural difference had previously served as the primary rationale for differential treatment, particularly in the discourse of "native labour", the emerging language of development now recast global inequality in economic terms. The new framing centred on supposedly universal capacities for growth, productivity and collective welfare, eschewing

19 Wilfrid Benson to Mr. de Vleeschauwer (October 13, 1943), ILO Archives, NL 1-25-0.

20 ILO (1944): Future Policy, Programme and Status of the International Labour Organisation. Report to the 26th International Labour Conference. Montreal: ILO.

21 ILO (1944): Declaration of Philadelphia. In: ILO https://webapps.ilo.org/static/english/inwork/cb-policy-guide/declarationofPhiladelphia1944.pdf (last accessed: January 22, 2025). Analysed in depth by Daniel Maul (2019): The International Labour Organization. 100 Years of Global Social Policy. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter; Geneva: ILO, 127–134. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110650723.

22 For an introduction to the history of the development idea, see Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy & Corinne A. Bernet (2022): The History of Development. A Critical Overview. In: Unger, C.R., I. Borowy & C.A. Bernet (eds.): The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 3–16. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356940-2.

racialised language but retaining many of its structural implications.[23] The ILO's transition from notions of "native labour" to "underdevelopment" thus reflected a broader transformation in international governance.[24]

In addition to the Declaration itself, the Philadelphia Conference adopted a recommendation on "minimum standards of social policy" in dependent territories. While this represented a formal step towards extending social protections to colonial contexts, the recommendation preserved the differential treatment of these territories. Notably, many of its provisions closely echoed Benson's vision for post-war colonial reform. However, the broad support for the recommendation, especially among Britain and other European colonial powers, reflected not so much a commitment to decolonial social justice than a strategic effort to secure US support for the post-war rehabilitation of their empires. By portraying themselves as modern and benevolent colonial administrators, these powers sought to shape international perceptions.[25] With US presidential elections taking place that same year, the British government feared that anti-colonial sentiment among the American public might pressure the United States into adopting a stricter anti-colonial stance. Supporting the recommendation was thus a diplomatic move aimed at placating the US government, on which British and European politicians increasingly depended.

5.1.2 Caribbean Workers in Britain, 1940–1941

At the same time that Wilfrid Benson was shaping the ILO's post-war programme for colonial reconstruction, he increasingly turned his attention to the Caribbean. Until then, the ILO's discussions of "native" or colonial labour had centred almost exclusively on Africa and Asia. While Latin America began to receive more attention under Albert Thomas and the United States formally joined the ILO in 1934, the Caribbean islands, situated between North and South America in the western Atlantic, remained largely absent from the

23 Halsmayer, Verena & Daniel Speich Chassé (2022): Economic Growth and the Object of Development. In: Unger, C.R., I. Borowy & C.A. Bernet (eds.): The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 25. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356940-4. See also Chapter 7.3.3.

24 This transformation was facilitated by the crises of the 1930s and the war. Plata-Stenger, Véronique (2020): Social Reform, Modernization and Technical Diplomacy. The ILO Contribution to Development (1930–1946). Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 282–283. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110616323.

25 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 80–81. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

organisation's agenda during the 1920s and 1930s.[26] The region's complex colonial history shaped its marginalisation in ILO discourse. Initially colonised by Spain and Portugal and later dominated by British, Dutch and French powers, the Caribbean had long been central to the transatlantic slave trade. Enslaved Africans were forcibly transported to labour on plantations across the islands, leaving a lasting legacy of racialised labour relations. At the same time, the Caribbean was also home to one of the most significant anti-colonial revolutions in global history: the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), which led to the overthrow of French colonial rule and the founding of the second independent nation in the Americas after the United States.[27] By the twentieth century, geopolitical control over the region had become a site of contest between Britain and the United States, both competing for hegemonial influence.[28]

Between 1934 and 1939, a wave of labour unrest emerged in the British West Indies.[29] In response, the British government established the West India Royal Commission, chaired by Lord Moyne, to investigate the causes of the disturbances. One of the key outcomes of the commission's work was the passage of the British Colonial Development and Welfare Act (CDWA) in 1940, which provided a new framework for welfare reform and development planning across the British Empire.[30] Wilfrid Benson, stationed in London to oversee colonial developments, closely followed these events. In his September 1940 report, he directly addressed British labour policy in the West Indies and briefly suggested that greater coordination of labour standards across the region's British territories might be desirable. In this context, he proposed the idea of a "regional British West Indian labour conference".[31] Beyond the

26 The area received no attention in the debates of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour or the ILCs. The first ILO article specifically mentioning the Caribbean dates back to 1938. See N.N. (1938): Labour Problems in the West Indies. In: *International Labour Review* 37(4), 492–502.

27 Heuman, Gad J. (2018): The Caribbean. A Brief History. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 77–87.

28 Heuman, Gad J. (2018): The Caribbean. A Brief History. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 145–154.

29 On terminology, see Catherine Hall (2003): What is a West Indian? In: Schwarz, B. (ed.): West Indian Intellectuals in Britain. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 31–50. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526137968.00007.

30 Cooper, Frederick (1996): Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 57–58. On Royal Commissions, see also Chapter 4.2.2 and Barbara Lauriat (2010): 'The Examination of Everything'. Royal Commissions in British Legal History. In: *Statute Law Review* 31(1), 24–46. https://doi.org/10.1093/slr/hmq001.

31 Wilfrid Benson, Report for September 1940, ILO Archives, NL 1-25.

influence of the new colonial act, Benson's growing attention to the Caribbean can also be traced to its strategic importance in Anglo-American war negotiations, a topic that featured prominently in his discussions with the British Colonial Office.[32] In a report to Montreal, he voiced concern that Caribbean inhabitants might be subject to racial discrimination by US personnel. Yet the issue of racialised encounters soon became even more relevant in the British context, as increasing numbers of Caribbean migrants were recruited to the United Kingdom as wartime labour.

Although the history of Caribbean migration to Britian is often popularly associated with the arrival of the HMT Empire Windrush in 1948, a large passenger ship carrying over one thousand British Caribbean migrants, this movement was not unprecedented.[33] Cities such as London had long featured sizeable Black populations drawn from across the British Empire and beyond. However, the experience of West Indians in Britain carried its own specific dynamics. As the sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall has argued, the Caribbean, shaped profoundly by histories of slavery, displacement and colonialism, represents "the first, the original and the purest diaspora".[34] Wartime migration thus placed Caribbean workers in a "dual diaspora", simultaneously being British imperial subjects and members of a global African diaspora. Though systematic statistical data was only collected from the late 1950s onwards, historical research has shown that several thousand Caribbean workers were recruited during the Second World War. Among others, these individ-

32 For example, in his reports to Montreal, Benson included his own analysis of the so-called "Destroyers-Bases Deal" between the two governments and its possible consequence for the Caribbean inhabitants. See Wilfrid Benson, Report for January 1941, ILO Archives, NL 1-25. For more information on the deal, see Charlie Whitham (2013): The Thin End of the Wedge. The British Foreign Office, the West Indies and Avoiding the Destroyers-Bases Deal, 1938–1940. In: *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 11(3), 234–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/14794012.2013.814382.

33 On the history of Windrush as a symbol see, for example, Stuart Hall (2007): Preface. In: Gilroy, P. (ed.): Black Britain. A Photographic History. London: Saqi: 5,7, Metthew Mead (2009): Empire Windrush. The Cultural Memory of an Imaginary Arrival. In: *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 45(2), 137–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449850902819920, and Huon Wardle & Laura Obermuller (2019): 'Windrush Generation' and 'Hostile Environment'. Symbols and Lived Experiences in Caribbean Migration to the UK. In: *Migration and Society* 2(1), 81–89. https://doi.org/10.3167/arms.2019.020108. The history of Black life in Britain is too vast to be reviewed here. A useful starting point is Hakim Adi (ed.) (2019): Black British History. New Perspectives. London: Zed Books.

34 Hall, Stuart (1995): Negotiating Caribbean Identities. In: *New Left Review* 209, 6.

uals served in the Royal Air Force and the merchant navy and participated in civilian wartime labour across Britain.[35]

In June 1941, Wilfrid Benson visited a group of 117 Jamaican workers recently brought to Britain to work in Royal Ordnance Factories and Shell oil refineries in the Liverpool area. His visit reflected a growing concern within the ILO about the working and living conditions of Caribbean wartime migrants. Benson's assessment of the scheme was cautiously mixed. One major issue he identified was the unequal pay between white and Black workers. Although officially attributed to deductions for travel allowances from Caribbean workers' wages, Benson noted that white workers frequently accused their Black colleagues of "undercutting" wages.[36] Similar racialised dynamics had previously been reported from other multiracial labour environments, such as by Harold Butler following his 1927 visit to South Africa.[37] Another issue was the question of "industrial efficiency". While Benson acknowledged that some of the Jamaican workers demonstrated "exceptionally high" skill levels, others did not meet the standards expected. Yet unlike their white counterparts, whose uneven performance was accepted as normal, Black workers were held to a stricter standard, judged not just as individuals but as representatives of their race.

Benson also expressed concern over the lack of contact between the Caribbean workers and British trade unions. The workers reported feeling excluded and unsupported by the unions. In response, Benson rhetorically asked whether it was "too much to ask that as a necessary British service of propaganda something should be done to correct misunderstandings in this field and to educate the West Indians in the value and methods of trade union organisation?"[38] Although his frustration was directed at the British trade unionists and administrators, Benson's remarks reveal a limited perspective. He did not seriously consider that the British unions may have failed these workers or that the workers' distrust could stem from direct experiences of racial exclusion. Nor did he acknowledge the existence of established labour activism in the Caribbean. For instance, British Guiana

35 Bourne, Stephen (2012): The Motherland Calls. Britain's Black Servicemen & Women, 1939–45. Stroud: The History Press, 11. For statistics on migration in the 1950s and 1960s, see Ceri Peach (1965): West Indian Migration to Britain. The Economic Factors. In: *Race* 7(1), 31–46.

36 Wilfrid Benson, Visit to West Indians in Liverpool Area (June 11, 1941), ILO Archives, NL 1-25.

37 See Chapter 1.2.4.

38 Wilfrid Benson, Visit to West Indians in Liverpool Area (June 11, 1941), ILO Archives, NL 1-25.

had experienced large waves of strikes and demonstrations since the late nineteenth century, though trade unions remained illegal until after the First World War.[39] In Jamaica, first traces of a labour movement manifested around the turn of the century and grew much stronger and more visible in the 1930s.[40] Despite this, Benson viewed British trade unionism as something to be exported to Caribbean workers. He dismissed their claims of deliberate racist exclusion, believing instead that they simply needed to be "educated" and taught to "comprehend" trade unionism.

A final aspect revealing important insights into Wilfrid Benson's racialising conceptualisation of the Caribbean workers concerned their use of leisure time. Approximately half of the Jamaican workers had been housed in a YMCA-run hostel named "West Indies House". Although its official opening only took place in October 1941, Wilfrid Benson could already visit the premises in June.[41] The remaining workers were placed in private lodgings. Observing the lack of space and recreational infrastructure in the hostel, in his report, Benson elaborated on the question of the workers' sexual life. Projecting a hypersexualised image onto the workers, he outlined three possible outcomes of their presence in Liverpool, one as consequential as the other. In the first scenario, the men would engage in homosexual intercourse with each other. This was, as the ILO officer concluded, to be avoided. Another possibility was a recourse to local white sex workers, which Benson associated with dangers of venereal diseases and a general "demoralising" effect. If, however, the men decided to pair with "decent girls", their relationship might result in the bearing of children of mixed race. This was seen as a contribution to British "race problems".[42] Overall, the intersection of Blackness and masculinity seemed to offer no easy solution.

This example effectively demonstrates how, throughout history up until today, Black bodies have been subjected to processes of hypersexualisation by a white patriarchal gaze.[43] The construction of Black masculinity as dominant and promiscuous became a problem upon the entering of the Black

39 Heuman, Gad J. (2018): The Caribbean. A Brief History. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 155–165.

40 Alexander, Robert J. (2004): A History of Organized Labor in the English-Speaking West Indies. Westport/London: Praeger, 23.

41 N.N. (1941): West Indies House. New Club-Cum-Hostel Opened. In: *Liverpool Echo* (October 4, 1941), 4.

42 Wilfrid Benson, Visit to West Indians in Liverpool Area (June 11, 1941), ILO Archives, NL 1-25.

43 hooks, bell (2004): we real cool. Black Men and Masculinity. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 63–79.

workers into a predominantly white surrounding. All of the three options Benson considered possible for the Caribbean workers' sexual behaviour mirrored beliefs about Black male sexuality already long existent in colonial discourse. For example, homosexuality in segregated spaces was not new. While there is no direct evidence of homoromantic or homosexual relationships between the Caribbean migrants, similar relationships were, for example, well documented among migrant workers living together in the restricted spaces of South African mining compounds during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[44] Given Wilfrid Benson's tenure in the ILO's Native Labour Section, he was likely aware of such cases.[45] His conclusion that homosexual behaviour was possible and needed to be avoided reveals nothing about the migrants' actual sexual acts but more about Benson's own assumptions about Black men's sexuality. As the historian Philippa Levine has argued, "differences among colonized peoples [and their sexual behaviours] were frequently minimized" in order to "maintain the necessary ruling gap between colonizer and colonized".[46] The colonial moral judgment of sex work has a complex history that cannot be explored here.[47] In the case of racial mixing, however, the Second World War marked a caesura in Britain's history. Before the war, most interracial relationships involved British colonial subjects or Chinese migrants and the white British population. Between 1942 and 1945, however, the arrival of large numbers of Black US servicemen introduced new dynamics. Unlike earlier migrants, these men had different ethno-racial backgrounds and socialisation.[48] The Caribbean migrants in Liverpool thus occupied a unique position: While their stay in the UK was temporary and likely to leave mixed-race children in the care of white mothers, their reception in Britain remained influenced by earlier colonial narratives.

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44 Moodie, T. Dunbar, Vivien Ndatshe & British Sibuye (1988): Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines. In: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14(2), 228–256. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057078808708172.

45 Official reports thereon had been written by the South African members of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour. See the biographies of Henry M. Taberer and Herbert S. Cooke in Appendix I.

46 Levine, Philippa (2003): Prostitution, Race, and Politics. Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 179.

47 Analysed in depth by Philippa Levine (2003): Prostitution, Race, and Politics. Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire. London/New York, NY: Routledge.

48 Caballero, Chamion & Peter J. Aspinall (2018): 1939–1949. The Second World War and the Early Post-War Years. In: Caballero, C. & P.J. Aspinall: Mixed Race Britain in The Twentieth Century. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 195–197. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-33928-7.

Wilfrid Benson's report on his visit to Liverpool revealed that, in the case of Caribbean labour migrants to the UK, elements of discourse familiar from previous debates—both within the ILO and in broader colonial labour politics—were combined. This occurred despite Wilfrid Benson's generally progressive stance on the treatment of colonised labourers and his open approach towards post-war colonial reforms within the ILO. Wilfrid Benson's characterisation of the Caribbean men as an "élite of colonial workers" underlined this duality. What earned them this designation was their partial divergence from entrenched colonial stereotypes regarding their productivity and trustworthiness. The fact that these divergences were considered as noteworthy, thereby elevating the workers' status to an "élite", demonstrates the persistence of deeply ingrained racial and racist perceptions of colonial subjects that shaped both Benson's as well as the wider society's perception of wartime Caribbean labour migrants.[49]

5.1.3 Doing Something for the "West Indies" in Return, 1942–1944

Apart from his visit to Liverpool, Wilfrid Benson also sought contact with members of the Caribbean diaspora in London. This is exemplified by an exchange between him and the Black British Guianese actor Robert Adams (1902–1965), who had migrated to Great Britain in the 1920s and was one of the founding members of the British League of Coloured Peoples in the 1930s.[50] After a personal meeting between the two, Robert Adams expressed interest in Benson's work and asked the ILO officer to supply a short text explaining the ILO's relevance for the Caribbean. Although it is not clear whether the text was ever published or distributed, the draft document written in May 1942 demonstrates Benson's awakened interest in the area but also reveals the ILO's previous negligence of the Caribbean. When asked to explain why the ILO, if intended to be universal in its approach, was largely unknown in the area, Wilfrid Benson excused the organisation by referring to the fact that only

49 Wilfrid Benson, Visit to West Indians in Liverpool Area (June 11, 1941), ILO Archives, NL 1-25.

50 The life and work of Robert Adams are severely understudied. One of the few scientific articles about him is Stephen Bourne (2001): Robert Adams and Orlando Martins. Men of Two Worlds. In: Bourne, Stephen: Black in the British Frame. The Black Experience in British Film and Television. London/New York, NY: Continuum, 72–80. On the League of Coloured Peoples, see David Killingray (2003): 'To do something for the race'. Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples. In: Schwarz, B. (ed.): West Indian Intellectuals in Britain. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 51–70. https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526137968.00008.

independent nations could become members. Still, he admitted that even the rare inclusion of colonised workers' delegates as advisers to the labour conference delegations were "not enough". Admittedly, the ILO needed to "find a way [...] so that all effective national agencies in production and welfare, governments, workers and management, m[ight] take a share in drafting and applying ILO decisions". Confronted with Adam's concern that the ILO might "exercise a kind of tutelage" over the British West Indies, Benson recited Franklin D. Roosevelt in promising that the ILO believed in the "right to freedom from want" also for non-self-governing territories.[51]

Finally, a few months before his transfer to Canada, Wilfrid Benson recruited a young Black man from British Guiana (now Guyana) for a temporary position as a research assistant at the International Labour Office's outpost in London. Cedric Oliver John Matthews (?–?) was first hired to conduct a small study on West Indian wartime labour migrants to Great Britain.[52] While nothing is known about his previous career, his engagement as a researcher suggests a background in the social sciences. At the centre of Matthews' study, loosely based on methods of ethnographic field work, were a group of forty-five young men, aged 23 to 30, who had recently migrated to the town of Bolton, Greater Manchester, England, to work in the war industry. The men stemmed from the Bahamas and Jamaica. This second ILO study on Caribbean labour migrants in the UK must be seen as a major caesura in the organisation's approach towards colonial topics. For the first time, the topic of racialised labour was studied by a Black researcher with a colonial background. It had needed twenty years since W.E.B. Du Bois' suggestion to hire a Black specialist to study "native labour" questions in 1921 that the ILO followed this request. It is also likely that C.O.J. Matthews was, overall, the first Black officer of the ILO.[53]

For Matthews' study, this meant that new insights could be gained into the workers' view of their life in Britain and their experiences within a predominantly white surrounding. Combining more nuanced interview techniques with a shared experience of racialisation and benefiting from the greater trust placed in him as a Black specialist, C.O.J. Matthews was able to centre the workers' perspectives more clearly than Wilfrid Benson had in his earlier report. According to Matthews, by the time of his study, the group of Carib-

51 Draft Interview with Wilfrid Benson (May 28, 1942), ILO Archives, NL 1-25-0.

52 C.W.H. Weaver to Edward Phelan (September 14, 1943), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1, and C.O.J. Matthews to A. Thompson (October 25, 1943), ILO Archives, NL 1-25-0.

53 This would need to be verified through an analysis of all personal files in the ILO Archives.

bean workers had generally settled well into life in Bolton after a year in England. This was facilitated in part by favourable local conditions. Matthews observed that in the North of England, "colour-prejudice [...] tend[ed] to be less marked than in the South of England". The workers themselves reported feeling broadly accepted within society, though they remained aware of their fragile position, as they continued to be seen as an "interesting if minor novelty". They recognised that this provisional acceptance could easily give way to hostility should larger numbers of non-white workers arrive. Their current standing, they noted, was partly secured by the fact that the labour of "semi-skilled men such as these" was genuinely needed, which for the moment helped to defuse tensions with the white workforce.[54]

By the time of November 1943, when the study was conducted, their future prospects had become a central concern of the workers. According to Matthews' report, the majority of Caribbean workers used their spare time to study at local colleges. They also expressed the wish to be temporarily released from their work contracts in order to train for post-war employment. Well aware of the Colonial Office's possible opposition against this prospect, Matthews used his report to support the workers' wishes by explaining the positive effects a granting of the workers' request could have. Bringing forward "the psychological force" of a support of the workers' educational interest, Matthews argued that the support of the British government could improve the Caribbean workers' attitude towards the colonial government and reassure them in "the sincerity behind official pronouncement on West Indian reconstruction".[55] By placing the migrant workers in the larger picture of post-war colonial reconstruction, Matthews thus used the power of his position in a predominantly white international organisation to speak up for the Caribbean workers' interests. This example demonstrates the shift in perspective that could be achieved when Black interests were directly represented in the colonial section of the ILO.

Half a year later, C.O.J. Matthews also transferred to Montreal. In conversations with C.W.H. Weaver and Edward Phelan, Wilfrid Benson had emphasised how, in his opinion, the colonial labour section of the ILO should "aim at the building up of a service staffed primarily by officers with a direct colonial or

54 Matthews, Cedric O.J. (1943): Visit to West Indian Technicians in Bolton, ILO Archives, NL 1-25-0. Also available online in: University of Warwick Digital Collections, Trade Union Congress, West Indies, 1937–1950, 292C/972/1/39.

55 Matthews, Cedric O.J. (1943): Visit to West Indian Technicians in Bolton, ILO Archives, NL 1-25-0.

indigenous background".[56] Benson thus supported both Matthews' further employment as well as the possible recruiting of more non-white ILO officers. Next to Weaver's and Phelan's hesitation towards this step, however, C.O.J. Matthews' early experiences in Montreal also show that the working conditions both within the ILO as well as in Canada at the time were not necessarily pleasant for Black persons. In February 1944, in a letter to C.W.H. Weaver, Matthews complained about the racist discrimination he experienced from other ILO staff who were refusing to grant him access to relevant information for his work: "[T]he ordinary informal channels of civilised social intercourse has [sic] been dispelled by the fact that my physical characteristics seem to set too great a strain on the stock of common courtesy which I have no doubt the staff normally displays".[57] A few months later, Matthews also reported to experience "considerable difficulties" in finding affordable housing in Montreal due to the "attitudes prevalent in North America" towards Black people.[58] While officers like Wilfrid Benson supported the diversification of the ILO's staff and acknowledged the increased knowledge that could be gained from staff with a "colonial background", they appear to have been largely ignorant of the consequences Black hires like C.O.J. Matthews had to face. Despite these sufferings and the impression of being underpaid in comparison to white ILO staff of similar responsibilities, for the moment, Matthews decided to stay with the organisation.[59]

5.1.4 Renewal of Colonial Contacts, 1945–1947

Over the next years, the Dependent Territories Division tried to re-establish close connections to all European colonial powers. For several years, Wilfrid Benson had repeatedly asked to be allowed to hire more staff for this endeavour.[60] In March 1945, the division gained a new member when the Belgian Count Pierre de Briey (1896–1984) joined the Office, first on a temporary basis, and from 1947 on as a permanent member. After studying law and philosophy, de Briey had become a member of the Belgian civil service and served as colonial administrator in the Belgian Congo (1928–1931; 1934–1937). After his return to Belgium, he was employed by the Ministry of Colonies.[61] In this

56 Quotation from a letter by Wilfrid Benson to C.W.H. Weaver (August 27, 1943) in a letter by C.W.H. Weaver to Edward Phelan (September 14, 1943), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1.
57 C.O.J. Matthews to C.W.H. Weaver (February 17, 1944), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1.
58 C.O.J. Matthews to Wilfrid Benson (June 22, 1944), ILO Archives, P 3526.
59 C.O.J. Matthews to Wilfrid Benson (June 22, 1944), ILO Archives, P 3526.
60 C.W.H. Weaver to Edward Phelan (September 14, 1943), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1.
61 Personal Notice Pierre de Briey (January 10, 1947), ILO Archives, P 3557.

capacity, in 1943, he had also been a recipient of Wilfrid Benson's memorandum on the ILO's future colonial programme and had found withering words for Benson's concept, when he "refused to be convinced by the details of the paper, ruling that trade unions were out of the question for 'primitive regions'" like the Belgian colonies.[62] While nothing has been recorded about the relationship between Benson and de Briey once the latter joined the Office, it is easy to imagine that their views on colonial politics clashed significantly and that de Briey's work in the Office was not welcomed by Wilfrid Benson.

Generally, the employment of a former colonial administrator to the Dependent Territories Division must be seen as a conservative turn in the International Labour Office's staff choice for colonial questions. While de Briey undoubtedly had demonstrated his capability for academic studies on colonial conditions with several publications on the Belgian Congo, his background differed considerably from that of former employees in the section.[63] Before the war, ILO officers like Harold Grimshaw, C.W.H. Weaver and Wilfrid Benson had joined the ILO as young men and made their careers within the different departments of the organisation, gaining knowledge and experience with colonial labour conditions on the way. Contacts to former colonial administrators were constant but still tied to the role of external "experts" used for in-detail consultation for the ILO officers. De Briey's employment thus was a novelty in the way that it provided an opportunity of post-colonial civil service employment for him, regarding his time as an administrator in the Belgian Congo as a useful qualification for his work in the Dependent Territories Division. For the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, comparable career paths have been noticed for British colonial officers who used their experiences as a stepping stone to take on roles as "development experts" in the period of decolonisation.[64] In 1945, however, the idea of wide-spread decolonisation, especially in Africa, was not yet viewed as inevitable as it would later turn out to be. Through de Briey's

62 Cited in Daniel Maul (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 73. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

63 De Briey, Pierre (1938): Discours du Comte Pierre de Briey sur le Gouvernement du Congo Belge. Brussels: Universelle, and Pierre de Briey (1945): Les Migrations des Travailleurs Indigènes au Congo Belge. In: *International Labour Review* 52(4), 370–387.

64 Hodge, Joseph Morgan (2010): British Colonial Expertise, Post-Colonial Careering and the Early History of International Development. In: *Journal of Modern European History* 8(1), 24. https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944_2010_1_24. For a case study that critically interrogates the narrative of a direct continuity between colonial and developmental expertise, see Eva-Maria Muschik (2018): The Art of Chameleon Politics. From Colonial Servant to International Development Expert. In: *Humanity* 9(2), 219–244. https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2018.0012.

location in Europe—while C.W.H. Weaver, Wilfrid Benson and now also C.O.J. Matthews resided in North America—his engagement allowed the ILO to re-establish contact with the Belgian and French authorities, which became one of de Briey's first tasks.[65] Similar visits were made by Wilfrid Benson and C.O.J. Matthews to Great Britain.[66] One of the central goals of these official conversations was the re-establishment of a committee of experts similar to the pre-war Committee of Experts for Native Labour.[67]

In 1946, Wilfrid Benson decided to leave the ILO. After more than twenty-five years in the Office, he felt that his surroundings offered little stimulus for actual changes in the treatment of colonial questions and the reforms he had envisioned. His new employer, the United Nations, offered more promising opportunities in the Trusteeship Department, where the work of the League of Nations' PMC continued under new conditions.[68] In December 1946, Benson wrote to Edward Phelan that, in his view,

> [o]ne of the most dangerous threats to world peace [wa]s that arising from the race tensions, the economic rivalries, the conflict of cultures, and the rise of new nationalisms to be found in territories which little more than a generation ago appeared to have no destiny other than that chosen for them.[69]

This statement illustrates the shifting perception of global politics in the post-war era. While the war itself had ended, the rise of nationalist and anti-colonial movements in areas still under foreign rule alerted observant international officers to the possible changes soon to come. Confronted with these developments, Wilfrid Benson admitted that, like most Europeans, he had long been unable to envision the open demands for self-determination by colonised peoples. As will be shown, not all ILO officers were as forward-thinking in their understanding of these impending colonial transformations as Benson.

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65 De Briey, Pierre, Rapport au sujet de la mission effectuée pour le Bureau International du Travail du mercredi 28 mars au samedi 21 avril 1945 (May 1, 1945), ILO Archives, MI 60-1.

66 Mission Order for Wilfrid Benson (September 22, 1944), ILO Archives, P-B 1176 (Pocket 1), Mission Order for C.O.J. Matthews (December 7, 1946), ILO Archives, P 3526.

67 See Chapter 6.

68 Pearson, Jessica Lynne (2017): Defending Empire at the United Nations. The Politics of International Colonial Oversight in the Era of Decolonisation. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45(3), 526. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2017.1332133, and Eva-Maria Muschik (2022): Building States. The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945–1965. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 26–60. https://doi.org/10.7312/musc20024.

69 Wilfrid Benson to Edward Phelan (December 27, 1946), ILO Archives, P-B 1176 (Pocket 2).

In the Office, Wilfrid Benson's position was succeeded by David Habershon Blelloch (1896–1985). Like Benson, Blelloch had been a member of the ILO since the early 1920s and had dedicated his entire career to the organisation.[70] Assuming the role of Chief of the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section, as it was now called, in March 1947, Blelloch joined the section during a particularly challenging time. On the one hand, the section was preparing to hold the inaugural meeting of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories, scheduled to take place in London from March 17 to March 26, 1947. This event marked the first major initiative following the Second World War and represented a crucial opportunity to reaffirm the ILO's significance in international colonial cooperation. On the other hand, the section remained understaffed and faced internal difficulties. Notably, C.O.J. Matthews, who had recently transferred to Geneva, expressed dissatisfaction with his working conditions. In early 1947, he repeatedly reported feeling forced to "agree indefinitely to do work generally assigned to a Senior Member of Section at a Junior Member of Section's pay".[71] Offering little accommodation to his subordinate, David Blelloch urged Matthews to "once and for all, decide" whether he would commit to the Office or choose to leave.[72] Ultimately, Matthews chose to remain, continuing his career in the ILO until his retirement in the 1960s. Over the following decades, he would become a central figure in the organisation's study of Caribbean and African labour.

5.2 Competition and Cooperation, 1948–1952

After the period of post-war rapprochement between the ILO and the colonial powers, the International Labour Office's Non-Metropolitan Territories Section attempted of to re-assert itself as a producer of knowledge and political actor in the field of colonial labour and social policy. In this endeavour, the main opposition came from the colonial powers and their inter-colonial networks. Historical research shows that inter-colonial cooperation existed throughout the period of high imperialism from the late nineteenth century.[73] Between the First World War and the Second World War, the newly

70 Edward Phelan to D.H. Blelloch (March 10, 1947), and Personal History D.H. Blelloch (June 3, 1952), both ILO Archives, P 760.

71 C.O.J. Matthews to Jef Rens (January 22, 1947), ILO Archives, P 3526.

72 D.H. Blelloch to C.O.J. Matthews (May 22, 1947), ILO Archives, P 3526.

73 Lindner, Ulrike (2011): Koloniale Begegnungen. Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880–1914. Frankfurt: Campus, 458.

established international organisations facilitated colonial cooperation, such as within the League of Nations' PMC and the ILO's Committee of Experts for Native Labour. At the same time, institutions like the International Colonial Institute (ICI) in Brussels operated largely outside these interactions.[74] However, there were significant personal overlaps between bodies. But while the PMC and the ILO's committee of experts aimed to regulate certain aspects of colonial life, they did not threaten the colonies' existence in itself.

After the Second World War, however, the colonial powers faced two new challenges that influenced their relationship with international organisations. First, the war itself, along with the rise of the United States and the onset of decolonisation in Asia, had exposed the fragility of imperial dominance.[75] At the same time, as historian Adom Getachew has argued, anti-colonial activists engaged in globally networked projects of anti-colonial worldmaking, offering a direct counterpoint to the structures of imperial worldmaking.[76] Second, the newly founded United Nations aimed to succeed where the League of Nations had failed in international oversight, posing a perceived threat to colonial rule. In response, colonial powers formed alliances to resist external interference, particularly from organisations like the ILO.[77] These tensions reveal complex histories of both competition and cooperation in debates about race and labour during a period when colonial authority became more precarious than ever.

74 For more information on the ICI, see Chapter 1.3.2. Other forms of imperial cooperation are examined in the contributions to Volker Barth & Roland Cvetkovski (eds.) (2015): Imperial Co-operation and Transfer, 1870–1930. London/New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic. A more conceptual approach to the notion of shared inter-imperial knowledge is offered by Christoph Kamissek & Jonas Kreienbaum (2016): An Imperial Cloud? Conceptualising Interimperial Connections and Transimperial Knowledge. In: *Journal of Modern European History* 14(2), 164–182. https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2016-2-164.

75 Frey, Marc (2006): Dekolonisierung in Südostasien. Die Vereinigten Staaten und die Auflösung der europäischen Kolonialreiche. Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 23–32.

76 Getachew, Adom (2019): Worldmaking after Empire. The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2–5.

77 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 148–150. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638, and Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo (2023): Les organismes inter-impériaux et l'internationalisation des politiques sociales (des années 1940 aux années 1960). In: *Études internationales* 54(1), 45. https://doi.org/10.7202/1110732ar.

5.2.1 Gaining Ground in Africa

When David Blelloch took over the position of Wilfrid Benson in 1947, a first attempt was made to gain grounds in Africa. Similar to the ILO's experience in other regions, such as South and Southeast Asia, official visits to the territories under study appeared to be the best way to gain insights into the conditions on the spot and to establish closer contacts with the tripartite constituents.[78] A first opportunity therefore seemed to emerge in the summer of 1947, when, during the ILC, a representative of the British government suggested that the Office would be welcome to visit Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and, if agreed by the respective government, possibly also Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). A plan to combine a visit of the two British colonies together with a visit to South Africa emerged and Jef Rens, Assistant Director-General, attempted to secure a concrete invitation on behalf of the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section.[79] Over the next months, however, the matter was postponed repeatedly and it became clear that the governments concerned had severe reservations to let the ILO into their territories. From internal correspondence between the governments, their fears become more tangible. For example, the High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa in London, George Heaton Nicholls, urged the British government to ensure that the ILO mission would not only consist of members of the Office, but also bring "responsible members of the Governing Body" who were "persons of standing, capable of viewing matters objectively and with due regard to their relative importance".[80] This already suggested a perceived lack of objectiveness on the side of the International Labour Office that needed to be balanced by colonial governments' delegates in the Governing Body.

A few months later, the South African doubts had even turned into a larger rumour, fearing that "the terms of reference of the Mission were to be widened to include general questions of native labour [...] to embarrass the Union". In this case, the Government of South Africa threatened to leave the ILO altogether.[81] The United Kingdom acceded to South Africa and promised to offer support to the South African position during the Governing Body discussion.[82] In the end, the visit to South Africa was postponed indefinitely, as both South Africa and the United Kingdom harboured significant reservations about

78 See Chapter 7.

79 Jef Rens to Ministry of Labour (June 30, 1947), Kew Archives, LAB 13/240.

80 George Heaton Nicholls to Philip Noel-Baker (October 31, 1947), Kew Archives, LAB 13/240.

81 Minute Sheet (December 2, 1947), Kew Archives, LAB 13/240.

82 F. Pickford to C. Costley-White (January 1, 1948), Kew Archives, LAB 13/240.

allowing the ILO to operate within their territories. A delegation composed entirely of Office members was perceived as potentially too critical, and the broader the ILO's scope of interest appeared, the less willing South Africa and the colonial authorities were to permit external involvement.

Over the course of the following year, South Africa underwent a significant political transformation. In the general election of May 1948, Daniel François Malan was elected as the new prime minister and quickly began to implement a regime of radical Afrikaner nationalism that would soon become known as "Apartheid".[83] By 1949, in a letter to the British governmental representative on the ILO's Governing Body, Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, the South African Secretary for Labour, Arthur D. Lee, remarked that "times and practices ha[d] changed considerably since then [the last ILO visit to South Africa in 1938] and much of the genuineness ha[d] disappeared from international negotiations".[84] While Lee did not explicitly reference the substantial political shift brought about by Malan's victory, his comment suggests a growing scepticism towards multilateral engagement. This exchange illustrates the increasing deterioration in the ILO's relationship with South Africa over the preceding decade. Even before the Apartheid system was fully institutionalised, South Africa's treatment of its Black population was already drawing heightened international scrutiny.

In response to the UN's and its specialised organisations' growing interests in Africa, in 1950, the colonial powers founded an inter-governmental committee to co-ordinate projects of technical co-operation on the continent. The Combined Commission for Technical Co-operation in Africa South of the Sahara (CCTA) channelled colonial interests against the United Nations' programmes and held its first meeting in 1950. In 1952, a permanent secretariat was established and soon a number of information bureaus in Africa and Europe followed.[85] Among others, they covered the inter-African study of health questions, offering a counter piece to the WHO, and problems of agriculture, a topic otherwise falling into the field of the Food and Agriculture

83 Afrikaner Nationalism describes an ideology influenced by Christian nationalism, cultural essentialism and racism that was used to justify the racial discrimination and establishment of white supremacy during the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Dubow, Saul (1992): Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of 'Race'. In: *Journal of African History* 33(2), 209–210. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700032217, and Saul Dubow (2014): Apartheid 1948–1994. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3.

84 Arthur D. Lee to Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans (March 22, 1949), Kew Archives, LAB 13/240.

85 Kent, John (1992): The Internationalization of Colonialism. Britain, France, and Black Africa, 1939–1956. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 265–267.

Organization (FAO) of the UN.[86] On questions of labour, a series of inter-African labour conferences had been set off in the late 1940s, corresponding to fears of a more regionalised approach of the ILO in Africa.[87]

Not wanting to be left out of the equation entirely, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section of the Office tried to be included in the colonial powers' discussions outside of the ILCs. At the end of 1949, the section had again seen a significant change in its directorate. After only two years of leading the section, David Blelloch stepped down from his position. The vacant position was filled by the Scot Robert Gavin (1905–?).[88] The choice of Gavin continued a process that had already begun with the employment of Pierre de Briey in 1945. In stark contrast to his predecessors in the leadership of, first, the Native Labour Section and, later, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section, Gavin was another external recruit for the Office. After his studies of law, Robert Gavin had worked for the West Indian Committee, a chamber of commerce for the British Caribbean. In this role, he represented colonial employers in several ILCs throughout the 1940s.[89] With Robert Gavin as the leader of the ILO's colonial section, therefore, the colonial powers appeared to have little to fear. The future course of the section was also influenced by the recent change in the ILO's leadership. With the inauguration of the American David Morse (1907–1990) as the new Director-General of the Office in 1948, the ILO began to focus more intensely on practical work. Morse's so-called Technical Assistance Programme (TAP), discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, aimed at helping its member countries, especially those considered to be still "underdeveloped", in expanding their systems of employment policies and vocational training in order to generate "development" and economic growth. Over the next years, it became clear that the colonial powers were largely opposed to technical help from the ILO in Africa. However, this new course still symbolised a new orientation towards economical questions.

When the colonial powers organised the second African Labour Conference of the CCTA in Élisabethville, Belgian Congo (now Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo) in 1950, it was evident that the ILO needed to secure an invitation. The previous conference had taken place in Jos, Nigeria,

86 Kent, John (1992): The Internationalization of Colonialism. Britain, France, and Black Africa, 1939–1956. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 269.

87 Cooper, Frederick (1996): Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 361–369.

88 Personal Notice Robert Gavin (November 1, 1949), ILO Archives, P 4758.

89 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 154–155. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

in September 1948, without ILO participation.[90] In an internal ILO memorandum, shared confidentially with the British Ministry of Labour, Robert Gavin outlined his vision for the future of the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section. Regarding the coordination of African labour efforts, he proposed the preparation of a series of specialised research papers to be presented to the colonial powers during the Élisabethville Conference. Gavin expressed hope that

> in this way the Office would be able to convince the Powers concerned and the territorial administrations, if conviction [wa]s needed, that the I.L.O. c[ould] make useful contributions to inter-territorial discussions on labour matters in Africa, outside the framework of International Labour Conferences, or indeed of formal regional arrangements.[91]

Gavin's proposal demonstrated his awareness of the colonial powers' deep-seated mistrust towards the ILO, particularly in relation to Africa. In the memorandum, he therefore outlined a potential role for the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section as a provider of information that would assist colonial administrations, thereby proving the ILO's usefulness. Simultaneously, this position would reassure them that engagement with the ILO would not necessitate the "formal [...] arrangements" associated with its institutional machinery. Gavin, perhaps more than anyone, understood the colonial powers' reluctance to be subjected to the critical voices of workers' delegations during the International Labour Conferences. His decision to share the memorandum with British officers during his visit to London further underscored his general alignment with British colonial interests. By providing the British Ministry of Labour with an outline of the section's future policy direction, he sought to cultivate their trust in his reliability.

In connection with their participation in the African labour conference in the Belgian Congo, between June and September 1950, Robert Gavin, Pierre de Briey and Cedric O.J. Matthews travelled extensively across Africa. Among the territories visited, though not always by all three together, were Kenya, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, Southern and Northern Rhodesia, Angola, French Equatorial Africa, Nigeria, the Cameroons, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia and French West Africa.[92] During the preparations for the trip, it had been crucial

90 Note on the Work of the African Labour Conference (n.d.), Kew Archives, CO 859/814.

91 Robert Gavin, Programme of Work of Office in Relation to Non-Metropolitan Territories (April 1950), Kew Archives, LAB 13/397.

92 Mission Order for Robert Gavin (June 6, 1950), ILO Archives, P 4758, Mission Order for Pierre de Briey (June 6, 1950), ILO Archives, P 3557, Mission Order for C.O.J. Matthews (June 6, 1950), ILO Archives, P 3526.

to reassure the colonial powers about the harmless nature of the project. In a letter to Arthur D. Lee, Deputy Director-General C.W. Jenks emphasised that the sole purpose of the visit was for the section members to "see something of local conditions in these territories for themselves" and to gather missing information on the Office's documentation of African labour conditions. Under no circumstances would staff members engage in any critical research.[93] However, an internal report by a delegate from the British Ministry of Labour indicates that, throughout the conference, colonial authorities remained wary of the ILO's presence in Élisabethville and, more broadly, in Africa. The report acknowledged Robert Gavin's fluency in both English and French, which facilitated communication between French- and English-speaking conference participants and provided "helpful [...] guidance" in translation and conference procedure. Nonetheless, the delegate also noted that Gavin's "interventions" during the plenary sessions were met with resistance. "Of course", the report conceded, "this feeling was not in any way made apparent in Conference, but could be sensed and was confirmed in subsequent conversation with delegates". Particular discontent was directed at the "substantial programme of visits by the I.L.O. observers" that took place around the months of the conference.[94] Against the colonial powers' will, with their visit, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section had thus gained a foothold in African labour politics.

5.2.2 Teaching the "High Traditions of British Trade Unionism" in Africa

Of the tensions described by the British Ministry of Labour, very little transpired in Robert Gavin's own report of his time in Africa. Although Gavin did not engage in critical research, he nonetheless undertook a small confidential part-time mission. On behalf of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), Gavin had been discreetly tasked with assessing the state of trade unions in the countries he visited. In a confidential letter to Ernest Bell, one of the TUC's leading officers at the time, Robert Gavin summarised his impressions of trade unionism in Kenya, Tanganyika and Nigeria. However, he emphasised that none of his observations should be officially linked to the ILO, since the CCTA opposed any critical inquiries.[95] While his report remained general

93 C.W. Jenks to Arthur D. Lee (May 18, 1950), ILO Archives, MI 144-2.

94 R. Brown, Background Notes on the Second Inter-African Labour Conference at Elizabethville [sic], Belgian Congo, July 1950 (July 29, 1950), Kew Archives, LAB 13/397.

95 Robert Gavin to Ernest Bell (November 7, 1950), ILO Archives, MI 144-2.

and lacked regional specifics, it provides valuable insight into both his and the TUC's conceptualisation of trade unionism in Africa.

Having spoken to several Black African trade unionists, Gavin generally portrayed them as unreliable and unsympathetic. Summarising the characteristics he most frequently encountered, Gavin complained about their "little real sincerity", their mistrust, their general tendency to "underhand manoeuvrings" and a "complete lack of respect for agreements".[96] When African workers engaged in organisation, Gavin assumed these processes were "rarely spontaneous expressions of general desire on the part of workers" but instead the result of secretive manipulations by "the brain of one or two men" who sought to exploit their positions of authority. These sweeping generalisations reflect both Gavin's and the broader British perspective's reliance on culturalist and racist essentialisms. Already in 1945, the Pan-African Congress in Manchester had discussed the question of emancipation of colonial workers, reaching a consensus that the workers required a distinctive alternative to the colonialist model of "responsible British trade unionism".[97] Similarly, in some of the territories Gavin visited, such as Kenya, radical Marxist trade unionists emerged in the 1940s, advocating revolutionary rather than conciliatory approaches to colonial governments.[98] In contrast, the British understanding of "right trade unionism" prioritised arbitration, eschewed strikes or protests and strictly adhered to established labour laws. For Gavin, most of the trade unionists he had met remained unwilling to regard such principles, remarking that "the high traditions of British Trade Unionism [we]re a closed book" to them.[99] The fact that the trade unionists Gavin encountered did not want to adhere to the rules set upon them by the colonial authorities could, in the view of the ILO officer, only signify a lack of responsibility and maturity and were not taken as serious political expressions.

Gavin's letter revealed that, despite his background as a representative for colonial employers, he held the British trade union model in high regard and viewed it as the ideal template for emerging trade unions in Africa. This per-

96 Robert Gavin to Ernest Bell (November 7, 1950), ILO Archives, MI 144-2.

97 Adi, Hakim & Mario Soares Neto (2022): Pan-Africanism and Internationalism in 1945. 'Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded'. In: *Revista Direito e Praxis* 13(2), 833. https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2020/49493i.

98 McCann, Gerard (2019): Possibility and Peril. Trade Unionism, African Cold War, and the Global Strands of Kenyan Decolonization. In: *Journal of Social History* 53(2), 353–356. https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz099. An overview over trade union development in Africa is given by Bill Freund (2019): Trade Unions. In: Bellucci, S. & A. Eckert (eds.): General Labour History of Africa. Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries. Woodbridge: James Currey, 523–551. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787445550.021.

99 Robert Gavin to Ernest Bell (November 7, 1950), ILO Archives, MI 144-2.

spective aligned with a broader British approach implemented since the 1940s. Between the First World War and the Second World War, the British TUC, employers and the state government had become increasingly aligned. During this period, leading TUC trade unionists ceased to challenge the fundamental relationship between labour and capital and instead cooperated with the government. Militant action was marginalised within the TUC. As a result of this collaboration, the British government enlisted the TUC's assistance in suppressing labour unrest in the British colonies, such as the Caribbean during the late 1930s. In July 1940, the two parties formally agreed to cooperate, signifying the TUC's full integration into the colonial system.[100] One strategy employed to shape colonial trade unionism involved scholarships for moderate colonial trade unionists to come to Britain to learn "proper" trade unionism. By 1942, members of the Colonial Office, the TUC and the Overseas Employers' Federation formed the so-called Colonial Labour Advisory Committee (CLAC). Under this scheme, British trade unionists were deployed by the Colonial Office to foster the development of "acceptable" trade unionism. After speaking with some of these TUC members, Gavin praised them for "doing a good job of work" and being "a great credit to the trade union movement which produced them". Nevertheless, he acknowledged the challenges they faced in Africa. According to Gavin, a central problem was the fundamental distrust these British trade unionists encountered due to their whiteness and their direct employment by the government: "In other words, [from the point of view of the Black workers,] Government is a white employer which cannot in any issue with which it is associated, either directly or as conciliator or arbitrator, be expected to give justice to a black trade union."[101]

As a solution to the unpopularity of white British trade unionists in Africa, Robert Gavin proposed sending larger missions of TUC representatives to lecture on "proper" workers' organisation without being directly employed by the Colonial Office. Additionally, he advocated for expanding the scholarship programme to bring more colonised trade unionists to Britain. Another idea was to make use of trade union leaders from other colonial territories,

100 Weiler, Peter (1984): Forming Responsible Trade Unions. The Colonial Office, Colonial Labor, and the Trades Union Congress. In: *Radical History Review* 28–30, 375–378. https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1984-28-30-367, Frederick Cooper (1996): Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 324–336, and Paul Kelemen (2007): Planning for Africa. The British Labour Party's Colonial Development Policy, 1920–1964. In: *Journal of Agrarian Change* 7(1), 84–86. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0366.2007.00140.x.

101 Robert Gavin to Ernest Bell (November 7, 1950), ILO Archives, MI 144-2.

such as the Caribbean, and show them off as role models. Names Gavin had in mind included Grantley Adams and Ralph Mentor, whom he regarded as examples of "intelligent development of colonial trade unionism".[102] Grantley Herbert Adams (1898–1971), a Barbadian lawyer, co-founded the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) and the Barbados Workers' Union (BWU) and later served as prime minister of the short-lived West Indies Federation. He embodied a liberal model of trade unionism in collaboration with the British Labour government.[103] Ralph Mentor (?–?) was a trade unionist associated with Trinidad and Tobago's Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (OWTU).[104] Gavin's suggestion of employing moderate Caribbean trade unionists as intermediaries in British Africa stemmed from the recognition that race played a significant role in fostering trust and understanding. While TUC officers struggled due to their whiteness and their association with the British government, selected Caribbean trade unionists could serve as cultural and ideological bridges for advancing British labour ideals. A decade later, this approach—though likely not implemented due to Gavin's advocacy but rather reflecting a broader strategic vision—was realised when a Trinidadian trade unionist was sent to Nigeria on behalf of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). This case illustrates how the historical lineage of many Caribbean people, descended from enslaved Africans, provided a shared cultural and historical framework that facilitated communication between Caribbean and African workers and trade unionists.[105] In the face of global anti-colonial unrest, the incorporation of African industrial workers into an organised and mostly apolitical system of labour relations was a top priority for British interests in Africa, to which Gavin contributed with his covert research for the TUC in 1950.

102 Robert Gavin to Ernest Bell (November 7, 1950), ILO Archives, MI 144-2.

103 Roberts, Pamela (2013): Black Oxford. The Untold Stories of Oxford University's Black Scholars. Oxford: Signal Books, 49–53, and Robert J. Alexander (2004): A History of Organized Labor in the English-Speaking West Indies. Westport/London: Praeger, 247–271.

104 Bolland, O. Nigel (1995): On the March. Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934–39. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 99, 105.

105 James, Leslie (2019): 'Essential Things Such as Typewriters'. Development Discourse, Trade Union Expertise, and the Dialogues of Decolonization between the Caribbean and West Africa. In: *Journal of Social History* 53(2), 381. https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz100.

5.2.3 Labour Studies in the Caribbean

In contrast to its slow progress in Africa, due to the colonial powers' reluctance to welcome the ILO on the continent, the Office was more successful in establishing itself in the Caribbean. This success can be largely attributed to the efforts of C.O.J. Matthews, who, between 1946 and 1952, travelled to the region four times and spent a total of ten months conducting research on labour conditions. During his travels, Matthews visited Barbados, British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the American Virgin Islands, Guadeloupe and Surinam. Similar to the CCTA in Africa, an inter-imperial organisation overseeing social and economic developments had been established in the Caribbean during the 1940s. What began as the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission in 1942 was transformed in 1946 into the Caribbean Commission, now also encompassing France and the Netherlands.[106] The commission held biannual conferences, at which C.O.J. Matthews represented the ILO from the second West Indian Conference of 1946 onwards.[107] Unlike the ILO's contested standing in Africa, colonial authorities in the Caribbean appeared neutral towards Matthews' presence, enabling him to conduct independent research during his travels. This work culminated in the 1952 publication of *Labour Policies in the West Indies*, a comprehensive study for which Matthews was the principal author, with research assistance from the Dutch ILO officer K.L. Versteeg.

Primarily, the volume functioned as a compilation of existing labour laws across various Caribbean territories, serving a documentary goal by consolidating all existing information. However, its introduction and conclusion provide critical insights into C.O.J. Matthews' personal perspectives on labour conditions and race in the Caribbean. In certain aspects, his views diverged from other ILO publications of the time. This distinction was largely attributable to Matthews' unique position as a Black researcher from British Guiana. For instance, when introducing the question of "race relations" to the readers, Matthews observed that "much ha[d] been written about race relations in the British West Indian area" in the past, but little of it "[wa]s based on adequate experience".[108] His publication sought to rectify this deficiency.

106 Bough, James A. (1949): The Caribbean Commission. In: *International Organization* 3(4), 643–655, and Spencer Mawby (2012): Ordering Independence. The End of Empire in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1947–1969. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 33. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137262899.

107 C.O.J. Matthews to D.H. Blelloch and Henri Reymond (August 27, 1947), ILO Archives, P 3526.

108 ILO (1952): Labour Policies in the West Indies. Geneva: ILO, 20.

One of the volume's most significant contributions was its examination of the historical conditions and developments that shaped and perpetuated racial inequalities in the Caribbean labour sphere. In discussing trade union organisation, Matthews underscored the parallels with European trade unions, thereby fostering a sense of connection between his predominantly European readership and the Caribbean labour movement. As elsewhere in the world, he noted, Caribbean unions sought to improve wages and working conditions through collective action and encompassed a broad political spectrum, with factions leaning both to the right and to the left. However, a crucial distinction was the political dependence of Caribbean workers. The lack of political autonomy, coupled with a history of racial discrimination, manifesting, for example, in the preferential treatment of white Europeans and the exclusion of Black workers from many public service, commercial and industrial positions, offered essential context for understanding the contemporary status of Caribbean labour.[109] Matthews explained:

> But political dependence and the fact that a large segment of the employing class is associated in the minds of the workers with a ruling caste, no less than the narrow range of leadership available in small communities, had led in many cases to close relationships between the political and industrial aspects of British West Indian labour movements.[110]

This interdependence between political and industrial spheres was frequently used to discredit emerging trade unions across Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. By labelling them as "too political", colonial powers and even some ILO officers sought to regulate their activities, delineating what was regarded as acceptable trade unionism within the tripartite system while restricting actions that fell beyond this scope.[111] Matthews, on the other hand, demonstrated an understanding of the intrinsic link between Caribbean trade union organisation and anti-colonial agitation. His analysis made clear that the trade unions' political orientation was a direct consequence of the systematic racial inequalities experienced by Black workers among a white elite. Only a nuanced understanding of these historical injustices, Matthews argued, could provide a balanced perspective on the position of workers in the Caribbean.

109 ILO (1952): Labour Policies in the West Indies. Geneva: ILO, 21.
110 ILO (1952): Labour Policies in the West Indies. Geneva: ILO, 134.
111 See Chapter 7.1.2.

Matthews also addressed another racialised trope within colonial labour discourse—the question of productivity. Citing reports from commercial boards such as the Sugar Industry Commission of Trinidad and the Economic Policy Committee of Jamaica, he highlighted the persistence of stereotypes portraying Caribbean workers as exhibiting "low productivity" and "voluntary absenteeism".[112] Historically, colonial authorities had justified these claims through racial and cultural essentialism, perpetuating the enduring stereotype of the "lazy native". In contrast, C.O.J. Matthews problematised these critiques, situating them within their broader socio-historical context. He pointed out that, historically, full-time employment opportunities in the Caribbean had been scarce, with a significant increase in demand for labour occurring only during the Second World War. Given this context, Matthews found it unreasonable to expect workers to rapidly discard "the habits of, perhaps, a lifetime". Additionally, he emphasised the detrimental effects of poor living conditions, including malnutrition and inadequate housing, on workers' productivity. Nonetheless, he noted that the expatriation of Caribbean workers during the war had shown their capacity to perform on par with their white North American and European colleagues.[113]

Upon its publication, *Labour Policies in the West Indies* received reviews in several economic journals but did not provoke significant debate.[114] Among the generally favourable assessments, a review by the US economist Frank T. de Vyver was particularly revealing in its portrayal of Caribbean workers. While de Vyver acknowledged the merits of the ILO study, his review repeatedly referred to Caribbean workers as "natives", a term conspicuously avoided by Matthews. More significantly, the North American economist asserted that the "attempt to transplant the mature collective bargaining of England or the United States to more primitive cultures" had been "a failure", thereby disregarding Matthews' nuanced historical analysis of Caribbean trade unionism.[115] This example demonstrates the conflicting perspectives at play: while C.O.J. Matthews' study sought to challenge racist misconceptions, de Vyver's review illustrated the persistence of colonial stereotypes about Black labourers, even in the face of deliberate counter-narratives. Despite the resistance

112 ILO (1952): Labour Policies in the West Indies. Geneva: ILO, 189.

113 ILO (1952): Labour Policies in the West Indies. Geneva: ILO, 190.

114 N.N. (1952): Review of Labour Policies in the West Indies. In: *Economica* 19(76), 461, Louis J. Ducoff (1952): Review of: Mathews [sic] and Versteeg: Labour Policies in the West Indies. In: *Rural Sociology* 17(1), 294, and Simon Rottenberg (1953): Review of Labour Policies in the West Indies. In: *ILR Review* 6(2), 279–280.

115 De Vyver, Frank T. (1952): Review of Labour Policies in the West Indies. In: *Southern Economic Journal* 19(2), 280–281.

of his white contemporaries to deconstruct entrenched colonial biases, C.O.J. Matthews' *Labour Policies in the West Indies* is a remarkable historical source for future studies of labour in the Caribbean. It offers a crucial perspective on the ILO's colonial activities in the 1950s and highlights the profound impact that the inclusion of a Black perspective could bring to discussions of Caribbean labour.

5.3 Towards Africa as a Region, 1953–1958

Following the publication of *Labour Policies in the West Indies* as a contribution to studies of labour policy in the Caribbean, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section progressively focused its efforts on Africa. As it sought to establish itself as a key institution on the continent, it increasingly competed with the CCTA. Under Robert Gavin's leadership, the section adopted a strategic approach that highlighted its potential as a collector and disseminator of information and knowledge about colonial labour, mirroring the Office's earlier activities in the Caribbean. Similarly, these efforts culminated in the preparation of a comprehensive study on African labour conditions. With its publication in 1958, the specialised treatment of colonial or "non-metropolitan" territories within the Office formally ended. This shift towards recognising Africa as a distinct region, akin to the Office's regional frameworks in Asia or Latin America, rather than as characterised by the territories' dependence on European colonial powers, reflected the undeniable reality of decolonisation on the continent.

5.3.1 A Second Scramble for Africa?

In the following years, a dynamic interplay of steps of competition and cooperation between the ILO and the CCTA, consisting of the colonial powers, in Africa persisted. At the centre of the contest lay the question of which organisation would assert primary authority over labour-related information on the continent. While parallel structures of conferences had emerged—where the CCTA organised Inter-African Labour Conferences with the ILO participating as observers, while the ILO maintained a body of experts advising its Governing Body and International Labour Conferences on colonial matters—both institutions vied for influence on the ground. For the ILO, establishing a permanent presence in Africa was crucial for positioning itself as an independent body for labour research and development, free from direct colonial oversight. Such an initiative, however, was met with resistance from colonial authorities, who perceived it as a direct challenge to their waning control over African

labour politics. The British government, in particular, expressed concern following the 1950 Élisabethville Conference, inquiring about potential ILO plans to establish a "Regional (Field) Office" in Africa. It underlined the importance of keeping the ILO's Non-Metropolitan Territories Section excluded from any regional arrangements.[116] Simultaneously, the CCTA pushed forward with its own initiative, seeking to establish an Inter-African Labour Institute.[117] This struggle for institutional dominance, entangled with the ILO's Committee of Experts for Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories, kept the question of direct ILO representation in Africa unresolved until the late 1950s.[118]

Despite these tensions, the ILO maintained a regular presence at the Inter-African Labour Conferences, leveraging its participation to conduct extensive study tours across the continent. At the third conference, held in Bamako, French Sudan (now Mali) in January 1953, Robert Gavin deliberately refrained from preparing documents to influence the proceedings through ILO interventions, having learned from previous experience that such actions were unwelcome to the CCTA.[119] Instead, he used the opportunity to expand the ILO's networks in Africa. Gavin was accompanied by Louis Mondet, a French member of the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section who had gained prior experience as a colonial labour inspector in French Togoland, reinforcing the ILO's connections to colonial administrations and repeating the pattern of employing former colonial officials.[120] Two years later, at the Fourth Inter-African Labour Conference in Beira, Mozambique, Gavin took advantage of his presence in Africa to visit Madagascar, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, Mozambique and Sudan.[121] In these institutional efforts to expand the ILO's influence in Africa, Robert Gavin emerged as a particularly intriguing intermediary, whose personal and professional profile remain difficult to fully discern. Prior to joining the ILO, Gavin's career had been closely tied to British colonial circles and their economic interests. Yet, under his leadership, the Office increasingly sought to assert its presence in colonial territories, often in ways that ran counter to the preferences of the colonial powers themselves.

116 M.D. Tennant to Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans (August 2, 1950), Kew Archives, LAB 13/397.

117 Draft Constitution of an Inter-African Labour Institute (July 30, 1951), Kew Archives, LAB 13/863.

118 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 160–165. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

119 Robert Gavin to C.W. Jenks and David Morse (January 8, 1953), ILO Archives, MI 144-4.

120 Robert Gavin to C.W. Jenks and David Morse (January 8, 1953), ILO Archives, MI 144-4.

121 Mission Order for Robert Gavin (July 7, 1955), ILO Archives, P 4758.

While the ILO still lagged behind the UN and its specialised agencies in terms of direct engagement and anti-colonial assertiveness, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section under Gavin gradually positioned itself as a more active player on the ground, at times challenging colonial policy from within the international system.

Robert Gavin's visits to Africa were complemented by the appointment of a new member of the section. In 1951, for the first time, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section recruited an African officer. Solomon Athanasius James Pratt (1921–2017) was a figure largely overlooked in historical research on the ILO. Born in Bathurst (now Banjul), Gambia, and raised in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Pratt initially worked for the Sierra Leone Department of Agriculture before enrolling in Fourah Bay College in Freetown. He later pursued studies in London and Oxford, earning an MSc in Economics and a diploma in Agricultural Economics.[122] After graduation, he returned to government service before responding to a job advertisement circulated by the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section in the colonies.[123] With Pratt, the ILO gained a highly educated officer with first-hand colonial experience diametrically opposed to the experiences of de Briey, Gavin and Mondet. In 1954, S.A.J. Pratt undertook visits to the French Cameroons, the Gold Coast and Nigeria, further broadening the ILO's engagement with African labour on the ground.[124]

With its visits to Africa in the 1950s, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section sought to compile a comprehensive study on African labour conditions, mirroring the approach taken previously in the Caribbean. Inspired by the 1952 publication of *Labour Policies in the West Indies*, initial plans in 1952 envisioned a study focused on West African labour.[125] This reflected the broader trend in which strategies developed for the Caribbean were transplanted to Africa, particularly in response to the ILO's limited success in securing cooperation with the CCTA. Where direct intervention, such as the implementation of the ILO's TAP, was obstructed by the colonial powers, the Office instead reinforced its role as a collector and disseminator of information and knowledge about colonial labour. Over time, however, the scope of the

122 Personal Notice S.A.J. Pratt (March 14, 1952), ILO Archives, P 5283-A, and Abdul Rashid Thomas (2018): State Funeral for the late Solomon Athanasius James Pratt. In: *The Sierra Leone Telegraph* (January 19, 2018) https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/state-funeral-for-the-late-solomon-athanasius-james-pratt-saj-pratt/ (last accessed: March 4, 2025).

123 Robert Gavin to C.W. Jenks (January 11, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and S.A.J. Pratt to David Morse (July 21, 1951), ILO Archives, P 5283.

124 Mission Order for S.A.J. Pratt (February 15, 1954), ILO Archives, P 5283.

125 Robert Gavin to P.M. Henry (November 26, 1952), ILO Archives, MI 144-4.

enquiry expanded, culminating in the production of a comprehensive volume of labour laws and conditions across the entire African continent.

5.3.2 The *African Labour Survey* (1958). A Milestone in the Office's Work

Following the Governing Body's official approval of a major study on African labour, Robert Gavin began preparations in the spring of 1956, hiring several secretaries as well as two British and French former colonial officials to assist with the final stages of the volume.[126] Little is known about the background of the British expert, F.W. Carpenter, while the French expert, R. Pochon, had previously worked as a labour inspector for the French Colonial Ministry.[127] Gavin's work was accompanied by extensive consultations with colonial administrations in Britain, Portugal, Belgium and France, which he visited throughout 1956.[128] Before publication, the draft was circulated among relevant UN organisations and the Inter-African Labour Institute of the CCTA.[129] These extensive consultations underscore the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section's intent to produce a study that reflected the Office's collaboration with the colonial powers. Despite its intensified competition over labour policy in Africa in preceding years, the study sought to reaffirm the ILO's defining role as an independent body specialised in the collection of labour information and research while maintaining diplomatic relations with the key stakeholders.

In 1958, the *African Labour Survey*, a 700-page volume, was published by the Office as an attempt to provide a comprehensive assessment of labour and social policies across Africa. Its sixteen chapters covered a broad range of subjects, including economic and social conditions, land ownership, manpower and employment, productivity, technical and vocational training, industrial relations, wage policies, recruitment, labour contracts, conditions of work, occupational health and safety, social security, housing, labour administration and inspection as well as the application of ILO standards. The table of con-

126 N.M.T. Division, Staff requisitions for temporary appointment (April 17, 1956), and N.M.T. Division, Staff requisitions for temporary appointment (July 24, 1956), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1.

127 N.M.T. Division, Staff requisitions for temporary appointment (August 7, 1956), and N.M.T. Division, Staff requisitions for temporary appointment (October 16, 1956), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1.

128 Mission Orders for Robert Gavin (August 28, 1956), ILO Archives, P 4758.

129 C.W. Jenks to R.A. Métall (November 20, 1957), C.W. Jenks to T. Haighton (November 22, 1957), P.P. Fano to B. Aleksander (November 22, 1957), and P.P. Fano to A.G. Orbaneja (November 22, 1957), all ILO Archives, NL 1005.

tents reflected the themes explored by both the pre-war and post-war committees of experts, the ILCs and the ILO's post-war shift towards technical assistance, manpower studies and research on productivity. Some chapters provided general overviews before being subdivided by territory, including both colonised territories and independent states such as the Union of South Africa, Ghana and Sudan.

The survey drew on information collected during the Office's missions to Africa—reportedly covering thirty-four countries and territories in "Africa South of the Sahara"—as well as data provided by the colonial governments, the CCTA and a vast body of existing research. The bibliography at the end of the book reflected the state of scholarly work in the 1940s and 1950s, predominantly in English and French, with some Portuguese sources. Notably, the introduction paid special tribute to early twentieth-century Anglophone colonial studies, including Sidney Olivier's *White Capital and Coloured Labour*, Frederick Lugard's *The Dual Mandate* and American R.L. Buell's *The Native Problem in Africa*.[130] It also acknowledged Lord Hailey's *An African Survey* (1938), which had formed the basis for British colonial reforms under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in the 1940s.[131] This reliance on British colonial scholarship highlights the continued dominance of British imperial perspectives in shaping the ILO's view on colonial policies throughout the research period.

One of the most significant differences to earlier colonial discussions and publications, including the work of the former Native Labour Section and the first committee of experts, was the clear rejection of biological definitions of race. It was explicitly stated that no "initial incapacity of the African" for labour could be attributed to a "difference in hereditary biological constitution between him and members of any other racial group".[132] Racial distinctions were no longer considered a valid explanation for disparities in work behaviour. Similarly, the longstanding notion that white people were inherently less suited to working in tropical climates, previously debated as part of the "acclimatisation question", was dismissed. It was observed that "physiologically[,] the African [wa]s no better able to cope with the heat and humidity than [wa]s the European".[133]

130 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 6, and Raymond Leslie Buell (1928): The Native Problem in Africa. Vol. I & II. New York, NY: The MacMillan Company.

131 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 6, and Lord Hailey (1938): An African Survey. A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara. London: Oxford University Press.

132 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 143.

133 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 148.

Instead, cultural differences emerged as the primary framework for explaining variations in labour patterns.[134] A dichotomy was drawn between industrial urban workers, adapting to "Western" lifestyles within a capitalist economy, and rural villagers, whose livelihoods remained tied to community life, agriculture and subsistence farming. These two ways of life were presented as fundamentally incompatible, with the persistence of rural ties hindering the development of industrial labour.[135] African workers were portrayed as inevitably shaped and constrained by their origins, leaving little space for individual agency:

> In a world in which everything was ordained, in which ritual explanations existed for everything, in which the intervention of the spirit world coloured all life, a sense of personal responsibility obviously could not be highly developed. Discipline in and regularity of work did not require emphasis in tribal conditions.[136]

According to the authors, the perceived lack of "personal responsibility" manifested itself primarily in patterns of "absenteeism", which, they argued, could only be addressed through greater education on "the employer-worker relationship in modern society".[137] Still, the report also acknowledged that factors such as ill-health and malnutrition contributed to the smaller output of the workers.[138] These explanations closely mirrored discourses on Indian labourers and on absenteeism among Caribbean workers examined earlier. However, unlike C.O.J. Matthews' more sympathetic interpretation of the Caribbean workers' behaviour, the survey's depiction of African workers lacked the latter's empathy. It was asserted that "by tradition and background the African [wa]s singularly ill-adapted for assimilation as an effective element in a wage economy on the modern pattern", he generally lacked pride in his work and was "often unstable and restless and prone to absent himself apparently without valid reasons".[139] The supposed "lack of pride" echoed similar critiques

134 A comparable shift in the conceptualisation of race from "race-as-biology" to "race-as-culture" has been demonstrated in the context of the United Nations. Amrith, Sunil & Glenda Sluga (2008): New Histories of the United Nations. In: *Journal of World History* 19(3), 258. https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.0.0021.

135 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 16.

136 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 147.

137 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 147.

138 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 146.

139 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 168–169.

directed at newly industrialised workers in Asia.[140] Within this framework, mere participation in wage labour was deemed insufficient; workers were also expected to show gratitude for the opportunity to partake in the capitalist system, despite its exploitative nature. While the survey expressed a significant shift from biological determinism to culturalist explanations for the perceived differences between African and European workers, many of the underlying assumptions about the mismatch between African workers and European models of labour remained largely intact.

This broader ideological change was also reflected in language. The term "native" was largely avoided and replaced by "Africans", appearing only in reference to official terminology, such as "Native Reserves" in South Africa, the Rhodesias and Kenya.[141] This linguistic transition paralleled the renaming of the Native Labour Section, first as the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section and later as the African Unit.[142] Since the mid-1930s, the ILO had largely substituted the term "native" with "indigenous", though the term continued to reflect colonial understandings. By the late 1940s, the meaning of "indigenous" began to shift again, increasingly aligning with its contemporary sense in referring to specific ethnic populations within independent states who hold distinct territorial and cultural claims.[143] In the African context, however, particularly within the *African Labour Survey*, the ILO continued to apply the colonial usage of "indigenous" to denote Black populations in mostly not yet independent African territories. By the late 1950s, at the conclusion of the period examined in this study, the term "indigenous" thus carried multiple, and at times contradictory, meanings, some of which remained embedded in colonial logics of racialisation. Notably, explicit references to different degrees of "civilisation", so common in earlier colonial discourse, were almost entirely omitted and featured only in three instances.[144] Nevertheless, while the terminology evolved, many of the underlying assumptions about the African workforce remained unchanged.

To conclude, this chapter has examined the International Labour Office's engagement with racialised and colonised labour between 1940 and the late 1950s. It has shown how the Second World War and its aftermath were leveraged to renew the ILO's mandate concerning colonial labour. During this

140 See Chapter 7.2.1.

141 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 15.

142 On the broader meaning of changing social categories and terminologies within colonial discourse, see Ann Laura Stoler (2009): Along the Archival Grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 35–39.

143 See Chapter 6.2.3.

144 ILO (1958): African Labour Survey. Geneva: ILO, 58, 413, 534.

period, the Office's focus shifted to two key geographical arenas, namely the Caribbean and Africa. Whereas the pre-war Native Labour Section had primarily concentrated on Asia and Africa, Asia was increasingly treated as a distinct space in light of accelerating decolonisation processes. The employment of the ILO's first Black researchers during this period introduced new perspectives into its work, most notably through C.O.J. Matthews' research on Caribbean labour. Simultaneously, however, the Office employed former colonial actors, such as Pierre de Briey and Robert Gavin, generating tensions within its approach to colonial policy.

With the publication of the *African Labour Survey* in 1958, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section was also dissolved. In March 1958, the Governing Body decided to establish an African Field Office and create a tripartite African Advisory Committee. During the transition period, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section was first renamed the African Unit before being fully dissolved by mid-1960.[145] This shift signalled the end of the Office's distinct treatment of colonial territories. While racialised labour discourses undoubtedly continued to shape its policies, the broader geopolitical transformations, driven by the accelerating pace of decolonisation, necessitated a restructuring of its approach. The move towards regionalisation, long demanded by non-European workers since the ILO's founding in 1919, had first taken root in Latin America before expanding to Asia in the 1940s. By the late 1950s, this process had reached Africa.

The former officers of the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section pursued different career paths. Some left the Office entirely, such as Pierre de Briey, who retired. Others, like S.A.J. Pratt, transitioned into new but equally notable careers. After leaving the ILO in early 1958, Pratt settled as a barrister and later held various ministerial positions in the Government of Sierra Leone.[146] Meanwhile, some remained within the organisation. Following de Briey's retirement, C.O.J. Matthews, who spent more than a decade awaiting recognition for his contributions in the Office, emerged as the leading candidate for promotion, with the support of C.W. Jenks.[147] However, when the Office sought to formalise Matthews' advancement, it faced unexpected resistance from workers' representatives on the selection committee, who objected to

145 Robert Gavin to Pierre de Briey (July 5, 1960), ILO Archives, P 3557.

146 S.A.J. Pratt to Robert Gavin (August 23, 1957), ILO Archives, P 5283, and Abdul Rashid Thomas (2018): State Funeral for the late Solomon Athanasius James Pratt. In: *The Sierra Leone Telegraph* (January 19, 2018) https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/state-funeral-for-the-late-solomon-athanasius-james-pratt-saj-pratt/ (last accessed: March 4, 2025).

147 C.W. Jenks to David Morse (July 11, 1958), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1.

his direct appointment and demanded an open internal competition for the position. While the precise motivations behind this opposition remain unclear, the possibility of racial discrimination needs to be considered, particularly as direct appointments were otherwise a common practice.[148] Still, Matthews was ultimately promoted to Principal Member of the Division in November 1958 and transferred to the new African Field Office in 1959.[149] His longstanding contributions to Caribbean labour research later culminated in the establishment of a regional ILO Office in the Caribbean in 1969, where he became the first Director, before retiring shortly thereafter.[150] Robert Gavin remained with the Office until 1966.[151]

148 ILO, Personnel Office, Method of Filling P.M.D. Post in the Non-Metropolitan Territories Division (proposal for promotion by direct selection) (July 24, 1958), ILO Archives, P 6/16/1/1.

149 Notice of Transfer (December 1, 1958), ILO Archives, P 3526.

150 N.N. (2009): ILO in the Caribbean. In: *Caribbean Newslink. A quarterly newsletter of the ILO Subregional Office for the Caribbean*, 4, https://www.ilo.org/media/331716/download (last accessed: March 5, 2025).

151 David Morse to Robert Gavin (June 2, 1966), ILO Archives, P 4758.

CHAPTER 6

Colonial Expertise in the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories

When the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section of the International Labour Office re-established its mandate for the study of colonial labour during and after the Second World War, the perceived need for a renewed expert committee on colonial labour questions soon became apparent. In light of the changed global context and the evolving mandate of the ILO, this new committee was tasked with a more explicit focus on questions of social policy and was accordingly renamed the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. While the racialised discourses embedded in the committee's work and debates often echoed those of its interwar predecessor, the change in nomenclature marked a formal shift. Rather than positing an inherent distinction between racialised categories such as "native" and "regular" labour, as had been the case for the earlier Committee of Experts for Native Labour, the ILO increasingly grounded its differentiated approach on political and regional criteria, specifically the study of "non-metropolitan" territories. This terminology, invoking the dichotomy between colonial metropoles and peripheral dependencies, maintained colonial status as a key marker of differentiation, while also paving the way for the future process of regionalisation.

This chapter examines the work of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Like its predecessor, this new committee was closely interwoven with the activities of the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section of the ILO and its findings significantly informed policy decisions taken at subsequent International Labour Conferences. The central research aim of this chapter is to interrogate the contrasting conceptions of colonial knowledge and expertise as understood and mobilised by the ILO, by external interest groups and by the experts themselves. For instance, the Catholic Church emerged as a particularly influential interest group, successfully asserting its perspective on the committee. Simultaneously, questions regarding more equitable racial and tripartite representation gained prominence. The efforts by members of the Office and, even more, by workers' representatives to include non-white experts, and particularly representatives of colonised workers, stand at the centre of this chapter, as they highlight significant subversive challenges to entrenched understandings of expertise

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and contested the dominance of top-down knowledge production by colonial authorities.

The analysis traces the committee's work from its inception in the 1940s through the five formal meetings it held between 1947 and 1957, concluding with its dissolution in 1958. It also sheds light on the broader institutional diversification of colonial and racialised labour expertise within the ILO, which saw the establishment of two additional expert committees working on related questions around 1950. Anchored in a chronological narrative, the chapter draws on institutional documentation as well as biographical information on individual committee members. These short biographies, along with a tabular overview of committee composition and participation, are included in Appendix II.

6.1 The Committee's Convocation, 1940–1947

The idea of reviving the dormant Committee of Experts for Native Labour, which had last convened in the mid-1930s, first emerged in the early 1940s during Wilfrid Benson's time in Britain. In discussions with Margery Perham, lecturer in colonial administration at Nuffield College, Oxford, and a friend of the former committee's member Frederick Lugard, as well as with Granville St John Orde Browne, the most recent British representative on the committee, and other officials within the British Colonial Office, Benson explored the possible composition and character of a reconstituted committee.[1] Similar conversations were also held with representatives of the Belgian colonial administration.[2] However, more concrete steps were postponed, pending the outcome of the war and its anticipated effects on global colonial politics. A key turning point came with the International Labour Conference of Philadelphia in 1944. The conference called upon the Governing Body to re-establish a colonial committee, recalling the "valuable help given in the past to the Office and Conference by the Committee of Experts for Native Labour". In January 1945, the Governing Body formally endorsed the desirability of creating a new committee, thereby providing the final mandate to initiate its convocation.[3]

1 Margery Perham to Wilfrid Benson (May 26, 1942), ILO Archives, NL 1-25-0, Wilfrid Benson, Memorandum on Conversation (May 18, 1943), ILO Archives, NL 1000, and Wilfrid Benson, Colonial Note for June and July 1943, ILO Archives, NL 1-25.

2 Wilfrid Benson, Colonial Note for June and July 1943, ILO Archives, NL 1-25.

3 ILO (1945): Minutes of the 94th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. London, 25th–31st January 1945. London: ILO, 208–209.

6.1.1 Becoming a Member

Over the following months, different governments were invited to nominate expert candidates. Ultimately, representatives from Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, South Africa, the United States and Puerto Rico and China were accepted. In contrast to the composition of the former Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Italy, Spain, Germany, Japan and India were no longer included. This shift in membership was largely driven by geopolitical changes. Italy, Germany and Japan, having formed the Axis powers during the Second World War, were barred from joining the United Nations in the immediate post-war period. Although Spain had officially remained neutral, the Franco regime's alignment with Hitler and Mussolini also excluded it from early UN participation. Furthermore, these countries had lost most of their colonial holdings by the time. India, meanwhile, was progressing towards independence. Among the new members, Puerto Rico's inclusion reflected both the increasing influence of the United States within the UN system as well as Puerto Rico's status as one of the most prominent US controlled "non-metropolitan territories". China's participation can be attributed to its key role as an Allied power during the Second World War. Australia, although invited to nominate a representative in 1945, ultimately declined to do so.[4]

Beyond the formal nominations based on national representation, other interest groups sought inclusion in the re-established committee. As early as 1945, following the announcement of its revival, international women's organisations like the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organisations and the Catholic women's organisation St Joan's Social and Political Alliance approached the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section of the Office to advocate for the appointment of at least two female experts.[5] Among their numerous proposals was Jane Vialle (1906–1953), a Black journalist and prominent women's rights activist. Born in Ubangi-Shari (now in the Republic of the Congo), Vialle was educated in Paris, worked as a journalist and participated in the French Resistance during the Second World War. In the post-war years, she co-founded the *Association des Femmes de l'Union Français* (AFUF), an organisation committed to advancing the rights and opportunities of women

4 G.A. Johnston to Minister of External Affairs Canberra (July 12, 1945) and W.A. Wynes to Edward Phelan (September 12, 1946), both ILO Archives, NL 1001.

5 Florence A. Barry to Edward Phelan (September 12, 1945), ILO Archives, NL 1001. See also Chapter 2.2.2.

in the French colonies.[6] As with earlier campaigns by women's organisations to gain representation in League of Nations bodies following the First World War, these efforts aimed to secure inclusion in the emerging institutional landscape of the United Nations and its specialised agencies. However, with regard to colonial questions, these efforts proved more effective within the direct UN framework than within the ILO.[7] The proposal to include Vialle in the ILO committee was met with silence in the 1940s. Nevertheless, she would later serve in the French UN delegation and was appointed to the 1949 Ad Hoc Committee on Slavery.[8] Despite their lack of success within the ILO, the advocacy of international women's organisations reflected both their recognition of the new Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories as an important forum of influence and their belief in the importance of including a Black woman's perspective within it.[9]

The ILO, in contrast, appointed only one female member to the committee at its convocation. The white British social anthropologist Margaret Read (1889–1991) had studied at Cambridge and the LSE in London, from where she received her PhD in anthropology in 1934. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Read emerged as one of the leading researchers of questions of education and health in Southeast Africa. At the time of her nomination for the committee in 1945, Read held a chair at the Institute of Education at the University of London.[10] In contrast to Hélène Marzorati, the female member of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, Read was chosen because of her own expertise and not that of her husband. She had also been nominated by

6 Dunstan, Sarah Claire (2020): 'Une Nègre de drame'. Jane Vialle and the Politics of Representation in Colonial Reform, 1945–1953. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 55(3), 648. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419873038.

7 For more information on St Joan International's efforts in general and specifically at the United Nations, see Elaine Clark (2004): Catholics and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage in England. In: *Church History* 73(3), 635–665, and Giusi Rosso (2018): Contested Practices, Human Rights, and Colonial Bodies in Pain. The UN's Gender Politics in Africa, 1940s–1960s. In: *Gender & History* 30(1), 196–213. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12337.

8 Dunstan, Sarah Claire (2020): 'Une Nègre de drame'. Jane Vialle and the Politics of Representation in Colonial Reform, 1945–1953. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 55(3), 648. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419873038.

9 Still, it needs to be remarked that Jane Vialle was also subjected to exoticising racialisations by the predominantly white women's organisations who nominated her. See Florence A. Barry to Wilfrid Benson (September 12, 1945), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and Sarah Claire Dunstan (2020): 'Une Nègre de drame'. Jane Vialle and the Politics of Representation in Colonial Reform, 1945–1953. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 55(3), 664. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419873038.

10 See Appendix II for more biographical information.

the British government and not the women's movement.[11] This suggests that the field of anthropology, at the time inherently intertwined with colonial structures, increasingly offered women the opportunity to engage with colonial issues and use this as a foundation for their academic careers. Although Read officially continued to represent the general group of women on the committee and was therefore still nominated based on her gender and not solely on her expertise, the representation of women within ILO expert committees gradually increased as these female experts came to be perceived more independently from international women's movements.

In the earlier stages of conceptualising the committee, not only questions of gender representation, but also of race, were addressed by the Office.[12] Between 1944 and 1946, Wilfrid Benson strongly emphasised the importance of including a Black American member in the committee. His initial recommendation was Judge William H. Hastie (1904–1976), the first Black judge in the US territory of the Virgin Islands and a former adviser to the American Section of the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission.[13] It is likely that Benson's familiarity with Hastie stemmed from this context. Ultimately, however, a different prominent Black American was nominated: the political scientist Ralph J. Bunche (1904–1971). At the time, Bunche held a chair in Political Science at Howard University and had already played a significant role in the US delegation at the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks Conference, which laid the groundwork for the founding of the United Nations. In 1946, he joined the UN's Trusteeship Department in a leading capacity.[14] Despite initial concerns about his dual affiliation with both the UN and the ILO, his nomination

11 G.A. Johnston to Edward Phelan (February 12, 1945), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

12 The ILO's ignorance towards the women's movement's nomination of Jane Vialle can also be explained by the intersection of Blackness and womanhood that led to a classic case of double marginalisation explained by theories of intersectionality. See, for example, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989): Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex. A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. In: *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, 139–167.

13 Wilfrid Benson, Report on Mission to Washington & New York, 27 August to 1 September 1944 (September 1, 1944), ILO Archives, MI 29-4.

14 See Appendix II for more biographical information. Ralph Bunche's work at the United Nations and his role in the decolonisation process have been covered in depth by Robert A. Hill & Edmond J. Keller (eds.) (2010): Trustee for the Human Community. Ralph J. Bunche, the United Nations, and the Decolonization of Africa. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, Elad Ben-Dror (2015): Ralph Bunche and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Mediation and the UN, 1947–1949. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315764573, and Kai Raustiala (2022): The Absolutely Indispensable Man. Ralph Bunche, the United Nations, and the Fight to End Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

was carried forward. Yet, due to these overlapping responsibilities, Bunche was eventually forced to withdraw and a white American was appointed in his place.[15] Thus, the failure to secure the inclusion of a Black member on the committee stemmed from institutional neglect. Although national governments ultimately decided on their nominations, the selection of experts was typically shaped through informal negotiations and relied heavily on the individual actors' sensitivity to questions of representation. Within the ILO, Wilfrid Benson stood out as the only official to explicitly advocate for the inclusion of a Black representative. Bunche, it appears, had been nominated by the US government due to his professional expertise and his proximity to the emerging UN system and not for reasons of racial representation. When, in 1946, both Benson and Bunche transferred to the UN, which increasingly appeared to offer a more relevant platform for engagement with colonial questions, no one within the ILO leadership pursued the matter further. As a result, the opportunity to ensure Black representation on the committee during its formative years was ultimately lost.

6.1.2 The Committee's First Meeting, London, 1947

Between January 17 and January 26, 1947, the first meeting of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories took place in London. At the centre of the meeting's agenda was the topic of migrant labour. Additionally, formalities regarding the future work of the committee should be discussed. Apart from the eleven participating experts, the Governing Body was also represented by a governmental and an employers' representative and sent additional governmental observers from the Netherlands and Portugal. The Non-Metropolitan Territories Section was represented by David H. Blelloch, who had just superseded Wilfrid Benson as head of section, and Pierre de Briey. Benson himself was also present in his new function as Director of the Non-Self-Governing Territories Division at the UN.[16]

The different opening speeches highlighted the changed global circumstances that required from the colonial powers to portray a different self-image than before the war. The British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Arthur Creech Jones (1891–1964), spoke of the "increasing consciousness of the responsibility" of colonial powers in the world and argued that for some, the former idea of "trusteeship" had already been exchanged by a relation of

15 C.W. Jenks to David Morse (n.d.), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

16 ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

"partnership".[17] David Blelloch further explained that in the past, the Office had regarded colonial topics as limited by their territorial and constitutional differences. Now, however, it had become clear that their "social and political progress" required a handling of these questions on a "universal basis".[18] These introductions mirrored the universal language of the Declaration of Philadelphia, which called for the rights to well-being and development irrespective of race. In the succeeding discussion on migrant labour in non-metropolitan territories, however, colonial discourses were largely reproduced, revealing that although the Philadelphia Declaration had introduced a more progressive language, it did little to challenge the entrenched substance of the debates.

Similar to the working methods of the first committee of experts, the experts discussed questions of migrant labour on the basis of a general report prepared thereon by the Office. Additionally, some of the experts had also prepared shorter memoranda on the topic.[19] During the discussions, several core themes resurfaced that had already been prominent in earlier meetings of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour, especially during its fourth meeting in 1932. At the time, considerable attention had been devoted to the issue of "detribalisation". Central to the debate was the underlying question of how larger migratory movements of male contract workers affected the rural communities left behind by the departure of the young and middle-aged men. The committee had expressed concern that such patterns of migration undermined traditional family structures and village communities, leading to the destabilisation of rural life. These demographic shifts were also believed to have demoralising effects on the men themselves, who were thought to become susceptible to alcoholism, gambling, sexual promiscuity and violent behaviour. In his memorandum on migrant labour in 1947, which he submitted to the ILO prior to the meeting, the British colonial administrator and former Governor of Mauritius, British Guiana and Tanganyika (now mainland Tanzania), Wilfrid Jackson (1883–1971), expressed similar beliefs:

17 Arthur Creech Jones, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

18 D.H. Blelloch, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

19 Jackson, Wilfrid (January 1, 1947): Note on Migrant Labour in Africa, ILO Archives, NL 1001/1.

> It must I think be acknowledged that in the present state of development of tribal natives generally the translation of large numbers of them to conditions resembling town life in the vicinity of large industrial towns inevitably involves the demoralisation of a large proportion [...]. This is the justification for imposing on immature and unsophisticated peoples limitations and restrictions in the way of migration to urban areas which would be regarded as unjustifiable and intolerable in the case of a more mature people. [...] This principle of trusteeship is recognised in international agreements to restrict or prohibit the supply of European alcoholic liquors and of firearms in certain areas, and it might well be acknowledged that the equally destructive migration to cities should also be regulated.[20]

According to Jackson, the African migrants originated from what he described as "immature and unsophisticated peoples", a characterisation that reinforced the perceived necessity of ongoing "civilising missions". Only through the strict oversight of European colonial powers could the supposedly vulnerable and impressionable workers be protected from the dangers associated with alcohol, firearms and urban life. Similar points were echoed by former British colonial administrator Granville St John Orde Browne, who attended the meeting as Jackson's substitute.[21] This continuity in rhetoric highlights the persistence of central colonial tropes and reveals the enduring nature of pejorative assumptions among the colonial experts—despite the ILO's efforts to rebrand its colonial approach after the war.

While most other discussants were similarly opposed to, or, at least, critical of male labour migration due to its perceived social consequences, South Africa stood out as a vocal defender of the migratory labour system. This trend had already been evident in the pre-war expert discussions and during the debates of the ILCs.[22] During the 1947 meeting of the committee, South Africa was represented by two parties. The official expert was Claude William Slarke (1898–?), a civil servant from Durban concerned with the government of "native labourers", who largely remained in the background during the sessions.[23] In contrast, William Gemmill (?–?), representing the employers' group of the Governing Body, emerged as a far more assertive and influential voice.

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20 Jackson, Wilfrid (January 1, 1947): Note on Migrant Labour in Africa, ILO Archives, NL 1001/1.

21 Granville St John Orde Browne, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

22 See Chapters 1.2.4 and 3.1.4.

23 See Appendix II for more biographical information.

Gemmill had long been a central figure in South Africa's mining industry, at times as General Manager of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines.[24] The industry itself was heavily reliant on migrant labour, with recruitment networks extending across the region. For example, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Gemmill was instrumental in brokering an agreement with the British Governor of Nyasaland (now Malawi) that permitted the annual recruitment of up to ten thousand workers for South African mines.[25]

However, the system faced increasing scrutiny by the late 1940s. Rising rates of tuberculosis in colonial territories were widely attributed to labour migration, reinforcing the long-standing concerns about its "demoralising" effects on rural communities and the labourers themselves.[26] In response to these criticisms, representatives like Gemmill sought to reframe the narrative and argued that, rather than exacerbating health risks, employment in South African mines offered improvements in medical care, as migrant workers were subjected to regular health screenings.[27] During the discussion of the committee, Gemmill asserted that controlled labour migration, such as the organised recruitment from Nyasaland, did not produce the same negative outcomes as uncontrolled migratory movements. In his view, the conditions of African migrants employed in the Witwatersrand gold mines were "far superior to that of the peasants in many European countries and one[s] that might well be envied by them".[28] The inclusion of the Governing Body's representatives in the meeting, particularly those with direct economic interests such as colonial employers like Gemmill, thus made the discussions of the committee more contested and marked a discursive shift that accepted more diverse opinions.[29] While Gemmill's overtly optimistic assessment of labour

24 McCulloch, Jock (2012): South Africa's Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis. Woodbridge: James Currey, 74.

25 McCulloch, Jock (2012): South Africa's Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis. Woodbridge: James Currey, 92–93.

26 McCulloch, Jock (2012): South Africa's Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis. Woodbridge: James Currey, 96.

27 McCulloch, Jock (2012): South Africa's Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis. Woodbridge: James Currey, 97.

28 William Gemmill, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

29 Originally, a Governing Body representative for each tripartite group had been elected. It is unclear why the chosen workers' delegate, the Dutch Jacobus Hendrik Oldenbroek, did not participate in the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories' meeting. See ILO (1945): Minutes of the 95th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Quebec, 21st–27th June 1945. Quebec: ILO, 110.

migration was not endorsed by all members, the Belgian expert William van Remoortel (1888–1965) acknowledged the emerging divergence by remarking that "the truth should be sought between these [...] standpoints".[30]

Beyond the broader debate on the advantages and disadvantages of labour migration, the issue of workers' education and training emerged as a central question. One line of argument suggested that improved access to formal education in Africa contributed to increased migration of educated individuals to urban centres. This position was notably emphasised by Margaret Read, who had observed similar patterns in her research on labour migration in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).[31] In the ensuing debate, it was particularly the Portuguese expert Álvaro Eugénio Neves da Fontoura (1891–1975) who strongly opposed the expansion of literary education among colonised populations. Citing the lack of employment opportunities for highly educated Africans, he warned that many would "not go back to tribal life but became inadaptable, and [...] demoralised. [...] The Natives would be much happier if they could be given education suited to their stage of civilisation, so that they could become cultivators provided with hygienic native dwellings".[32] Such assessments reflected the underlying belief that literary or academic education was incompatible with traditional rural life. According to da Fontoura, formal education posed a threat to the supposed social stability of colonial rule. These views echoed broader colonial anxieties regarding the emergence of educated Black elites. It became evident that many experts and, by extension, also colonial authorities, feared that the migration of educated Africans to urban centres would lead to a transformation in self-perception, fuelling demands for political participation and challenging colonial hierarchies. In contrast, experts like da Fontoura advocated vocational and agricultural education designed to retain rural populations in their territories of origin and maintain existing social and economic structures.[33]

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30 William van Remoortel, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1. See Appendix II for more biographical information.

31 Margaret Read, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1. She referred to her PhD thesis, see Margaret Read (1934): Primitive Economics with Special Reference to Culture Contact. University of London: PhD Thesis.

32 Álvaro Eugénio Neves da Fontoura, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

33 In the discussion, da Fontoura was supported by the Belgian expert William van Remoortel, the Dutch expert Nicolaas Selhorst Blom, the British expert Father Thomas

However, these views did not go unchallenged by Margaret Read. Her position in the group was unique for two key reasons: she was not only the sole female member but also the only trained social scientist. In contrast, the majority of the committee's 1947 members came from backgrounds in colonial politics, administration or law. The only other exceptions to this pattern were the experts from the United States, Puerto Rico and China.[34] Read's scholarly background enabled her to approach the committee's discussions from a markedly different, critical perspective, grounded in anthropological and sociological research on colonial cultures and politics. On multiple occasions, Read intervened when the conversation strayed into reductive reasoning. She pointedly reminded the group of the extensive body of research already available on colonial education policy.[35] Alongside Wilfrid Benson of the UN, she also highlighted the relevance of UNESCO, the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as a key institution in shaping global educational standards. By the time of the meeting, Read had already been serving for a year on UNESCO's Panels of Experts on Fundamental Education, lending her critique further authority.[36] Despite these interventions, the responses from most other colonial experts remained minimal and the discussion was ultimately ended. Read, however, did not conceal her dissatisfaction, expressing her "distress at the line which the discussion had taken". She firmly asserted that "the function of education was to develop people and education of the people could not be sacrificed to purely economic considerations".[37] Her remarks underscored the tension between colonial economic imperatives and more human-centred, emancipatory visions of education within the committee. They also highlighted the com-

McLaughlin and the South African Governing Body member William Gemmill. ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1. See also Daniel Maul (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 105–107. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

34 See Appendix II for more biographical information.

35 Margaret Read, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

36 Matasci, Damiano (2022): Colonial Education Goes International. A Micro-History of Knowledge Production and Circulation in an Age of Imperial Crisis. In: *Itinerario* 47(1), 84. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115322000237.

37 Margaret Read, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

peting definitions of colonial labour expertise, between personal experiences in colonial administration on the one side and the sociological and anthropological study of colonial life on the other side.

During the following International Labour Conference in 1947, five conventions were adopted that built directly on the recommendations formulated by the committee. Among these was the Social Policy (Non-Metropolitan Territories) Convention (C82), which articulated general principles for colonial social policy and was based on earlier recommendations of 1944 and 1945. Four additional conventions followed: Convention C83 addressed the extension of general labour standards to colonial territories, C84 dealt with the freedom of association, C85 focused on the role of labour inspectorates and C86 outlined the maximum duration of employment contracts in colonial territories. Because colonial authorities had already been involved in the drafting process via their participation in the committee, the adoption of these conventions at the conference provoked only little debate. Furthermore, several colonial powers, including Belgium, France and South Africa, invited their expert delegates to serve as advisers during the conference. This ensured continuity between the committee's recommendations and the final texts.[38] As a result, the colonial powers were largely successful in securing versions of the draft conventions that were even more moderate than those originally proposed by the Office. With regard to the issue of migrant labour, the convention merely called for improved protection of migrant labourers, thereby reinforcing rather than fundamentally challenging the continued reliance on migratory labour systems within colonial economies.[39]

In sum, by the end of 1947, the influence of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories remained relatively marginal. Its internal debates revealed the persistent endurance of racist colonial stereotypes, which were seldom challenged by its members. Aside from Margaret Read, who sought to bring the discussions on a more scientific basis, the only consistent critic of the committee's perspectives was the Puerto Rican expert Guillermo Atiles Moréu (1901–1967). On multiple occasions, Atiles Moréu advocated for the greater inclusion of "indigenous workers", arguing that their direct participation in the committee's work would "add a useful ele-

38 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 31st Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1947. Geneva: ILO, xv–xxix.

39 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 107. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

ment of realism to the discussions".[40] At the ILC of 1947, the committee's already modest consensus was further diluted. Despite vocal protests from several workers' delegates, such as Shanta Mukerjee from India and Charles Assalé, representing the French Cameroons within the French delegation, the outcomes of the conference underscored a familiar reality for the colonised workers: that the ILO remained deeply reliant on its colonial member states and was ultimately unwilling to enact substantive improvements in colonial working conditions.[41]

6.2 A Diversification of Colonial Labour Expertise, 1948–1953

Following the adoption of several colonial conventions during the ILC in 1947, the work of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories came to a temporary halt. Several factors help explain this interruption. The late 1940s marked a period of internal restructuring within the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section of the Office. Under David Blelloch, the section aimed to deepen its understanding of African labour conditions. However, efforts to conduct field research were obstructed by shifting political dynamics in South Africa. This period also witnessed growing tensions between the ILO and colonial powers over influence in the colonial world. The colonial administrations became increasingly wary of the ILO's involvement, seeking to limit its authority and access. Shortly thereafter, Blelloch was succeeded by Robert Gavin, under whom the Office entered a renewed competition with the colonial powers. During this transitional phase, the expert committee was not asked to convene, primarily because neither the Office nor the ILC issued any formal request for expert guidance. Only in 1951 did the committee resume its activities, signalling a reactivation of its mandate.

6.2.1 The Catholic Church, Missionaries and Colonial Labour Expertise

Despite the preliminary halt of the committee's work, the experts themselves did not pause their individual activities in the field of colonial labour. One

40 Guillermo Atiles Moréu, in: ILO (1947): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. First Session, London, 17th–26th March 1947. Minutes. ILO Archives, NL 1001-0-5-1.

41 Shanta Mukerjee, in: ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 13th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1947. Geneva: ILO, 256, and Charles Assalé, in: ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 31st Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1947. Geneva: ILO, 258–259.

group of experts not discussed so far were the representatives of the church on the committee. This was a novelty compared to the pre-war Committee of Experts for Native Labour. Over the course of the existence of the second expert committee, four different priests of the Jesuit order became members. Looking at their biographies and entanglements with missionary work and the ILO provides important insight into this aspect often treated only marginally by historiography. While research on the Office's colonial work before the Second World War has briefly mentioned the ongoing conversations between the Native Labour Section and different missionary societies and more recently, a general study on the influence of the Holy See and Catholic social teaching on the ILO was published, the interconnection between missionary work and the ILO's colonial labour policies has been often neglected so far.[42]

The relationship between the Jesuit order and the ILO dated back to the 1920s. Under the leadership of the ILO's first Director-General, Albert Thomas, a permanent position for a Jesuit cleric was established in the Office in 1926.[43] Although a Protestant counterpart was briefly employed during the 1930s, this post was discontinued when the ILO relocated to Montreal in 1940.[44] According to one of the former clerics in this role, the Jesuit staff member functioned as a regular bureaucrat rather than a pastoral figure. His principal task was to maintain strong relations with the international Catholic milieu, especially with Catholic trade unions.[45] During Thomas' tenure, the ILO's relations with the Catholic Church were regularly addressed in his annual reports to the ILC, but these mentions ceased under his successors.[46] Nonetheless, the Jesuit representative's position in the ILO has continued to the present day, underscor-

42 The only study partially concerned with the Catholic experts on the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories and their connection to missionary work is Aurélien Zaragori (2016): Missions et l'Organisation internationale du Travail (OIT). Quelles collaborations pour le développement? Une étude historique (1920–1970). In: *Social Sciences and Missions* 29, 310–342. From a more general perspective, see Maurice Barbier (1972): Les Relations Entre l'Église Catholique et l'Organisation International du Travail. In: *Politique étrangère* 37(3), 351–387, and Paul Beckett (2021): Labour Rights and the Catholic Church. The International Labour Organisation, the Holy See and Catholic Social Teaching. Abingdon: Routledge.

43 Beckett, Paul (2021): Labour Rights and the Catholic Church. The International Labour Organisation, the Holy See and Catholic Social Teaching. Abingdon: Routledge, 160.

44 Beckett, Paul (2021): Labour Rights and the Catholic Church. The International Labour Organisation, the Holy See and Catholic Social Teaching. Abingdon: Routledge, 187.

45 Beckett, Paul (2021): Labour Rights and the Catholic Church. The International Labour Organisation, the Holy See and Catholic Social Teaching. Abingdon: Routledge, 188.

46 Beckett, Paul (2021): Labour Rights and the Catholic Church. The International Labour Organisation, the Holy See and Catholic Social Teaching. Abingdon: Routledge, 160.

ing the enduring influence of the Catholic Church on social policy, both in colonial and post-colonial contexts.[47]

When the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories was constituted after the Second World War, Wilfrid Benson proposed the inclusion of "two persons with missionary experience", one Protestant, one Catholic. His criteria specified that candidates should possess "recent colonial experience" and "an established reputation for forward thinking".[48] In Benson's view, missionaries, due to their extensive and often long-term engagement in colonised regions, could provide important insights into local social conditions that differed from the information presented by colonial governments and their appointed experts. The historical involvement of both Protestant and Catholic missions in education, healthcare and social reform made missionaries likely bearers of detailed knowledge on the peoples concerned.[49] Benson's emphasis on their inclusion reflected his appreciation for those missionaries who, he hoped, could help steer the committee towards a more progressive stance.

The first cleric to join the committee was French Father Eugène Emile Auguste Beaupin (1877–1953), who brought with him a longstanding relationship with the international organisations in Geneva. As head of the *Union Catholique des Études Internationales* (UCEI), the Catholic Union of International Studies, Beaupin had played a pivotal role in fostering ties between the Catholic Church, the League of Nations and the ILO in the 1920s and 1930s.[50] He had also served as a member of the League of Nations' Advisory Committee

47 During the period under study, the Jesuit priests in office were Father André Arnou (1926–1932), Father Achille Danset (1933–1936), Father Albert Le Roy (1936–1955) and Father Joseph Joblin (1956–1981). Arnou, Le Roy and Joblin published several works on the relation between the Catholic Church and the ILO.

48 Wilfrid Benson to C.W.H. Weaver, Minute Sheet (March 21, 1945), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

49 For an overview of recent trends in historical research on missionaries see, for example, Linda Ratschiller & Karolin Wetjen (2018): Verflochtene Mission. Ansätze, Methoden und Fragestellungen einer neuen Missionsgeschichte. In: Ratschiller, L. & K. Wetjen (eds.): Verflochtene Mission. Perspektiven auf eine neue Missionsgeschichte. Cologne/Vienna/Weimar: Böhlau, 9–24. https://doi.org/10.7788/9783412510121.9.

50 Between 1933 and 1937, Beaupin published a regular column on the League of Nations and the field of missionary work. Zaragori, Aurélien (2016): Missions et l'Organisation internationale du Travail (OIT). Quelles collaborations pour le développement? Une étude historique (1920–1970). In: *Social Sciences and Missions* 29, 324, and Cormac Shine (2018): Papal Diplomacy by Proxy? Catholic Internationalism at the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1922–1939. In: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69(4), 801–804. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046917002731.

on Traffic in Opium.[51] Because Beaupin was unable to attend the 1947 expert meeting, in his absence, the British Jesuit Father Thomas McLaughlin (?–?) represented the Catholic perspective in the meeting. In the 1950s, the Church's presence on the committee continued through two Belgian Jesuits: Father Pierre Charles (1883–1954), followed by Father Louis Bruyns (1919–2001) from 1955 onwards.[52] However, Benson's initial idea to also include a Protestant missionary was never realised. The nominations were facilitated through the Jesuit staff member already embedded within the Office, emphasising the close bond between the Jesuit order and the ILO.[53]

Two of the clerics who served on the committee also published reflections on the relationship between the ILO and missionary work. In 1950, Eugène Beaupin offered a general overview of the ILO's colonial activities in a publication likely aimed at a clerical audience, as it appeared in a journal for the more and more established academic discipline of missionary science.[54] By situating the evolution of the ILO's colonial policies within the broader tradition of Catholic social teaching, Beaupin expressed his approval of the organisation's direction and portrayed a harmony between the ILO's "social mandate" and that of Christianity. One of his Belgian successors, Father Pierre Charles, similarly engaged in public discourse by publishing several articles on African labour politics in the 1950s.[55] Unfortunately, the archival record

51 Jerónimo, Miguel Bandeira (2020): Imperial Internationalisms in the 1920s. The Shaping of Colonial Affairs at the League of Nations. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48(5), 872. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2020.1816620.

52 See Appendix II for more biographical information.

53 Zaragori, Aurélien (2016): Missions et l'Organisation internationale du Travail (OIT). Quelles collaborations pour le développement? Une étude historique (1920–1970). In: *Social Sciences and Missions* 29, 328.

54 Beaupin, Eugène (1950): L'Organisation Internationale du Travail et les Problèmes Sociaux en Pays de Mission. Beckenried: Seminar Schöneck. For an introduction into the history of missionary science, see Carine Dujardin (2015): Mission Research Revised. Missiology as a Project of Modernity and a Contemporary Form of Apologetics. In: Prudhomme, C. & C. Dujardin (eds.): Mission & Science. Missiology Revised/Missiologie Revisitée, 1850–1940. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 9–21.

55 Charles, Pierre (1952): Problèmes de Travail et Réalités Africaines. In: *Bulletin Bimestriel Société Belge d'Études et d'Expansion* 152, 584–587, and Pierre Charles (1954): Travail et Psychologie Africaine. In: Museum Lessanium: Les Missions et le Prolétariat. Rapports et Compte Rendu de la XXIII^{e} Semaine de Missiologie de Louvain 1953. Bruges/Brussels/Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 166–177. Note also the contribution of ILO official Pierre de Briey in the same volume, underlining the Office's close cooperation with the missionaries: de Briey, Pierre (1954): La transformation économique et sociale de la société africaine. In: Museum Lessanium: Les Missions et le Prolétariat. Rapports et Compte Rendu de la XXIII^{e} Semaine de Missiologie de Louvain 1953. Bruges/Brussels/Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 26–43.

does not allow for a detailed analysis of the missionaries' specific contributions to the committee's discussions. For most meetings, only summary reports survived, rather than full transcripts.

However, one anecdote from the 1953 meeting offers a revealing glimpse into how missionaries were perceived by some of the other committee members. Hugh Worrell Springer (1913–1994), a Barbadian lawyer and member of the committee from 1953 to 1958, recalled in his memoirs that Father Charles had what he considered "unusual ideas" about education. According to Springer, the Belgian priest believed that the education system in the Belgian Congo, particularly its focus on artisanal training, was responsible for the colony's "stability and peace". Because colonial subjects were trained in practical skills rather than critical thinking, Father Charles claimed, they were not interested in anti-colonial or political activity and were "not inclined to play with ideas". "He really believed this", Springer noted dryly, "and we had to be patient with him".[56] While this anecdote does not allow for any generalisations, it suggests that the role Benson had envisioned for the missionaries, as progressive voices within the committee, was not necessarily realised in practice. At least from the perspective of Springer, a highly educated Black lawyer stemming from a colonised territory himself, Father Charles' paternalism appeared naïve, if not absurd. His recollection also pointed to a clear divide between the missionary and the rest of the committee, marked by his use of "we" to refer to the other experts. This hints at a degree of exclusion or marginalisation of the missionaries within the committee, contradicting the harmonious image they portrayed in their own writings. Nonetheless, in 1953, the Office still cooperated with Father Charles and contributed a paper to the "week of missiology" held in Louvain, Belgium, in August 1953.

6.2.2 Re-establishing the Expert Committee, 1951–1953

At the end of 1950, the Office began to deepen the conversations with the colonial authorities to receive suggestions for candidates to re-establish the expert committee. Over the course of late 1950 and the first half of 1951, several new names were suggested, implying a generational shift in the representation. While some experts from 1947 remained in the committee, like the Belgian William van Remoortel and the Portuguese Álvaro Eugénio Neves da Fontoura, others joined the group for the first time. As a result of the Office's wish to "reinforce the Committee by the addition of one or more Africans",

56 Springer, Kean (2008): Truly a Gentleman. The Life and Times of Sir Hugh Worrell Springer. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 56–57.

the Ghanian lawyer Ernest Eggay Kwesi Kurankyi-Taylor (1922–1959) and the Beninese lawyer and Senator Louis Ignacio-Pinto (1903–1984) were nominated by the British and French colonial authorities.[57] In this composition, the second session of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories took place in Geneva in December 1951.

Among the key topics on the meeting's agenda were the ILO's future colonial policies, questions of technical and vocational training, migrant labour and the use of penal sanctions against colonised workers for breaches of employment contracts.[58] A clear divide emerged during discussions, wherein most experts aligned on one side, with South Africa, occasionally supported by Portugal, on the other. This was especially visible in debates on migrant labour and penal sanctions. Already ahead of the meeting, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA), a recruiting agency for migrant workers in the South African mines, had submitted a memorandum promoting labour migration and demanded it should be shared with the experts.[59] Echoing earlier debates from the 1947 expert meeting, the mining industry feared restrictions on African labour migration, which the Office and many experts were inclined to support. The WNLA was closely aligned with William Gemmill, the South African employers' representative on the Governing Body.[60] In its memorandum, the WNLA portrayed employment on the Witwatersrand gold mines as "one of the greatest civilizing factors in the whole field of employment of African Labour" that improved African workers "not only in physique but in mental outlook".[61] Though the South African government sought to distance itself from the WNLA's position and the memorandum was ultimately withdrawn, Gemmill continued to voice similar arguments during the meeting and at the subsequent Governing Body session, underlining the great influence of the South African mining industry within the ILO.[62] Aside from the clear divide between South Africa and the rest of the experts, the remaining mem-

57 Robert Gavin to A. Jouhaux (May 22, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001. See the biographies in Appendix II.

58 C.W. Jenks to M. Smuts (October 31, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1002.

59 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association Limited, Statement presented to the International Labour Office dealing with the restrictions placed on the spontaneous flow of African migrant labour (October 1951), Kew Archives, LAB 13/863.

60 Robert Gavin to C.W. Jenks (October 6, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1002.

61 Witwatersrand Native Labour Association Limited, Statement presented to the International Labour Office dealing with the restrictions placed on the spontaneous flow of African migrant labour (October 1951), Kew Archives, LAB 13/863.

62 Arthur D. Lee to David Morse (November 19, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1002, M.D. Tennant to Robert Gavin (November 26, 1951), Kew Archives, LAB 13/863, and Speech by William Gemmill (March 12, 1952), Kew Archives, CO 859/364.

bers largely shared a common position. While in 1947 there had still been differing opinions on the path towards a "stabilisation" of the labour force, meaning the restriction of migration and the improvement of living and working conditions at the places of origin, often framed in opposition to "detribalisation", by 1951, all experts except South Africa and Portugal supported the restriction of migration.[63]

The experts also largely opposed the continued use of penal sanctions for breaches of employment contracts. Although the 1939 Penal Sanctions (Indigenous Workers) Convention (C65) had called for their "progressive" abolition, it had only been ratified by the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Still, the Office argued that, in practice, many countries had already abolished such sanctions but lagged being behind in formal ratification.[64] In the past, colonial employers had long justified penal sanctions for their supposed "educative value", a rationale revisited in 1951. This time, however, most experts rejected the idea that penal sanctions brought any benefits.[65] Only South Africa and Portugal dissented, arguing that abolition was only appropriate where workers had reached a sufficient "educational level".[66] Ultimately, the committee encouraged governments to ratify the 1939 convention and to effect the immediate abolition of penal sanctions. Still, the dominant reasoning remained rooted in the logic of the "civilising mission". Abolition was supported not because the system was inherently unjust, but because it had failed as an effective tool for education.[67] Additionally, experts warned that continuing

63 ILO (1951): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Second Session, Geneva, 26th November–8th December 1951. Report, 54–63. Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, AD1715.

64 ILO (1951): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Second Session, Geneva, 26th November–8th December 1951. Report, 5. Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, AD1715.

65 Guillermo Atiles Moréu and Father Pierre Charles, in: ILO (1951): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Second Session, Geneva, 26th November–8th December 1951. Report, 8. Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, AD1715.

66 Álvaro Eugénio Neves da Fontoura, in: ILO (1951): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Second Session, Geneva, 26th November–8th December 1951. Report, 10. Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, AD1715.

67 ILO (1951): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Second Session, Geneva, 26th November–8th December 1951. Report, 12–13. Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, AD1715.

penal sanctions could provoke political unrest, revealing that colonial stability, not workers' welfare, was the key concern.[68]

In the following two years, based on a proposal of the workers' group in the Governing Body, the Office sought to increase the participation of experts from the colonies.[69] This move was met with scepticism by colonial powers such as the British Colonial Office, who cautioned its representative on the Governing Body, Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, that committee membership should be determined by "expert qualifications" rather than "criteria of birth or race".[70] In response, the Office warned the British government that "unless the number of indigenous members on the Committee" would be increased, other "anti-colonial elements within the I.L.O.", referring to workers' representatives on the Governing Body and during the ILCs, might "transform the Committee into something of a much more political character on the United Nations model".[71] This exchange highlights the Office's strategic balancing act. Colonial governments, clearly reluctant to include potentially critical voices, framed their resistance in terms of maintaining standards of expertise, arguing that selection based on race rather than qualifications would undermine the committee's integrity. This line of reasoning echoed earlier resistance to the inclusion of women in expert roles and deflected from the real concern of maintaining political control over the narratives on colonial labour. In the previous committee, the very notion of what constituted "expertise" in colonial labour matters had remained vague and contested. Rather than directly challenging the colonial powers' resistance, the Office now reframed the issue as one of institutional self-preservation. By arguing that failure to diversify the committee could open the door to more radical, anti-colonial forces, it positioned itself as a moderating influence. The invocation of the UN served as a warning, reminding the colonial powers of the challenges they faced there and implying that cooperation with the ILO was the more palatable option.

The Office's own position on racial representation, however, remained somewhat ambiguous. While it did not openly advocate for more inclusive

68 Ernest Eggay Kwesi Kurankyi-Taylor and Hubertus Johannes van Mook, in: ILO (1951): Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Second Session, Geneva, 26th November–8th December 1951. Report, 10–11. Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, AD1715.

69 ILO (1952): Minutes of the 118th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, 11th–14th March 1952. Geneva: ILO, 36.

70 Confidential Notes by the British Colonial Office for Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans on G.B. 118/3/1: Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories (n.d.), Kew Archives, LAB 13/863.

71 M.D. Tennant to N.D. Watson (March 24, 1952), Kew Archives, LAB 13/863; repeated a few months later by N.D. Watson, Minute Sheet (July 7, 1952), Kew Archives, CO 859/364.

representation, its diplomatic manoeuvring suggests a desire to secure greater influence in Africa. Robert Gavin, despite his alignment with British employer interests, was invested in expanding the ILO's reach on the continent. The push for increased colonial participation on the committee, then, appears to have been driven less by a principled commitment to decolonial inclusion than by pragmatic institutional strategy. In the end, only two new members from colonial territories were admitted: Hugh Worrell Springer from Barbados and the Malaysian economist Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Ungku Abdul Hamid (1922–2020).[72]

At the invitation of the Portuguese government, the third meeting of the committee was held from December 7 to December 19, 1953 at the Palácio Foz in Lisbon, Portugal.[73] At the time, Portugal's image abroad was increasingly fragile. Throughout the 1940s, its delegation to the ILC had generally remained quiet during debates on colonial conventions, trying to avoid scrutiny due to the stark contrast between ILO standards and its own colonial labour legislation.[74] When reports of abuses against African migrant labourers in Portuguese colonies surfaced in the late 1940s, some officials pushed for modest reforms inspired by earlier ILO measures.[75] Aware of its own problems, Portugal increasingly relied on diplomacy to maintain its appearance. While the Portuguese authoritarian President of the Council of Ministers, António de Oliveira Salazar (1889–1970), refused a UN inquiry into forced labour and slavery, the 1951 Ad Hoc Committee on Forced Labour, product of a cooperation between the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the ILO, forced Portuguese participation.[76] Its findings highlighted severe labour violations in

72 Commissioner General of Malaya to J.D. Higham (November 24, 1952), Kew Archives, CO 859/366. See Appendix II for more biographical information.

73 Mr. D'Almendra, Minute Sheet (February 9, 1953), ILO Archives, NL 1003.

74 Monteiro, José Pedro (2023): The Internationalisation of the 'Native Labour' Question in Portuguese Late Colonialism, 1945–1962. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 29, 30, 33. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05140-1.

75 Monteiro, José Pedro (2023): The Internationalisation of the 'Native Labour' Question in Portuguese Late Colonialism, 1945–1962. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 49. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05140-1.

76 Monteiro, José Pedro (2023): The Internationalisation of the 'Native Labour' Question in Portuguese Late Colonialism, 1945–1962. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 57, 75. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05140-1. See also Daniel Maul (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 205–208. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638. A. Ramasamy Mudaliar should not be mistaken for the Indian workers' delegate to the ILC in 1931, V.M. Ramaswamy Mudaliar.

the Portuguese Empire.[77] In response, Portugal launched a diplomatic defence strategy emphasising "imperial self-scrutiny".[78] Hosting the ILO meeting in Lisbon must be seen as part of this strategy to signal cooperation on colonial labour issues.

The meeting itself passed without any major decisions. Although a range of issues, such as housing for colonial workers, technical and vocational training and strategies to improve labour productivity in the colonies, were discussed, the committee ultimately made no concrete recommendations to the Governing Body.[79] In sum, thus, between 1951 and 1953, the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories experienced a slow but noticeable transformation. It moved towards broader representation, with four non-white members joining what had been an all-white committee in 1947. Although a stronger consensus emerged around issues such as penal sanctions and labour migration, colonial discourses of Otherness persisted, particularly in relation to labour. By 1953, the Office's increasing focus on Africa had become unmistakable. Despite the inclusion of one Asian colonial member, Ungku Aziz, the committee's discussions were now almost entirely centred on Africa. This shift was underscored by the committee's suggestion that its next meeting should be held on the continent itself.[80]

6.2.3 Coloniality, Indigeneity and Beyond

In the early 1950s, while the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories awoke from its hiatus and reconfigured its direction, two additional expert bodies were established that likewise addressed the intersection between race and labour. The first was the Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour, which emerged from a resolution passed during the

77 Monteiro, José Pedro (2023): The Internationalisation of the 'Native Labour' Question in Portuguese Late Colonialism, 1945–1962. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 79. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05140-1.

78 Monteiro, José Pedro (2023): The Internationalisation of the 'Native Labour' Question in Portuguese Late Colonialism, 1945–1962. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 81–82. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05140-1.

79 ILO (1953): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories: Third Session, Lisbon, 7th–19th December 1953. Geneva: ILO, 4. In: ILO https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1953/53B09_64_engl.pdf (last accessed: September 5, 2024).

80 ILO (1953): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories: Third Session, Lisbon, 7th–19th December 1953. Geneva: ILO, 5. In: ILO https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1953/53B09_64_engl.pdf (last accessed: September 5, 2024).

1949 regional ILO conference of American member states.[81] Over the following two years, its membership was assembled in a manner like that of other expert committees, through recommendations made by national governments. The committee convened for the first time in January 1951 at the premise of San Andrés University in La Paz, Bolivia, and met a second time in 1954 in Geneva. It was ultimately dissolved in 1958.[82] The second group was the Committee on Work on Plantations, which held its inaugural meeting in 1951 in Bandung, Indonesia, and remained active in this form until the mid-1990s.[83] A comparison between the three post-war committees and their predecessor, the pre-war Committee of Experts for Native Labour, reveals that the late 1940s and 1950s saw a formal diversification of expertise on racialised labour within the ILO. However, this diversification was more structural than substantive, as the discussions and frameworks employed often continued to draw on longstanding assumptions about the relationship between the racial identity of workers and their labour practices. Although a detailed analysis of each committee's discourses and policies exceeds the scope of this study, a brief comparison highlights the underlying duality in the ILO's post-war understanding of racialised labour. This, in turn, provides further insight into the workings and limitations of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories.

In contrast to the Committee of Experts for Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories, with a heavy bias on Africa, the Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour primarily focused on independent nations in the Americas.[84] However, its scope was soon widened to include countries in Asia, such

81 N.N. (1951): First Session of ILO Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour. In: *International Labour Review* 64(1), 61.

82 Abbas Amar to Government of the Philippines (September 28, 1959), ILO Archives, CL 1001-1-100.

83 Weisband, Edward & Edward Singleton Diggs (1996): ILO Industrial Committees and Sectoral Activities. An Institutional History. Working Paper. Geneva: ILO, 155–167. I thank Jacques Rodriguez of the ILO Archives for recommending this source to me. For an analysis of the committee's policies, see David Lincoln (2010): Plantation Workers by Definition. The Changing Relevance of the ILO's Plantations Convention. In: *The International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 17(1), 51–71. https://doi.org/10.48416/ijsaf.v17i1.267.

84 The ILO's relation to indigenous peoples in the Americas has most recently been explored by Martin Breuer (2018): Exploring the Technical Assistance Activities of the International Labor Organization in the Field of Indigenous Peoples. Development and Human Rights in the Andean Indian Program (1954–1968). In: *Forum for Inter-American Research* 11(3), 110–123, and Martin Breuer (2025): Multilaterale Entwicklungspolitik und Indigenität im Andenraum. Das Programa Indigenista Andino und die Internationale Arbeitsorganisation (1949–1970). Bielefeld: Kipu. For the broader discussions about indi-

as Burma, India, Pakistan and the Philippines, as well as in Oceania, such as Australia and New Zealand. The Office understood this new committee as, in part, a continuation of the pre-war Committee of Experts for Native Labour.

This continuity must be seen in the context of evolving definitions and usages of the terms "native" and "indigenous". During the early years of the ILO's colonial work, "native" functioned as a broad and imprecise category, referring generally to colonised populations without reference to specific ethnic identities or territorial claims. With the adoption of Convention C50 in 1936, "indigenous" replaced "native", though it largely preserved the earlier colonial connotations.[85] It was only after the Second World War that the ILO began to differentiate committees based on the formal criterion of national independence. This shift was initiated and shaped by the Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour. The adoption of Convention C107 in 1957, the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, marked a turning point during which "indigenous" came to refer to indigenous populations in independent countries, thereby acquiring the meaning it holds today.[86]

This distinction, though clear in theory, proved more ambiguous in practice. A striking example is the case of South Africa. Despite its status as an independent nation within the British Commonwealth since 1934 and its longstanding membership in the ILO since 1919, South Africa continued to be included in the discussions of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories after the Second World War. This anomaly can be explained by the persistence of racialised perceptions that effectively treated South Africa's Black population as subjects separate from the white settler minority. This separation was visible most prominently during South Africa's Apartheid regime from 1948 onwards. While South Africa was not a colonial power in the regular sense, such as the British Empire or France, its state politics continued to be built on racist assumptions about Black inferiority, which also undermined the ILO's formal definition of "non-metropolitan" and blurred the boundaries between colonial and independent contexts.

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geneity in the UN, see Maivân Clech Lâm (2018): Minorities and Indigenous Peoples. In: Weiss, T.G. & S. Daws (eds.): The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 619–634. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803164.013.34.

85 Rodríguez-Piñero, Luis (2005): Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime (1919–1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 46–47. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199284641.001.0001.

86 Rodríguez-Piñero, Luis (2005): Indigenous Peoples, Postcolonialism, and International Law. The ILO Regime (1919–1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 52. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199284641.001.0001.

Another ambiguous case was that of India. Prior to the Second World War, while still under British rule, India participated in the Committee of Experts for Native Labour. At that time, its representatives, first a British and later an Indian member of the Indian Civil Service, addressed labour issues affecting the entirety of the Indian workforce under the broad and racialised category of "native labour", regardless of caste or ethnicity. This homogenising perspective ignored the significant role of the Hindu caste system in structuring labour hierarchies and determining working conditions.[87] By collapsing India's diverse and stratified workforce into a singular racialised category, the ILO justified India's inclusion in the committee under the logic of colonial governance.[88]

Following independence in 1947, India was no longer considered part of the "non-metropolitan" world and was instead assigned a seat on the newly established Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour. While this shift appears, at first glance, to reflect India's transformation into a sovereign "metropolitan" state, it also marked a significant change in how the Indian working class was perceived and represented within the ILO. Instead of addressing the conditions of Indian workers as a whole under the umbrella of "native" or "colonial" labour, racialising discussions now focused exclusively on the so-called Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The term "Scheduled Castes" refers to Dalit communities, describing those historically positioned outside the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy who formed and continue to form one of the most marginalised groups in Hindu society. "Scheduled Tribes" refers to groups officially recognised as indigenous or "backward tribes".[89] The formal

87 The nature of the relation between caste and class is a highly debated issue in Indian history and sociology and cannot be reviewed here. For an introduction, see Carol Upadhya (2023): Caste and Capital. In: Jodhka, S.S. & J. Naudet (eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Caste. Oxford: Oxford Academic, 76–90. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198896715.013.5, and Jules Naudet (2023): Caste and Class. In: Jodhka, S.S. & J. Naudet (eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Caste. Oxford: Oxford Academic, 91–103. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198896715.013.6. See also Chapter 4.1.1.

88 The case becomes even more ambiguous when studied in greater detail. India was, at times, designated a "special country" under Article 19 of the ILO Constitution. This status allowed for a differentiated application of conventions based on India's "special circumstances" and typically applied only to full member states of the ILO. However, India's lack of independence prior to 1947 meant that it was also treated as a dependent territory and subject to the ILO's colonial labour standards.

89 Throughout this study, the concept of "backwardness" has emerged as a central element of colonial labour discourse. A comparison between the Indian understanding of the concept versus other definitions is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this chapter, but would be a valuable question for future research. The Indian context is explored by S. Anandhi & Kalpana Kannabiran (2023): 'Backwardness'. Reviewing the Emergence

recognition of SCs and STs in Indian law came with the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order of 1950, which placed the state under obligation to provide these communities with special protections.[90] Although the classification of STs was based largely on criteria from colonial times and sources, the emergence of SCs and STs as a meaningful category within the ILO, evidenced by India's inclusion in the Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour, revealed the fluid and at times inconsistent application of concepts of racial identity, ethnicity and indigeneity within the organisation's framework.[91]

The Committee on Work on Plantations differed in scope from the other expert groups, as it was classified as an Industrial Committee.[92] These committees had been introduced following the Philadelphia Conference of 1944, which emphasised the need for bipartite or tripartite forums focused on key industrial sectors such as textiles, construction or metal works. Prior to the Second World War, plantation labour had already featured prominently in ILO debates, particularly in relation to Asia. Both Albert Thomas and Harold Butler had reported extensively on their visits to plantations in French Indochina, Ceylon and the Dutch East Indies during their travels across the region.[93] From the earliest discussions surrounding the establishment of an Asian Regional Labour Conference, the working conditions of Asian plantation labourers had been identified as a priority area for future ILO regula-

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of a Concept. In: Jodhka, S.S. & J. Naudet (eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Caste. Oxford: Oxford Academic, 213–230. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198896715.013.14. See also Sarah Gandee (2020): (Re-)Defining Disadvantage. Untouchability, Criminality and 'Tribe' in India, c. 1910s–1950s. In: *Studies in History* 36(1), 71–97. https://doi.org/10.1177/0257643019900089.

90 Bodhi, Sainkupar Ranee & Shaileshkumar S. Darokar (2023): Becoming a Scheduled Tribe in India. The History, Process and Politics of Scheduling. In: *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 2. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X231198720.

91 The reliance on the colonial classification is described by Sainkupar Ranee Bodhi & Shaileshkumar S. Darokar (2023): Becoming a Scheduled Tribe in India. The History, Process and Politics of Scheduling. In: *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, 3. https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X231198720.

92 Most recently discussed by Amalia Ribi Forclaz (2025): Cultivating Fields of Progress. Agriculture and the International Labour Organization, 1920s–1950s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 145–168. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191945014.001.0001.

93 First Supplementary Report of the Director. The Director's Visit to the Far East. In: ILO (1929): Minutes of the 43rd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva: ILO, 134–153, Harold Butler, in: ILO (1938): Minutes of the 82nd Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, February 1938. Geneva: ILO, 170–171, and Harold B. Butler (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 49.

tion.[94] In his submission to the Royal Commission on Labour in India, ILO official R.K. Das had also compiled a substantial body of evidence on plantation labour.[95] After the Second World War, when the Asian Regional Labour Conference was finally convened in India in 1947, plantation labour emerged as a central topic. As a direct outcome of these discussions, the Office pursued the establishment of a dedicated Industrial Committee on plantation labour.[96]

When the Committee on Work on Plantations was constituted, it included seventeen member nations representing a broad geographical spectrum. These included European colonial powers (Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Great Britain), countries in the Americas (Brazil, the United States), the Caribbean (the Dominican Republic, Cuba), in Asia (Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand) and Africa (Liberia).[97] Unlike previous expert committees, this body was composed of tripartite national delegations. Prior to the committee's inaugural meeting, the Office conducted a large-scale survey among governments of countries with large plantation industries, the results of which were published in a report titled *Basic Problems of Plantation Labour*. The report presented plantation labour as a kind of black box from the standpoint of labour legislation, a closed and opaque system, whose past and present were deeply enmeshed with colonial power dynamics.[98] While the report thoroughly surveyed areas such as labour recruitment, working conditions, the employment of women and children, living standards and health and social security, its summaries often concluded that although legal frameworks for workers' protection theoretically existed, they were either inconsistently applied or entirely absent in

94 Harold Butler to P.P. Pillai (February 24, 1930), ILO Archives, D 600/1000/50/1 (Jacket 1).

95 Das, R.K., Analysis of Report of the Royal (Whitley) Commission of Labour in India (November 11, 1931), ILO Archives, CAT 5/39/2/8 (B).

96 R. Rao to A.V. Pai (April 18, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80, ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 95, 110, and N.N. (1950): An International Enquiry into Conditions of Life and Work on Plantations. In: *International Labour Review* 62(3–4), 291–299.

97 N.N. (1950): An International Enquiry into Conditions of Life and Work on Plantations. In: *International Labour Review* 62(3–4), 291.

98 The entanglements between colonial practices, labour exploitation and systems of knowledge are examined by Nicholas B. Miller & Ulrike Lindner (2025): Introduction. Plantation Knowledge. Concept, History, and Research. In: Miller, N.B. & U. Lindner (eds.): Plantation Knowledge. Agricultural Colonization, Exploitation, and Exchange since 1500. New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1–25. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.140649.

plantation settings. As a result, workers remained systematically disadvantaged.[99]

Shifting the analytical focus from a political relationship, such as colonial rule, to a specific industrial sector, like plantations, complicated generalisations about the character of the workers concerned. Still, longstanding tropes from colonial labour discourse persisted in the report. For example, the monotony of plantation work was said to lead to "mental laziness" and excessive drinking, which were attributed to workers' lack of education. Their illiteracy, it was claimed, made them unaware of the value of time and unable to use it productively.[100] Furthermore, in discussions on trade unionism, the report argued that rural workers were too poor and ignorant to engage in collective organisation.[101] Although these assessments were less explicitly linked to racial identity than earlier discourses, they nonetheless revived older colonial stereotypes, reframed now in terms of a general "backwardness" of both the workers and the whole agricultural sector, in contrast to industrial labour. A closer examination of the persistence and transformation of racialising tropes in the committee's proceedings throughout the 1950s would be a valuable direction for future research.[102]

6.3 A Transformation Towards Tripartism, 1954–1958

When, in March 1954, the Governing Body agreed to hold the next meeting of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories on the African continent, the French government quickly proposed hosting it in a French territory, suggesting Dakar, French West Africa (now in Senegal).[103] Officially, the rationale was practical: the ILO argued that convening the meeting in Africa would allow for more direct work on the spot. However, to the

99 See, for example, the conclusions reached in ILO (1950): Basic Problems of Plantation Labour. Committee on Work on Plantations. First Session, Bandoeng, 1950. Geneva: ILO, 39, 47, 68, 77, 83.

100 ILO (1950): Basic Problems of Plantation Labour. Committee on Work on Plantations. First Session, Bandoeng, 1950. Geneva: ILO, 129.

101 ILO (1950): Basic Problems of Plantation Labour. Committee on Work on Plantations. First Session, Bandoeng, 1950. Geneva: ILO, 148. For a comparison between beliefs about white European rural workers in the early twentieth century and racialised rural workers on plantations in the 1950s, see Amalia Ribi Forclaz (2025): Cultivating Fields of Progress. Agriculture and the International Labour Organization, 1920s–1950s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3, 157–158. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191945014.001.0001.

102 See also Chapter 7.2.6.

103 Paul Ramadier to David Morse (May 21, 1954), ILO Archives, NL 1004.

colonial powers, it was clear that the true motivation was a "'political' consideration".[104] When France unexpectedly withdrew its invitation months later due to internal pressure from the French colonial authorities in Africa, the remaining colonial powers grew increasingly uneasy. As discussed, the early 1950s marked intensifying competition over African labour policy between the ILO and the CCTA, an alliance of colonial governments with African interests. While the CCTA aimed to prevent the ILO from establishing a lasting institutional presence in Africa, such as a Regional Field Office, it also recognised the need to accommodate some of the ILO's demands to avoid provoking more "extreme" outcomes. France's abrupt withdrawal alarmed the British Colonial Office, which internally voiced concern over the rising influence of anti-colonial sentiments among the workers' representatives on the Governing Body. In response, Britain began pressuring Portugal, South Africa, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and Belgium to offer an alternative location on the continent, should France maintain its decision.[105] In the end, the French government caved in and agreed to host the meeting in Dakar, but not without a grown awareness of the fragility of the reached consensus.[106]

6.3.1 Christian Trade Unionism in Africa

Soon it became clear that the workers' representatives on the Governing Body would not be satisfied with an expert meeting taking place in Africa without increased representation of African trade unionists themselves. Therefore, in the months leading up to the planned meeting in Dakar, several trade union organisations campaigned vigorously for the inclusion of African workers' representatives. If full participation was not feasible, they at least demanded observer status. One of the most persistent voices was the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU), a relatively small but active confederation of Christian trade unions.[107] During debates in the Governing Body, IFCTU's General Secretary, the Belgian August Vanistendael, emphasised the Christian unions' engagement in Africa and demanded inclusion in the proceedings.[108] When the Governing Body narrowly voted against workers' par-

104 N.D. Watson to R.M. Walker (February 15, 1954), Kew Archives, CO 859/814.

105 R.M. Walker to R.W. Luce and E. Barber (January 14, 1955), Note on the Fourth Meeting of the ILO Expert Committee for the CCTA meeting, both Kew Archives, CO 859/814.

106 C.C.T.A. Note, "Relations with I.L.O." (September 9, 1955), Kew Archives, CO 859/814.

107 Georges Eggermann to David Morse (February 21, 1955), ILO Archives, NL 1004-116.

108 ILO (1955): Minutes of the 128th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, 1st–4th March 1955. Geneva: ILO, 30. Since the late 1940s, the CFTC had toured the French African colonies for several months in order to gain insight

ticipation in June (by sixteen votes to fourteen, with eight abstentions), protest intensified.[109] Spearheaded by IFCTU, an increasing number of African trade union organisations began partitioning the ILO directly. Letters of protest arrived from unions in French Equatorial Africa, Tunisia, Madagascar and French Sudan.[110] These developments highlight the particularly active role of the colonial section of the French *Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens* (CFTC), led by trade unionist Gérard Espéret, in mobilising for the representation of colonised workers.[111] Although the larger International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) later joined the protest, it was primarily the confessional trade unions that carried the burden of advocacy in these earlier years.[112]

The initial absence of the ICFTU from the protest can be attributed to the broader tensions that shaped the post-war international trade union landscape. Formed in 1949 after splitting from the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) over ideological tensions around communism, the ICFTU positioned itself as explicitly anti-communist, bringing together the majority of Western unions. However, the internal dynamics of the ICFTU quickly became dominated by its two most powerful affiliates, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC).[113] While the AFL maintained a staunchly anti-communist stance, the TUC adopted a more pragmatic and less ideologically rigid approach. Tensions escalated further with the 1955 merger of the AFL and the American Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), as CIO leaders tended to be more aligned with TUC's politics.[114] These internal rivalries were especially pronounced in the months leading up to the 1955 meeting of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in

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into their living and working conditions and to build contacts and larger networks for trade union mobilisation.

109 ILO (1955): Minutes of the 129th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, 27th–28th May and 24th June 1955. Geneva: ILO, 50, and August Vanistendael to David Morse (July 22, 1955), ILO Archives, NL 1004-116.

110 P. Eticault to David Morse (August 22, 1955), Laurent Chetcuti to David Morse (September 27, 1955), Tostivint [first name unknown] to David Morse (September 29, 1955), Jean Morellet to Union Territorial des Syndicats C.F.T.C. de Soudan (October 28, 1955), all ILO Archives, NL 1004.

111 Georgi, Frank (2009): Espéret, Gérard, Marie, François, Auguste, Louis. In: Le Maitron (February 23, 2009) https://maitron.fr/esperet-gerard-marie-francois-auguste-louis/ (last accessed: April 23, 2025).

112 Jacobus Hendrik Oldenbroek to David Morse (August 8, 1955), ILO Archives, NL 1004-116.

113 Carew, Anthony (1996): Conflict within the ICFTU. Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Communism in the 1950s. In *International Review of Social History* 41(1), 148, 150.

114 Carew, Anthony (1996): Conflict within the ICFTU. Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Communism in the 1950s. In *International Review of Social History* 41(1), 150–151.

Non-Metropolitan Territories.[115] As a result, ICFTU's ability to present a cohesive and forceful position on colonial labour at the ILO was significantly undermined.

At the ILO, the protests from various French territories centred on the figure of Charles Mendy (?–?), a Senegalese trade union leader affiliated at the time with the colonial section of the French *Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens* (CFTC).[116] Mendy was proposed as a candidate for participation in the expert committee. Just a year later, in 1956, the French West African branch of CFCT moved towards more autonomy, forming the *Confédération Africaine des Travailleurs Croyants* (CATC), thereby establishing an independent Christian trade union organisation in West Africa.[117] As the ILO continued to cite the Governing Body's decision to reject tripartite representation at the Dakar meeting, African trade unionists led by Charles Mendy took their protest to the next level. By November, they threatened to organise a physical protest at the meeting itself.[118] This created significant diplomatic pressure. While the French government, already embroiled in the Algerian War, feared the political repercussions of another colonial protest and leaned towards concession, the representative of the British government on the Governing Body, Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, firmly opposed any compromise, characterising the unionists' pressure as "in effect blackmail".[119] Caught between these positions, Deputy Director-General C.W. Jenks devised a last-minute solution. Just days before the meeting began, the Governing Body agreed to appoint two colonial trade unionists on an ad hoc basis. Next to Charles Mendy, the ad hoc appointment also featured a trade unionist from British territories in Africa.[120] When Eyo E. Esua (1901–1973) of the Nigerian Union of Teachers was unable to attend due to other trade union commitments, Har-

115 Carew, Anthony (1996): Conflict within the ICFTU. Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Communism in the 1950s. In *International Review of Social History* 41(1), 159–160.

116 Charles Mendy to David Morse (October 1, 1955), ILO Archives, NL 1004. See Appendix II for more biographical information.

117 Pasquier, Roger (1986): La formation des cadres syndicalistes africains l'exemple de la C.F.T.C. In: Ageron, C.-R. (ed.): Les chemins de la décolonisation de l'empire colonial français, 1936–1956. Paris: CNRS Éditions [Online]. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.editionscnrs.527.

118 Charles Mendy to David Morse (November 28, 1955), ILO Archives, NL 1004.

119 J.H. Galbraith to A. McM. Webster (December 14, 1955), Kew Archives, CO 859/814.

120 ILO (1955): Minutes of the 130th Session of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. Geneva, 15th–18th November 1955. Geneva: ILO, 160.

oun Popoola Adebola (1916–?) was nominated in his place. However, Adebola also had to withdraw after contracting yellow fever.[121]

The preparations for the 1955 meeting of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories marked a significant turning point in the ILO's engagement with Africa. This shift had become apparent to the Office as early as 1953, when workers' voices within the Governing Body grew increasingly assertive. Attempts to appease these concerns by appointing a limited number of Black experts to the committee had proven ineffective, at best delaying the body's ongoing transformation. With the support of the IFCTU and the ICFTU, the ILO was introduced to African trade unionists such as Mendy, Esua and Adebola. These unionists not only demonstrated that African workers were capable of organising independently, a claim long denied by colonial authorities, but also, through their alignment with moderate, non-communist trade union federations, gained access to international platforms such as the ILO. Their inclusion ultimately benefitted almost all parties: the African trade unionists themselves, the international trade union bodies and the Office, which would increasingly need to rely on established trade union networks in Africa to expand its presence on the continent in the years ahead. Simultaneously, colonial employers' representatives were also appointed on an ad hoc basis. Only the governments of the colonial powers emerged as the final bastion of resistance, uneasy with the committee's gradual move towards broader representation.

6.3.2 The End of an Era of Colonial Experts?

Between December 5 and December 16, 1955, the fourth session of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories took place in Dakar, French West Africa. Despite earlier disputes about the representation of colonised workers' representatives, the meeting itself proceeded more smoothly than anticipated and served as a critical link between the Office's efforts to assert its influence against the colonial powers in Africa and its increasingly regionalised approach. Overall, the committee's demands closely aligned with the Office's own vision for its future work on the continent, highlighting the expert committee's role as an instrument for advancing the Office's colonial policy agenda.[122] Through the detailed preparation of mate-

121 N.N., Minute Sheet (December 23, 1955), Kew Archives, CO 859/814. See Appendix II for more biographical information.

122 Similarly argued by Daniel Maul (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 176–178. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

rial for the meeting, the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section of the Office was able to steer the committee into the desired direction. Among the main recommendations in the final report were the expanded application of the ILO's TAP programme to Africa and the conduction of a comprehensive survey of African labour conditions.[123] Thanks to the intervention of the workers' representative on the Governing Body, the Swiss Jean Möri (1902–1970), the report also incorporated proposals for the organisation of African Regional Labour Conferences and the establishment of a regional Branch Office.[124]

While the content and the results of the debates mostly pushed the treatment of Africa as a separate region rather than as characterised by its dependence on European colonial powers, the language applied to describe this transformation continued to reinforce racialised distinctions between Africa and Europe. Representing Director-General David Morse in his absence, Deputy Director-General C.W. Jenks' opening address captured this duality. In an extensive review of the ILO's relationship with the continent and of Africa's position within global history in general, Jenks portrayed Africa as a long-standing outsider to the main currents of world affairs. Acknowledging only a few incidents in early African history by quoting ancient Greek historian Herodotus and Arab historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldoun from the fourteenth century, Jenks concluded that "greater part of Africa remained until recent times almost wholly out of touch with the main currents of world history".[125] Within this narrative, Africa only entered the global conversation through European colonial expansion and as a recipient of the European "civilising mission", thus remaining passive entirely. While Jenks offered a comparative analysis of different European methods of colonial rule, he refrained from privileging one over another, instead broadly emphasising the benevolence of the colonial powers and their financial and moral commitment to the "advancement of the African".[126] This view reflected long-standing colonial tropes.

123 ILO (1955): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Fourth Session, Dakar, 5th–16th December 1955. ILO: Geneva, 12. ILO Archives, NL 1004-1.

124 ILO (1955): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Fourth Session, Dakar, 5th–16th December 1955. ILO: Geneva, 9. ILO Archives, NL 1004-1.

125 Jenks, C.W. (1955): The I.L.O. and Africa. Opening Speech for the Fourth Session of the I.L.O. Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. ILO Archives, NL 1004.

126 Jenks, C.W. (1955): The I.L.O. and Africa. Opening Speech for the Fourth Session of the I.L.O. Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. ILO Archives, NL 1004.

Nevertheless, the ILO's broader post-war restructuring had introduced new notions of universality that could not be entirely ignored. This ambivalence in the ILO's position became particularly apparent when Jenks asserted that, although the global application of the ideals of the Declaration of Philadelphia was a duty of "the whole civilised world", their implementation still depended on the "stage of social and economic development reached by each people".[127] More than a decade after the adoption of the declaration, little had changed regarding its practical application to colonised territories. Similarly, the host of the meeting, the High Commissioner of the French Republic in West Africa, cautioned against the premature extension of social security schemes to "underdeveloped countries".[128] Despite the political realities of growing decolonial movements and the increased organisation of colonised workers in Africa, and despite the committee's vote at the expert meeting for a new approach to African labour questions, the rhetoric used by both Jenks and the French High Commissioner continued to frame Africa through a lens of Otherness and underdevelopment. Thus, the meeting revealed the fundamental duality of the ILO's evolving stance. While a shift towards a more regionalised, autonomous engagement with African labour issues was underway, the language surrounding this change remained steeped in colonial hierarchies.

Following the conclusion of the meeting, the colonial authorities, represented by Thomas Haighton, Director of the CCTA's Inter-African Labour Institute, were compelled to acknowledge the Office's growing success in establishing a more permanent foothold in Africa. Haighton described the 1955 meeting as marking a "definite stage" in the Office's African policy and suspected that it would seek to "allow this development [of turning the expert committee into a fully tripartite body] to take place 'naturally' over a period of several years".[129] By March 1956, an internal meeting of the British government conceded that, while they intended in the short term to "play for time on the I.L.O. front" in an effort to slow down this transformation, "in the long view", it was uncertain whether it would even be "practicable or desirable to keep the

127 Jenks, C.W. (1955): The I.L.O. and Africa. Opening Speech for the Fourth Session of the I.L.O. Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. ILO Archives, NL 1004.

128 ILO (1955): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Fourth Session, Dakar, 5th–16th December 1955. ILO: Geneva, 7. ILO Archives, NL 1004-1.

129 Thomas Haighton, Report on the Fourth Session of the I.L.O. Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories (Dakar, 5th–16th Dec. 1955), Kew Archives, CO 859/814.

I.L.O. out of Africa".[130] By the autumn of that year, Robert Gavin, head of the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section, visited Portugal, Great Britian, France and Belgium to consult with the colonial powers on the proposed *African Labour Survey*, the gradual transformation of the committee of experts into a tripartite body and the broader future of ILO policy in Africa.[131] When the fifth and final meeting of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories convened in Geneva in December 1957, it was devoted solely to reviewing the Office's draft of the *African Labour Survey*.[132] By 1958, the expert committee was dissolved and replaced by an African Advisory Committee, thus completing the ILO's shift towards a regionalist approach.

In conclusion, over the years of its existence, the idea of a specialised expert committee for colonial questions steadily lost both popularity and effectiveness. Even during the interwar period, the notion of a fixed concept of "colonial labour expertise" had already proven untenable within the Committee of Experts for Native Labour. The professional backgrounds of the committee's members had varied widely and conflicting understandings of the expert role had frequently surfaced. While some experts perceived themselves primarily as civil servants representing their national governments, others emphasised their individuality and independence from national affiliations. The debates surrounding the inclusion of a female expert in 1930, where she was viewed more as a representative of her gender than her nationality, had already revealed the inherent ambiguity of the expert role. Following the Second World War, the creation of various committees focused on dependent territories, indigenous labour conditions and specific industrial sectors reflected the ILO's broader shift towards specialisation.

In its final years, the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories increasingly became a battleground for the ILO and the CCTA in their competition for influence in Africa, largely neglecting other non-independent territories. In this struggle, compared to the interwar period, the focus shifted away from the individual contributions of the experts and towards the broader dynamics of international diplomacy. At the same time,

130 Note of Meeting held in Mr. Bourdillon's room on 22nd March 1956 (April 3, 1956), Kew Archives, CO 859/814.

131 Report of Mission by Robert Gavin to Lisbon, London, Brussels and Paris, September and October 1956, 2. ILO Archives, NL 1005.

132 ILO (1957): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Fifth Session, Geneva, 9th–20th December 1957. Geneva: ILO. In: ILO https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/delivery/41ILO_INST:41ILO_V1/1290145660002676 (last accessed: September 6, 2024).

external pressure, most visibly from the workers' representatives, subjected the concept of an all-white, exclusively governmental committee to growing scrutiny and criticism. In a slow and uneven process, the workers' side ultimately succeeded in securing broader inclusion, granting greater access first to non-white members and later also to non-governmental representatives. Simultaneously, the very notion of expert knowledge on colonial labour came increasingly into question. As the analysis of the final two meetings of the committee demonstrated, the Office ultimately succeeded in deploying the idea of independent expertise to advance its own political aims. In a sense, this development closed the cycle of the committee's history in a manner strikingly similar to its origins in 1927, when figures such as Harold Grimshaw and Albert Thomas had conceived the committee as a means to legitimise the Office's engagement with issues of institutional interest. The perception of the experts' relative passive role in the whole equation was likewise captured by Hugh Worrell Springer in his memoirs: "I am not sure", Springer concluded, "what as 'experts' we were to do about social policy in non metropolitan [sic] countries" in the first place.[133]

133 Springer, Kean (2008): Truly a Gentleman. The Life and Times of Sir Hugh Worrell Springer. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 56–57.

CHAPTER 7

India and the ILO, 1940–1957

This final chapter offers a detailed examination of the evolving relationship between the ILO and India from 1940 to 1957 and thereby closes the larger analysis of the treatment of racialised labour at the organisation. Building on the pre-war developments described in Chapter 4, it analyses how the Second World War shaped the Indian trade union movement and provided new momentum for longstanding ILO ambitions to prioritise labour conditions in Asia. The second sub-chapter focuses on the pivotal year 1947, which not only marked India's independence in August but also represented a turning point in its engagement with the ILO. The convening of the first Preparatory Asian Regional Labour Conference in October reflected a significant shift in the organisation's discourse about Asia, now addressing a growing number of newly sovereign states. The final part of this chapter explores the transformations that followed the appointment of the American David Morse as the ILO's Director-General in 1948. Under Morse's leadership, the organisation underwent a major programmatic change, placing greater emphasis on economic questions and developing a programme of technical assistance for its member states. Concepts of "development" and "developmental aid" became increasingly central to the ILO's activities in Asia. India's transition from the organisation's only non-independent member to a sovereign postcolonial state offers valuable insights into the evolving intersections of race, labour and capitalism.

7.1 The ILO, Asian Labour and the Second World War, 1940–1946

When in 1938, shortly before his resignation as Director-General of the ILO, Harold Butler published his report on labour in South and Southeast Asia, he depicted India as a country at a crossroads between two historical trajectories. On the one side stood entrenched agricultural traditions and "economic lethargy", on the other the emergence of industrialisation, modernisation and economic development. His journey to South and Southeast Asia had marked a significant step towards reconciling the ILO with a region that had long felt overlooked by the organisation. At the same time, the visit had been part of a

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broader effort to bolster the ILO's image in Asia amid rising geopolitical tensions and the looming collapse of the League of Nations. These global crises—notably the ascent of fascism and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939—would prove pivotal for both the evolution of the Indian trade union movement and the deepening relationship between India and the ILO.

7.1.1 Strategic Alignments. War, Empire and the Reconfiguration of Indian Trade Unionism

By the end of September 1940, India's fragmented trade union landscape once again coalesced into a unified body. The National Trades Union Federation (NTUF), formed in 1933 as a vehicle for reconciliation among rival unions, was dissolved, and the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) resumed its role as the central platform representing the full political spectrum of organised labour in India.[1] Yet, even as the movement reunited, new divisions loomed. Though ostensibly centred on differing attitudes towards fascism and the Second World War, the emerging rift fundamentally concerned the future relationship with Britain and the path towards independence and decolonisation. This echoed earlier conflicts, most notably the 1929 Nagpur split, where divisions had crystallised around affiliation with either moderate international organisations like the ILO, which advocated reform within imperial frameworks, or anti-imperialist and communist organisations such as the LAI and the Comintern. By December 1940, the renewed tension led to the formation of a new political party and trade union: the Radical Democratic Party and the Indian Federation of Labour (IFL), spearheaded by Jamnadas Mehta, Aftab Ali and M.N. Roy.[2]

To understand this divergence of Indian labour, the broader political context of the war must be considered.[3] After Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939, Britain and France declared war, swiftly followed by Britain's unilateral decision to enlist India as a belligerent without consulting Indian leaders. The Indian National Congress (INC) responded by withdrawing all provincial ministries to protest the decision. In November 1939, Jawaharlal Nehru publicly condemned the war as a sham battle between democracy and fascism, arguing that Britain's continued imperialism rendered any

1 National Trades Union Federation, Resolution (n.d.), ILO Archives, RL 33-3-1.

2 P.P. Pillai to C.W.H. Weaver (April 24, 1941), ILO Archives, C 33-1.

3 For an introduction, see Ravi Ahuja (2021): Disruptive Entanglements. South Asia and South Asians in the World Wars. In: Fischer-Tiné, H. & M. Framke (eds.): Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia. London: Routledge, 479–481. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431012-44.

Indian support morally untenable.[4] Anti-war protests quickly followed, including a general strike in Bombay that mobilised more than 90,000 workers on October 2, 1939, with key support from the Communist Party of India (CPI).[5] Meanwhile, followers of Mohandas Gandhi upheld their commitment to non-violence, rejecting both war and armed resistance.[6] This spectrum of positions reverberated within AITUC. While the organisation condemned fascism, it also declared in September 1940 that India could only support the Allied war effort if independence was assured by stating that "participation in a war which w[ould] not result in the establishment of freedom and of democracy in India, w[ould] not benefit India, much less w[ould] it benefit the working classes of India".[7] Member unions, however, were allowed to adopt individual stances, reflecting the growing ideological pluralism and fracture within the labour movement.

Nonetheless, for several trade unionists and political leaders, among them Mehta, Ali and Roy, AITUC's lack of a clear commitment to anti-fascism prompted their departure from the organisation. M.N. Roy, once a founding figure of Indian communism and co-founder of the CPI in 1920, had by then undergone a significant ideological transformation. After his expulsion from the Comintern in 1929 and a decade of imprisonment by the British authorities, Roy increasingly aligned himself with the INC, though he eventually broke with it as well in 1939, openly criticising Gandhi's (neo-)*Swaraj* politics.[8] In contrast, Mehta and Ali came from more traditional trade union backgrounds. Mehta, a politician and businessman from Bombay, had risen to the presidencies of both the NTUF and the All-India Railwaymen's Federation by 1934. At the time, P.P. Pillai described him as "exceptionally able" but cautioned against his "well-developed [...] combative instincts", which

4 Nehru, Jawaharlal (1948): The Unity of India. Collected Writings, 1937–1940. London: Lindsay Drummond, 345, and Tom Buchanan (2016): 'The Dark Millions in the Colonies are Unavenged'. Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s. In: *Contemporary European History* 25(4), 651. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777316000394.

5 Manzer, Habib (2007): Communist Party Policy during the Imperialist War (1939–41). In: *Social Scientist* 35(11–12), 56. The position of the Indian communists changed with the entry of the Soviet Union into the war from June 1941 onwards.

6 N.M. Joshi to A. Staal (June 10, 1942), ILO Archives, RL 33-3-1. For an in-depth analysis of Gandhi's attitude towards the war, see also Francis G. Hutchins (2017): Gandhi's Battlefield Choice. The Mahatma, The Bhagavad Gita, and World War II. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351051101.

7 P.P. Pillai to C.W.H. Weaver (December 5, 1941), ILO Archives, C 33-1.

8 Manjapra, Kris (2010): M. N. Roy. Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism. New Delhi: Routledge, 116. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367818623.

might not bode well for the labour movement.[9] Aftab Ali, meanwhile, was a leading figure of the Indian Seamen's Union in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and had already represented Indian labour at the ILCs of 1933 and 1936. Their joint defection from AITUC to form IFL was met with harsh criticism from AITUC members. N.M. Joshi dismissed Mehta's motives as purely opportunistic, arguing that "really speaking[,] Jamnadas Mehta had no justification to start a new organisation".[10] In communist circles, Roy was condemned even more fiercely, labelled "a poor tool in the hands of Imperialism".[11]

Nevertheless, IFL's unequivocal support for the Allied war effort earned it strong backing from the British colonial government. Soon after its founding, the Government of India recognised the IFL as the official representative of Indian labour, effectively stripping AITUC of its authority to nominate delegates to the ILC.[12] In the years that followed, AITUC and the IFL clashed repeatedly over who could legitimately claim to speak for Indian workers. For the ILO, the situation remained opaque. When the IFL claimed in March 1943 to have over 372,482 members, more than double than the previous year, P.P. Pillai reported to Geneva that the number was unverifiable, as most affiliated unions were not registered under the Indian Trade Unions Act.[13] Without expressing a preference for either organisation, Pillai noted that the rivalry between AITUC and IFL, coupled with rising wartime labour demand, had led to a general weakening of the trade union movement in India.[14]

The early years of the Second World War had a lasting impact on the fragile unity of the Indian trade union movement. Central to the division was the unresolved tension between anti-imperialism and anti-fascism and the question of what role Indian labour should play in confronting each. In the historiography of Indian trade unions produced in the 1970s and 1980s, the formation of the IFL has often been interpreted as a strategic intervention by the British-led Government of India to weaken AITUC and suppress demands for Indian independence. While indirect support or tacit encouragement by the colonial authorities is plausible, this interpretation risks overlooking the agency of figures like Roy and Mehta. Both men acted with deliberate intent, choosing to

9 P.P. Pillai to Harold Butler (February 8, 1934), ILO Archives, XC 33/1/1.

10 N.M. Joshi to A. Staal (June 10, 1942), PMML, AITUC Papers 160.

11 Carritt, Michael (1941): The Crisis in India. In: *Labour Monthly* 23(2), 75–82. In: Marxists Internet Archive https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/periodicals/labour_monthly/1941/02x02.htm (last accessed: January 2, 2025).

12 P.P. Pillai to C.W.H. Weaver (December 5, 1941), ILO Archives, C 33-1.

13 In April 1942, the number was said to be roughly 168,700. N.N. (1942): Membership Strength of the Indian Federation of Labour. In: *Independent India* (April 3, 1942).

14 P.P. Pillai to A. Staal (March 17, 1943), ILO Archives, RL 33-3-2.

distance themselves from AITUC and adopt positions that aligned with official policy, but were also shaped by their own ideological trajectories and political calculations.[15] As the war sharpened the urgency of the anti-colonial struggle, the political and strategic divergences within the labour movement deepened.

7.1.2 Wartime Catalysts. The Second World War and the Revival of the Asian Regional Labour Conference

At the same time as the Indian labour movement was negotiating its diversification at the national level, the idea of a tripartite Asian Regional Labour Conference was once again placed on the ILO's agenda. In October 1941, member states of the ILO convened an International Labour Conference in New York. Acting Director-General Edward Phelan's reconstruction programme for the ILO also included a brief reference to the desirability of convening an Asian Regional Labour Conference in the near future. According to Phelan, such a conference had thus far been impeded by "political tension" but had now acquired greater significance, as the war had provided "so great a stimulus to further industrial expansion in Asia" that the post-war social problems of the region would soon become impossible for the rest of the world to ignore.[16] Shortly after the conference, in December 1941, the Japanese surprise attack on the American Pacific fleet stationed at Pearl Harbour led to the United States' formal entry into the war and had a profound effect on geopolitical developments in Southeast Asia. By March 1942, the Japanese invasion had brought French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, the US-administered Philippines, Hong Kong and Singapore under its control, resulting in the Japanese military's capturing of large territories of Southeast Asia previously under European or US authority. These developments played a decisive role in the ILO's endeavours to shape its influence in Asia.

At the subsequent meeting of the Governing Body, the representative of the Government of India, Shamal Dharee Lall, sought to slow down the ILO's resurfacing interest in the idea of a regional conference, thereby revealing

15 See, for example, S.N. Dhyani (1977): International Labour Organisation and India. In Pursuit of Social Justice. Delhi: National Publishing House, 124, and Prem Sagar Gupta (1980): A Short History of All-India Trade Union Congress. New Delhi: AITUC Publication, 437. Both publications are not historical studies in the narrower sense. An in-depth study of the involvement of the Government of India in the IFL foundation thus still needs to be conducted.

16 Edward Phelan (September 11, 1941), in: ILO (1941): The I.L.O. and Reconstruction. Montreal: ILO, 108.

the continued aversion of the Government of India to such an initiative, despite the changed sociopolitical circumstances. Nonetheless, over the following two years, the ILO expanded its inquiry into the proposal.[17] Two Indian staff members of the Office, S.S. Dhami and R. Raghunath Rao, were asked to compile their views on the topic, largely informing the ILO's future politics in the question. For Sadhu Singh Dhami (1906–1997), who had migrated from India to Canada as a teenager and had become well acquainted with Canadian trade union structures, the main benefit of a regional labour conference in Asia lay in its potential to strengthen trade unions across the region.[18] Drawing a parallel with the historical role of the first International Labour Conference in formalising the Indian trade union movement and contributing to the establishment of AITUC, Dhami believed a regional labour conference in Asia could foster the emergence of similar trade union bodies elsewhere, thereby promoting a more formalised articulation of labour interests. According to Dhami, large segments of the Asian labour movement remained unaware of their potential and capacity. The proposed conference could, he argued, "serve a historic purpose" by accompanying labour movements on their path towards "maturity".[19] However, Dhami also maintained that Asian workers needed to be made aware of the ILO's strictly apolitical character. In his opinion, they should be educated about the organisation's history and goals, highlighting its technical but not political potential for the Asian countries. At a time when the Indian labour movement and, more so, the whole subcontinent, was deeply engaged in debates over its future relationship with Great Britain and the imperial system in light of the war, Dhami considered it especially important to distance the ILO's work from any anti- or decolonial attempts. His assessment reflected, on the one hand, the growing global importance of Asian labour and, on the other, a continued insistence on the

17 S. Lall, in: Draft Minutes of the Fifth Session of the Emergency Committee of the Governing Body in April 1942 in London, ILO Archives, RC 158-1.

18 S.S. Dhami (1906–1997) migrated to Canada at the age of fifteen and gained early work experience in lumber mills. He later studied at the University of British Columbia and the University of California and received his PhD from Toronto in 1937 with a thesis on the influence of the philosopher John Dewey's work on India. Later, he published a semi-autobiographical novel on the experience of Indian immigrants in Canada. Krishnamurty, Jayasankar (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 59. See also Hammad Abdullah (2022): 'Maluka'. The Novel Unpacking Histories of Early 20th Century Indian Labour Migrants in B. C. In: 5xpress (November 9, 2022) https://www.5xfest.com/5xpress/maluka-the-novel-unpacking-histories-of-early-20th-century-indian-labour-migrants-in-b-c (last accessed: January 7, 2025).

19 S.S. Dhami, Note (June 5, 1943), ILO Archives, RC 158-1.

necessity of ILO guidance and oversight in what he perceived as the labour movement's still developing state.

Similarly, R. Raghunath Rao also spoke out in favour of the idea of a regional conference. When asked specifically about the advantages and disadvantages of a conference still to be convened during wartime, the officer, who in the 1930s had helped bring into life the Asiatic Labour Congress of the workers, highlighted the symbolic value of a war conference. According to him, it would be understood by the population of Asia as "an event of considerable significance for the future" and "a demonstration of a new outlook in the affairs of Asia", promising social and political changes in favour of the Asian populations in a post-war world.[20] Although the symbolic meaning of an Asian Regional Labour Conference during the war was undeniable, Rao also warned his superiors of narrowly following the geopolitical realities of the war. If the ILO's attention would only be paid to those nations showcasing recent economic growth due to the war industries like India, countries not as far developed industrially might feel left out. Large parts of the continent currently were under Japanese occupation and therefore would also be unable to join the conference, although Rao considered their participation to be vital. Rao also opposed the idea of organising a conference that would solely focus on countries from the "Far East". Such a "bifurcation" of Asia into the "Middle East" and the "Far East" would ignore the commonalities between the countries and also unjustly neglect the recent economic and social developments in territories like Iran, Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt.[21] Rao instead based his recommendations on a wide definition of "Asia" and focused more on the anticipated political, economic and societal changes of the continent in the reconstruction period rather than the signalling power of an immediate conference during the war.

Both S.S. Dhami's as well as R. Raghunath Rao's evaluations of the conference plans highlight the increased importance of the Asian Regional Labour Conference for the ILO. Although the organisation had tried to negotiate with the governments concerned for over a decade, the main initiative and driving force behind the idea had always come from the side of the Asian workers. Over the course of the war, however, the international organisation increasingly realised the precariousness of its own international standing and found

20 R. Raghunath Rao, Note on the Desirability of Convening during the War a Conference of Asiatic Countries under the Auspices of the International Labour Organisation (June 17, 1943), ILO Archives, RC 158-1.

21 R. Raghunath Rao, Note on the Desirability of Convening during the War a Conference of Asiatic Countries under the Auspices of the International Labour Organisation (June 17, 1943), ILO Archives, RC 158-1.

itself in need of a range of duties in which it could prove its relevance for the post-war world. Between 1941 and 1943, the ILO thus developed plans for its future policy emphasising the organisation's "all-inclusive social mandate" in the restructuring of international labour relations and global social policy.[22] Through the help of Dhami and Rao, the plans for the Asian Regional Labour Conference became an integral part of the policy outlined by Edward Phelan in the report "Future Policy, Programme and Status of the International Labour Organisation", which was presented in April/May 1944 in Philadelphia.

In his report to the conference, reflecting on the historical relationship between the ILO and Asia, particularly India and China, Edward Phelan acknowledged the "widespread and [...] altogether justified feeling that what ha[d] been accomplished hitherto ha[d] not been commensurate with the needs of a vast continent which [wa]s passing through a period of unprecedented social ferment". Consequently, Phelan explicitly endorsed the necessity for "some kind of regional arrangement" to improve these relations.[23] He went on to recount the earlier trajectory of the proposal of an Asian Regional Labour Conference. Initially delayed by the reluctance of colonial governments to cooperate and later interrupted entirely by Japan's withdrawal from the ILO in 1938, the idea had now re-emerged in the context of war, which had, according to Phelan, precipitated "a revolution in social life and in economic possibilities". In discussing industrial development in China and India, Phelan noted substantial progress in productivity, presenting it as a success of capitalist expansion and economic development in the face of war.[24] While in 1938 the former Director-General, Harold Butler, had emphasised the urgent need to raise productivity in India, by 1944 the ILO celebrated India's apparent advancement, largely ignorant of the fact that the production of essential goods for the Indian population remained insufficient.[25] For example, the disastrous Bengal famine of 1943 received only marginal mention in the report.[26] Phelan also chose not to act on internal suggestions put forward by R. Raghunath Rao and instead proposed that the prospective conference

22 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 40–43. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

23 ILO (1944): Future Policy, Programme and Status of the International Labour Organisation. Report to the 26th International Labour Conference. Montreal: ILO, 82.

24 ILO (1944): Future Policy, Programme and Status of the International Labour Organisation. Report to the 26th International Labour Conference. Montreal: ILO, 85.

25 Kamtekar, Indivar (2002): A Different War Dance. State and Class in India 1939–1945. In: *Past & Present* 176(1), 195. https://doi.org/10.1093/past/176.1.187.

26 ILO (1944): Future Policy, Programme and Status of the International Labour Organisation. Report to the 26th International Labour Conference. Montreal: ILO, 86.

should focus on South and Southeast Asia, setting apart the "Middle East" as a distinct region. In reference to Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous "Four Freedoms" speech, delivered to articulate the core aims of US war policy, Phelan identified the principal objective of an Asian Regional Labour Conference as the collaborative development of strategies to help Asia achieve "freedom from want".[27]

During the Philadelphia Conference, several delegates responded to the suggestion made by Phelan in his report. Expectably, the proposal for a regional labour conference was strongly endorsed by the Indian and Chinese workers' representatives. Aftab Ali, representing Indian workers on behalf of the IFL, articulated sharp criticism regarding the ILO's slow progress. Reflecting on the protracted history of the Asian Regional Labour Conference proposal, Ali reproached the ILO for its overly cautious and accommodating stance towards the repeated governmental objections that had obstructed earlier efforts. He characterised this hesitancy as a "breach of faith" towards Asian workers and urged the conference to cease further delays.[28] Chu Hsueh-fan, the workers' representative of China, equally supported the idea of a conference, though he cautioned against convening it during wartime. In his view, meaningful "advance planning" could not occur until hostilities had ceased. Nevertheless, he forecast an even more prominent role for Asia in the post-war period of rehabilitation and reconstruction, thus emphasising the need for the conference.[29] This view was echoed by the Chinese government.[30] Notably, the Philadelphia Conference also marked a shift in the official policy of the Government of India. Both the newly appointed High Commissioner of India, Samuel Ebenezer Runganadhan (1877–1966), and his deputy, Henry Carlos Prior (1890–1967) of the Department of Labour, now expressed support for the prospect of a regional conference.[31] With this shift in attitude, the conclusion of the Philadelphia Conference paved the way for the Governing Body to

27 ILO (1944): Future Policy, Programme and Status of the International Labour Organisation. Report to the 26th International Labour Conference. Montreal: ILO, 89. On the meaning of the "Four Freedoms" speech for the ILO, see Daniel Maul (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 41. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

28 Aftab Ali, in: ILO (1944): Record of Proceedings of the 26th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1944. Montreal: ILO, 173–174.

29 Chu Hsueh-fan, in: ILO (1944): Record of Proceedings of the 26th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1944. Montreal: ILO, 128, 161.

30 Li Ping-heng, in: ILO (1944): Record of Proceedings of the 26th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1944. Montreal: ILO, 93.

31 Samuel Runganadhan, in: ILO (1944): Record of Proceedings of the 26th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1944. Montreal: ILO, 61–62, and Henry Carlos Prior, in: ILO

initiate formal negotiations with the relevant governments and to settle on a prospective date for the conference.[32]

In the aftermath to Philadelphia, a race for the right to host the first Asian Regional Labour Conference emerged between India and China. Whereas originally, the conference had been scheduled for late 1945 or early 1946, in the face of the surprising conclusion of the Pacific war, China asked for a prolongment until the domestic political situation had been re-established.[33] After the Japanese surrender in September 1945, the government of the formerly occupied area was split between the Chinese *Guomindang* (GMT) under Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Mao Zedong. In November 1945, the Chinese government officially invited the ILO to hold the proposed conference in China.[34] This clashed with a similar invitation by the Indian government, leading to a conflict of interests. During a series of negotiations held in Copenhagen, the ILO officials and representatives of China and India came to the agreement that the honour of convening the first conference would be given to India. The character of the conference, however, should merely be "preparatory", thus leaving the right of the first "real" conference to China one or two years later.[35] In May 1946, the Government of India officially announced the conference for January 1947, which later was shifted to September 1947.

7.2 At the Crossroads of Empire and Independence. The ILO, India and Asia in 1947

When it was finally decided that the conference would be held in autumn of 1947, the Office began, at the start of that year, to organise several extensive research missions to South, Southeast and East Asia. As early as 1945, individual staff members had already undertaken smaller missions to selected territories in India.[36] Their observations had informed draft reports intended to

(1944): Record of Proceedings of the 26th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1944. Montreal: ILO, 159.

32 Edward Phelan, in: ILO (1944): Record of Proceedings of the 26th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1944. Montreal: ILO, 192.

33 Cheng Hai-feng to Edward Phelan (August 24, 1945), ILO Archives, RC 158-1.

34 Jef Rens to Edward Phelan (November 22, 1945), ILO Archives, RC 158-1.

35 C.W. Jenks to Edward Phelan (November 27, 1945), ILO Archives, RC 158-1. In the end, the location of the second conference was changed as China was too entangled in a civil war.

36 N.N. (1945): Seventh Item on the Agenda. Questions Arising out of Certain Decisions of the 26th Session of the International Labour Conference. Regional Activities of the Inter-

summarise the status quo in key fields such as economy, agriculture and rural life, industrial labour and the diplomatic relationship between the ILO and South and Southeast Asia.[37] In light of the substantial task ahead, however, more detailed and independently collected information was required to adequately prepare the ILO for its definitive engagement with the region. For some time, Asian delegates to the International Labour Conference had urged the organisation to deepen its research into non-European labour conditions. Although previous Director-Generals and officers, including Albert Thomas in 1928/29 and Harold Butler in 1937/1938, had visited parts of Asia, these travels were primarily representative in nature. This time, by contrast, the focus lay on research and collaboration with the governments concerned. For the ILO, it was vital to convey the impression that the organisation was genuinely committed to considering the interests and needs of Asian societies. In this context, R. Raghunath Rao emphasised the importance of showing local governments that the mission of the ILO was "no fairweather [sic] pleasure trip, but a serious undertaking". Highlighting the mission's focus on "technical work", Rao underlined the necessity for staff to acquaint themselves thoroughly with life and labour in Asia.[38] It was further suggested that, where possible, the delegation should largely consist of staff originally from Asia.[39] Accordingly, over the course of the next three months, a group of approximately ten ILO officers travelled across India, Ceylon, China, Siam, Singapore, Malaya and Burma, aiming to gain in-depth insights into the postwar conditions of labour and industry in Asia and to lay the groundwork for the forthcoming Asian Regional Labour Conference.

7.2.1 En Route to Asia. First Stop: India, February 1947

The first part of the mission brought the group to India where they spent the entire month of February 1947. Led by R. Raghunath Rao, the delegation included his secretary Ruth Gordon, who had joined the ILO only two years

national Labour Organisation. In: Minutes of the 95th Session of the Governing Body, Quebec, 21–27 June 1945. Quebec: ILO, 76.

37 R. Raghunath Rao, Note on the Present Position concerning the Proposed Asiatic Regional Conference and on Proposals for Future Action (June 6, 1944), ILO Archives, RC 158-1.

38 R. Raghunath Rao to G.A. Johnston (February 15, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

39 N.N. (1946): Fifteenth Item on the Agenda. Report of the Director. Second Supplementary Report. The Preparatory Asiatic Regional Conference, New Delhi. In: Minutes of the 99th Session of the Governing Body, Montreal, 16, 17 and 27 September 1946. Montreal: ILO, 103.

earlier and was responsible for planning the Asian Regional Labour Conference as well as Aamir Ali, Hervey G. de Bivort, Lore Bodmer, Sadhu Singh Dhami, Elna Palme Dutt and Marguerite Thibert.[40] The group was joined by Cheng Hai-feng (1904–?) and Djang Tien-kai (1913–?) from China. Cheng had directed the Chinese Branch Offices in Shanghai and Nanjing since 1934 and oversaw their multiple relocations during the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War.[41] Djang, who had prior experience in the Chinese government, joined the ILO in 1945.[42] The various delegates arrived in New Delhi in late January 1947 and spent the first days of February at the New Delhi Branch

40 Rolian, Fiona (2005): A Passage to India. Ruth Gordon's Mission, 1947. In: *Friends Newsletter* 39 (December 2005) https://webapps.ilo.org/public/english/friends/download/issue39/dec2005.pdf (last accessed: January 13, 2025).

41 Cheng Hai-feng (1904–?), also transliterated as Cheng Hai-fong, was born in Anhui Province, China. He studied at Stanford University and Columbia University, USA, where he earned a MA in Social Sciences. Following his studies, he headed the Factory Inspection Section within China's Ministry of Industries and represented China at several International Labour Conferences. In 1934, he was appointed Director of the Chinese Branch Office of the ILO in Shanghai and Nanjing. After the Japanese occupation of Nanjing during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the ILO office was relocated entirely to Shanghai. A new Branch Office was opened in Chongqing in 1939, while the Shanghai branch closed in 1942. After the end of the Second World War, the ILO's China branch was re-reestablished in Shanghai. It ultimately ceased operations in 1952, and Cheng Hai-feng's contract ended in the same year. See CV of Cheng Hai-feng (1934), Cheng Hai-feng to Edward Phelan (May 4, 1942), Cheng Hai-feng to Edward Phelan (December 26, 1947), and W. Caldwell to Cheng Hai-feng (April 8, 1952), all ILO Archives, P 2925. See also Chen Yifeng (2014): The International Labour Organisation and Labour Governance in China 1919–1949. In: Blanpain, R., U. Liukkunen & Y. Chen (eds.): China and ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Alphen aan den Rijn: Wolters Kluwer, 33–35.

42 Djang Tien-kai (1913–?) was born in Meixian, China. He studied at the National Tsing Hua University in Beijing and later earned a PhD in Economics from the University of London. Between 1941 and 1944, he worked for the Ministry of Social Affairs in Chongqing before joining the ILO in 1945. Following his time with the ILO, Djang returned to the Ministry of Social Affairs in Nanjing, where he worked in the Bureau of Factory and Mining Inspection. In 1949, with the relocation of the Guomindang government to Taiwan, he moved as well. There he served on various labour bords and became a prolific author on topics such as labour inspection, management and workers education. See CV of Djang Tien-kai (n.d.), ILO Archives, P 3586, Djang Tien Kai (1942): Factory Inspection in Great Britain. London: George Allen & Unwin, Djang Tien Kai (1954): Labor-Management Relations. Taipei: Chinese Labor Publishing Co [in Chinese], Djang Tien Kai (1956): Industrial and Mining Safety Manual. Taipei: World Book Co [in Chinese], Djang Tien Kai (1956): Aided Self-help Housing Programme for Workers in Taiwan. Geneva: ILO, Djang Tien Kai (1958): A Short History of the American Labour Movement. Taipei: World Book Co [in Chinese], and Djang Tien Kai (1977): Industry and Labor in Taiwan. Taipei: Academia Sinica.

Office, meeting with P.P. Pillai and his team to prepare for their upcoming journeys. Aamir Ali (1923–2018), who had joined the ILO just a month earlier and would later go on to build up a distinguished career in the organisation, later recalled that his role at the time was to ensure that his colleagues from Montreal and Geneva were properly accommodated and instructed on "living, eating and washing in India". He remembered being "deeply impressed by their mysterious and incomprehensible ways" of navigating the unfamiliar cultural surrounding.[43] For some, such as Ruth Gordon, this was their first trip abroad.[44] While R. Raghunath Rao and Ruth Gordon remained in New Delhi for an additional month, on February 7, 1947, half of the delegation, Group A, departed on a tour of Northern India.[45] At the same time, Group B travelled through Southern and Eastern India.[46]

Upon their return, both groups submitted their observations to Geneva in the form of summary reports. A close reading of these reports highlights three key aspects. First, both groups prominently noted the significant influence of living and housing conditions on workers' labour output. Overall, the housing conditions were described as "grossly unhygienic and inadequate",

43 Aamir Hassan Ali (1923–2018) was born in Bombay, India, and was educated in Kobe, Japan and Dehradun, India. Between 1940 and 1944, he studied English at the University of Bombay. In January 1947, Ali joined the Indian ILO Branch Office, before transferring to Geneva in 1948. At the ILO, Ali was employed in various departments, among them the Advisory Missions Section and later the Special Research and Reports Division. Upon its setting up, Ali joined the International Institute for Labour Studies. Ali retired from his official position at the ILO in 1986. He published widely on the topics of English and Indian literature, history, mountaineering and labour. Among his writings are Aamir Ali (1967): Via Geneva. Bombay: Pearl Publishers, Aamir Ali (1969): Fifty Years of the ILO and Asia. In: *International Labour Review* 99(3), 347–362, Aamir Ali (1973): Assignment in Kashmir. Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, Aamir Ali (1989): The Story of Geneva. Geneva: Slatkine, and Aamir Ali (2018): There Comes A Time. A Life in the Mountains. Dehradun: Natraj Publishers. For more information on his biography, see Andrés Castellanos de Corral (2019): In Memoriam Aamir Ali President Emeritus and Former President of FAFICS. In: FAFICS News https://fafics.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/FAFICS.pdf (last accessed: January 14, 2025). The quote about his role in the 1947 mission was given in Aamir Ali (2005): Ruth Gordon. In: *Friends Newsletter* 39 (December 2005) https://webapps.ilo.org/public/english/friends/download/issue39/dec2005.pdf (last accessed: January 13, 2025).

44 Ruth Gordon produced a large amount of private correspondence with her family about her time in India. The material remains in the possession of her descendants but unfortunately could not be accessed by the author.

45 International Labour Office Mission Tour Programme Group A (n.d.), ILO Archives, MI 80.

46 International Labour Office Mission Tour Programme Group B (n.d.), ILO Archives, MI 80.

leaving "much to be desired". In the absence of water supplies, drainage systems, electricity, ventilation and lighting, the workers were left unprotected from weather conditions and infectious diseases. Group A attributed the greatest importance to housing: any beneficial change for the workers could only be achieved through improvements of their living conditions "outside of their working hours". Consequently, the reports argued that governments and employers should not merely raise wages but instead prioritise the development of improved industrial housing.[47]

A second finding concerned the generally "low productivity" of India—an issue that had dominated discourse on Indian labour for decades. Ten years earlier, Harold Butler, in his report *Problems of Industry in the East*, had attributed the perceived low productivity of workers to their poor health and deplorable living conditions. Similar arguments were advanced by the 1947 ILO delegation. Although the reports refrained from making any direct reference to a correlation between the race of the workers and levels of productivity, they did note a "lack of a real incentive" among the labour force. According to Report B, "the worker fel[t] little personal interest in his factory or in his work" and lacked "pride in increased efficiency or output". The workers' limited identification with their labour was further explained by their difficulty in understanding mechanical and technical processes and the operation of machinery.[48] A comparable connection had already been made by Butler in 1938. By this logic, the phenomenon, if accurately understood by the observers, would gradually disappear as education levels improved. This line of reasoning would later underpin the ILO's Technical Assistance Programme (TAP). Nevertheless, it is striking that this example of labourers' alienation from their labour and its products was framed as a deficiency on the part of the workers, something to be corrected, rather than as an inherent consequence of the capitalist system of production into which they had been incorporated.

A final observation pertained to the status of organised labour in India. Both Groups A and B expressed regret concerning the fragmentation of the Indian trade union movement, criticising the absence of "real" workers among union leaders as well as the overt "political involvement" of the latter, rather

47 Draft Report on Mission of Group A (n.d.), ILO Archives, MI 80.
48 Draft Report on Mission of Group B (n.d.), ILO Archives, MI 80.

than a focus on industrial relations alone.[49] While it is true that the Indian trade union movement had experienced a number of serious internal conflicts over political issues, the ILO staff's remarks suggest that they conceived of workers' organisation as an essentially apolitical activity. This perspective failed to recognise the inherently political nature of labour organisation within a capitalist economic system. By artificially separating the ILO's tripartite work from the broader political systems in which it was embedded, such as capitalism and colonialism, ILO officers overlooked the inevitability of political conflict arising from the activities of Indian trade unions.

For the remainder of February, the ILO officers remained in New Delhi. Internally, the delegation incorporated the findings from their tour of India into the previously prepared draft reports, which were to be submitted to the delegates of the forthcoming Asian Regional Labour Conference. In addition, a delegation met with representatives of the Department of Labour of the Government of India to discuss its newly formulated labour policy, the "Five Year Labour Programme", developed by the new Minister of Labour in Jawaharlal Nehru's interim government, Jagjivan Ram (1908–1986). The programme, comprising a series of legislative and administrative measures, aimed to address existing deficiencies in Indian labour law and to coordinate a uniform national labour policy. In the years that followed, key elements of this programme were enacted, including the Industrial Disputes Act (1947), the Factories Act (1948), the Minimum Wages Act (1948) and the Employees' State Insurance Act (1948).[50] During the February meeting, Shamal Dharee Lall of the Government of India praised the ILO for its positive influence on Indian labour legislation. In his view, the most significant impact of the ILO was the establishment of tripartite bodies, such as the tripartite Indian Labour Conference and the various tripartite industrial committees.[51] In a press interview regarding India's relationship with the ILO, Jagjivan Ram stated that

49 Draft Report on Mission of Group A (n.d.) and Draft Report on Mission of Group B (n.d.), both ILO Archives, MI 80.

50 For a deeper understanding of Ram's view of labour, capitalism and caste, as he himself was Dalit, see Shivangi Jaiswal (2014): Caste and Labour in the Official Discourse of India, 1942–1952. In: *Labour & Development* 21(1), 45–75.

51 S. Lall, in: Report of Meeting of Members of ILO India Mission with Indian Department of Labour (February 28, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

> [n]either the backwardness nor the military weakness of Asiatic countries should be allowed to stand in the way of their development towards the goal of freedom and democracy. On the other hand, in fullest sympathy with the new awakening of these countries and their legitimate aspirations, international collaboration through an organisation such as the I.L.O. c[ould] show how dependent on each other [we]re the nations of this World for their own development and progress.[52]

It is evident that, since the reversal of official opinion during the 1944 Philadelphia Conference, the Government of India had become increasingly interested in strengthening its relationship with the ILO. Although the formal announcement of partition and independence was still several months away, initiatives such as Ram's labour programme suggest a heightened interest in cooperation with international organisations like the ILO, likely also in anticipation of India's eventual independence from the British Empire. At the conclusion of the meeting, both the ILO delegation and the Indian labour officials expressed optimism about future cooperation, thereby laying the groundwork for the successful joint organisation of the forthcoming Asian Regional Labour Conference.[53]

7.2.2 En Route to Asia. Second Stop: South and Southeast Asia, March 1947

At the beginning of March, the two groups departed once more, with one group travelling to Indochina and China and a second undertaking a tour of Ceylon, Siam, Singapore, the Malayan Union and Burma. A team of Aamir Ali, Ruth Gordon and Elna Dutt in all likelihood remained in New Delhi at the ILO Branch Office. In China, the first group visited Shanghai, Nanking (now Nanjing), Wusih (now Wuxi) and Hangchow (now Hangzhou), all cities located near the eastern coast. According to Marguerite Thibert's record, Chinese trade unions were generally well formalised but faced a number of hardships, including extremely long working hours, poor housing conditions and only

52 N.N. (1947): International Collaboration through I.L.O. Labour Member on Objectives of Asiatic Regional Conference. In: *Indian Information* 20(203), 216.

53 Report of Meeting of Members of ILO India Mission with Indian Department of Labour (February 28, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

limited access to social protection.[54] Hervey de Bivort, by contrast, concentrated primarily on questions of industrial organisation.[55]

The second group began their journey through Asia in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Between March 5, and March 9, R. Raghunath Rao, Djang Tien-kai and Lore Bodmer visited a number of factories, plantations and mines. While Rao and Djang focused primarily on industrial matters, Bodmer concentrated on issues relating to social policy and public health, visiting municipal housing schemes as well as health centres and clinics.[56] This was

54 This summary is based on Françoise Thébaud's analysis of the report: Françoise Thébaud (2014): What is a Transnational Life? Some Thoughts About Marguerite Thibert's Career and Life (1886–1982). In: Janz, O. & D. Schönpflug (eds.): Gender History in a Transnational Perspective. Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders. New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 173–174. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782382751-008. Marguerite Thibert (1886–1982) was a French international civil servant and advocate for women's rights. Thibert studied in Paris and received her PhD for a thesis on the history of French Socialist Feminism in 1926. In the same year, Thibert joined the ILO and first worked on the topic of migration. In 1932, she took over the responsibility for the topics of women's and children's labour, locating to Montreal in 1942. Between 1946 and 1947, Thibert led the Women's and Children's Section of the ILO, before being forced to retire officially. Thibert managed to receive several temporary contracts until the end of 1951, when she officially retired. Over the course of the next two decades, however, Thibert continued to function as an expert for the ILO, traveling to, among other areas and countries, Latin America, Tunesia and Algeria. Thibert published widely on topics of migration and women's labour. See, for example, Marguerite Thibert (1926): Le féminisme dans le socialisme français de 1830 à 1850. Paris: Marcel Giard, Marguerite Thibert (1933): Crise économique et travail féminin I. In: *Revue internationale du travail* 27(4), 465–493, Marguerite Thibert (1933): Crise économique et travail féminin II. In: *Revue internationale du travail* 27(5), 647–657. For more biographical information, see ILO Archives, P 1870, and Françoise Thébaud (2014): What is a Transnational Life? Some Thoughts About Marguerite Thibert's Career and Life (1886–1982). In: Janz, O. & D. Schönpflug (eds.): Gender History in a Transnational Perspective. Networks, Biographies, Gender Orders. New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 167–172. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782382751-008.

55 Hervey Ghislain de Bivort (1906–1985), born in France, was an international civil servant of the ILO. In 1936, he became a naturalised US citizen. He worked for the ILO in Canada and later Geneva in the Industrial Committees Section, before retiring in California. He published on the topic of labour automation, for example Hervey De Bivort (1955): Automation. Some Social Aspect. In: *International Labour Review* 72(6), 467–495. For more biographical information, see R.B. Saunders (2021): Lillian Frances Chinn 1885–1968. In: The Saunders Family History http://www.saundersfamilyhistory.com/images/Chapter%2012%20-%20Lillian%20Frances%20Chinn.pdf (last accessed: January 14, 2025), 139–141.

56 Lore Elsie Bodmer (1898–1965) was a British expert for social security. Bodmer studied political economy in Zurich and graduated with a PhD thesis on the history of the British trade union movement, published as Lore Bodmer (1925): Die englische Gewerkschaftsbewegung in der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit. Zurich: H.A. Gutzwillller. For a short time,

not Bodmer's first visit to Southeast Asia. In 1945, she had travelled India as an adviser to the Government of India in its efforts to develop a social insurance scheme for Indian seafarers.[57] Her report on the 1947 mission to Ceylon, however, focused only partially on matters of social insurance. Instead, it revealed the ongoing prevalence of concerns regarding the "low productivity" of Ceylonese workers. In her report, Bodmer quoted several British and Swedish employers interviewed in Colombo who suggested a direct correlation between workers' racial identity and their labour output. One Swedish employer, for example, remarked that "three men were needed in Ceylon where two were required in India and one and a half in Europe".[58] In a direct comparison between a Ceylonese and an English factory, a British employer estimated productivity to be 30 percent lower, with a rate of "absenteeism" 15 percent higher than in England. Additionally, Chinese workers were praised as the most desirable labourers overall, being described as "very industrious, regular in attendance and willing to work overtime".[59] Such ascriptions reflected long-standing stereotypes that had shaped British colonial discourse since the eighteenth century. While the term "native labour" had fallen out of use in reference to Asian workers by the late 1930s and early 1940s, the quotations from colonial employers nonetheless revealed the persistence of what political scientist Onur Ulas Ince has described as capitalist racialisation, ranking different "races" according to their presumed compati-

Bodmer worked at the Ministry of Finance in Saarbrücken, before joining the ILO in 1925. First working as a translator and statistician, Bodmer moved through different positions in the ILO until remaining in the Section for Social Insurance from 1932 until 1940. Between 1940 and 1942, Bodmer lived in Britain, where she worked for the Statistics Department in Bath and later joined the *Comité Belge pour l'Étude des problems d'après-guerre* (CEPAG). She rejoined the ILO in November 1942 and finally retired in 1958. Bodmer published widely on topics of occupational health and sickness insurance, later under the name "Laura" instead of "Lore". See, for example, Laura E. Bodmer (1941): Morbidity Trends and Trade Cycles. In: *International Labour Review* 43(5), 514–541, Laura E. Bodmer (1951): Organisation of Medical Care. ILO Regional Seminar for the Study of Social Security Problems, Istanbul, 3–22 September 1951. ILO: Geneva, and Laura E. Bodmer (1963): Volume and Cost of Sickness Benefits in Kind and Cash. Geneva: International Social Security Association. See also various files in ILO Archives, P 1844. Lore Bodmer was the sister of the botanist and lyricist Helen Schoch-Bodmer.

57 List of reports, monographs, and articles published by Lore Bodmer (1947), ILO Archives, P 1844.

58 Bodmer, Lore (June 20, 1947): Report on Mission to Ceylon, Siam, Singapore, the Malayan Union and Burma (March 3–April 4, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 94.

59 Bodmer, Lore (June 20, 1947): Report on Mission to Ceylon, Siam, Singapore, the Malayan Union and Burma (March 3–April 4, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 94.

bility with capitalist "civilisation".[60] Although in this context Bodmer merely reproduced the views of the employers she interviewed, she did not take the opportunity to critically distance herself from these statements, in contrast to other parts of the report, where she adopted a more critical stance.[61] This omission, combined with earlier observations by delegates regarding the "low productivity" of Indian workers, suggests a broader, implicit agreement with the notion of a connection between ascribed racial identity and differential work ethics.

After a brief return to India, the travel group arrived in Bangkok on March 13. With this visit to Siam (now Thailand), the ILO hoped to achieve a major turning point in its relationship with the state. Although a founding member of the ILO, the Kingdom of Siam had, during the 1920s, only sent observers to the International Labour Conferences and had not actively participated in the organisation's work or discussions—a fact that long been regarded with regret. One of the most significant personal contacts for the delegation was the socialist Thai prince Sakol Wannakon Worawan (?–?).[62] Prior to the Siamese Revolution of 1932, Sakol had served as a civil servant in the Ministry of Health and was publicly known for his sympathy towards trade unions and labour issues.[63] During the 1930s, he acted as a political consultant for *Khana Ratsadon* (the People's Party) and following the Second World War became closely associated with the *Sahachip* (Unionist) party.[64] In Bangkok,

60 Ince, Onur Ulas (2023): From 'Chinese Colonist' to 'Yellow Peril'. Capitalist Racialization in the British Empire. In: *American Political Science Review* 118(4), 1758. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423001260. On the construction of "Chineseness" and racial identity formation in the context of migrant and indentured labour, see also Marilyn Lake & Henry Reynolds (2008): Drawing the Global Colour Line. White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 15–45. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511805363, and Tu T. Huynh (2008): From Demand for Asiatic Labor to Importation of Indentured Chinese Labor. Race Identity in the Recruitment of Unskilled Labor for South Africa's Gold Mining Industry, 1903–1910. In: *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 4(1), 51–68. https://doi.org/10.1163/179325408788691516.

61 For example, Bodmer critically questioned the view of employers and governments that labour unrest should be attributed entirely to communist agitation.

62 In the ILO sources, his name is transcribed as "Prince Sakol Varavarn". ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xxiv.

63 *Bangkok Times Weekly Mail* (October 31, 1932), 10. Cited in Kevin Hewison (1986): Forgotten Facts. Industrial Development, Labour, and Rural Life in Thailand, 1850–1942, 27. In: Personal Blog by Kevin Hewison https://kevinhewison.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/thailand-industry-labor-rural.pdf (last accessed: January 18, 2025).

64 Tejapira, Kasian (2003): Commodifying Marxism. The Formation of Modern Thai Radical Culture, 1927–1958. Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 10.

with Sakol's assistance, the ILO delegates engaged in meetings with government representatives, workers' and employers' organisations, and visited factories, workers' housing areas, hospitals and maternity homes. R. Raghunath Rao was particularly impressed by what he perceived as the "enormous potentialities for economic development" in Siam. However, echoing observations made elsewhere in Asia, he also noted "the beginnings of acute economic discontent" among the population.[65]

During his time in Siam, Rao also reflected on the role of Indian migrant labour in the country. In his view, Indian workers had previously been willingly employed due to their being regarded as particularly "docile" and "low cost". However, in light of the growing anti-colonial sentiments and the impact of the Second World War, Rao believed this perception had shifted, resulting in increased assertiveness and political organisation among Indian workers. With evident pride, Rao remarked on the important role his home country now played on the global scale—a development he linked to India's "very considerable influence" in Southeast Asia during ancient times.[66] Rao's remarks echoed a widely circulated narrative about India's past that had gained popularity during the 1920s and 1930s. The idea of a "Greater India" or "India Magna" promoted the notion that, in pre-colonial times, India had not only been a "highly developed civilisation" in its own right but had also functioned as a hegemonic power, civilising other Asian peoples. These ideas, grounded in a belief in Brahmanic and Buddhist cultural supremacy, were adopted by twentieth-century Indian nationalists to argue that India belonged among the ranks of the "civilised nations". They further contended that India had historically practised a more pacifistic and therefore morally superior form of imperialism than that imposed by the British.[67] While Rao's travels seemed to confirm for him that India continued to function as a role model for neighbouring countries, thereby implying a degree of civilisational superiority, he nevertheless fully supported the "nascent national conscious-

65 R. Raghunath Rao to G.A. Johnston and Edward Phelan (March 19, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

66 R. Raghunath Rao to A.V. Pai (April 18, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

67 This idea was especially prominent among the founders of the Greater India Society, such as Kalidas Nag, P.C. Bagchi and Romesh Chandra Majumdar. They had largely been inspired by the works of French indologists Sylvain Lévi and Jean Przyluski. Fischer-Tiné, Harald (2008): 'The Cult of Asianism'. Asiendiskurse in Indien zwischen Nationalismus und Internationalismus (ca. 1885–1955). In: *Comparativ* 18(6), 26–28, and more detailed in Susan Bayly (2004): Imagining 'Greater India'. French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 38(3), 703–744. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X04001246.

ness" of the smaller nations and acknowledged their own struggles for independence.[68]

Following the stay in Siam, the ILO delegation continued with visits to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Rangoon (now Yangon).[69] At the end of March, both groups reconvened in New Delhi, where they spent several weeks revising the previously prepared draft reports for the Asian Regional Labour Conference. Thereafter, some of the delegates transferred to Simla for further consultations with government officials. By July 1947, most of the ILO officers had returned to their usual workplaces, while R. Raghunath Rao and Ruth Gordon remained in India.[70] Overall, the most significant outcome of the research mission lay in the diplomatic relations established with various governments and interest groups. While the improvement of the ILO's empirical knowledge concerning labour conditions in South and Southeast Asia was undoubtedly of importance, this was surpassed by the symbolic value of engaging directly, in situ, with governments, employers and trade unions alike, thereby laying the foundations for the discussions envisioned for the Asian Regional Labour Conference.

7.2.3 Indian Labour, Asian Solidarity and the Dawn of Independence, 1947

In the months following the large ILO mission across Asia in March 1947 and leading up to the Asian Regional Labour Conference at the end of October 1947, monumental events reshaped the history of India and the wider subcontinent. These developments also significantly influenced the Indian labour movement. In the first post-war years, strong competition between AITUC and the Indian Federation of Labour, which had emerged in 1940, continued. While the IFL had represented Indian labour at the 1944 International Labour Conference in Philadelphia, AITUC regained representative status for subsequent ILCs. By 1946, the Government of India's Department of Labour deemed it necessary to investigate the basis of the competition between AITUC and the IFL. In the resulting report, S.C. Joshi, Chief Labour Commissioner of the Government of India, affirmed AITUC's clear lead in terms of representation. With approximately 226,071 affiliated members, more than double the IFL's 101,500,

68 R. Raghunath Rao to A.V. Pai (April 18, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

69 R. Raghunath Rao to A.V. Pai (April 18, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

70 R. Raghunath Rao to G.A. Johnston (May 12, 1947) and Marguerite Thibert to S.R. Deshpande (August 21, 1947), both ILO Archives, MI 80.

AITUC secured the right to represent Indian trade unions on the international stage.[71]

On the international level, the topic of Indian and, more broadly, Asian labour, was prominently discussed during the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in March and April 1947. Although long marginalised in historical scholarship, some researchers have recently characterised this large non-official international gathering as a precursor to the more widely recognised Bandung Conference of 1955, laying the groundwork for what would later become the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).[72] Other historians, by contrast, interpret the conference as an outcome of earlier interwar currents of Asianism, including the 1934 Asiatic Labour Congress and Indian trade union efforts to unite Asian labour interests within the framework of the ILO.[73] In all interpretations, however, the conference stands as a pivotal moment of Asian decolonial solidarity that celebrated unity among Asian nations. At a time when India stood on the brink of independence, while several of the twenty-eight participating delegations still remained under colonial rule with no immediate prospect of self-government, the conference offered a critical space for debating various conceptualisations of Asianism.

71 Joshi, S.C. (1946): Report regarding the Representative Character of the All-India Trade Union Congress and the Indian Federation of Labour. New Delhi: Manager Government of India Press, 30.

72 As, for example, argued by Itty Abraham (2008): From Bandung to NAM. Non-Alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–65. In: *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46(2), 197, 199–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040801990280. The historiography of the Bandung conference itself is extensive and cannot be reviewed here. For an introduction, see Jamie Mackie (2005): Bandung 1955. Non-Alignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, Quỳnh N. Phạm & Robbie Shilliam (eds.) (2016): Meanings of Bandung. Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions. London: Rowman & Littlefield, and on the wider networks of Asian-African networks of solidarity during the Cold War, Su Lin Lewis & Carolien Stolte (2019): Other Bandungs. Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War. In: *Journal of World History* 30(1–2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2019.0011, and the other papers in the special volume. An overview over the wider Non-Aligned Movement is given by Jürgen Dinkel (2019): The Non-Aligned Movement. Genesis, Organisation and Politics (1927–1992). Boston, MA/Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004336131.

73 Stolte, Carolien (2014): 'The Asiatic Hour'. New Perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947. In: Mišković, N., H. Fischer-Tiné & N. Boškovska (eds.): The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War. Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 61–64. Vineet Thakur builds on Abraham's and Stolte's work but ultimately reaches a different conclusion, highlighting the transitional moment between decolonial and postcolonial visions on the future of Asia. Thakur, Vineet (2019): An Asian Drama. The Asian Relations Conference, 1947. In: *The International History Review* 41(3), 675. https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2018.1434809.

It fostered inter-Asian rapprochement and cooperation and set out shared visions for the future, all with the aim of securing a powerful post-imperial role for Asia in world affairs.[74]

The twenty-eight participating countries represented a broad geographical spectrum of Asia, including West Asia and North Africa (notably Egypt). The conference also featured delegations from several Soviet republics, including Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, demonstrating the organisers' expansive definition of "Asia". At the same time, the event brought together delegations with unresolved territorial disputes, such as the Jewish delegation from Palestine and its Arab neighbours, China and Tibet and rival Vietnamese representatives from both the French-controlled imperial regions and the areas governed by Ho Chi Minh. Observers from the Arab League in Cairo, institutions from Australia and New Zealand, the Institutes of Pacific Relations in Moscow and New York, the London India Institute, the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the United Nations were also present.[75] The conference was hosted by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), formally a non-political organisation focused on international studies. Unofficially, however, it was widely recognised that Jawaharlal Nehru and the INC had played a central role in organising the event. This influence was affirmed by several delegate speeches praising Nehru, with one referring to him as "the architect of this Conference".[76] As a consequence of the INC's dominance, the Indian Muslim League chose to boycott the event.[77]

Focusing on socio-economic development, labour and women's rights, the Asian Relations Conference addressed a number of questions of mutual interest to the ILO. Due to his extensive travels in preparation for the ILO Asian

74 Apart from the obvious criticisms against the European colonial powers, both China and India were warned, too, about possible future attempts at establishing their own imperial interests in Asia. See N.N., in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 96.

75 Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 264.

76 General Sri Yuvaraj Bijaya Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 55.

77 Stolte, Carolien (2014): 'The Asiatic Hour'. New Perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947. In: Mišković, N., H. Fischer-Tiné & N. Boškovska (eds.): The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War. Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 58.

Regional Labour Conference, R. Raghunath Rao was unable to attend the Asian Relations Conference. However, the ILO was represented by P.P. Pillai from the New Delhi Branch Office. Also present was the distinguished Indian trade union leader N.M. Joshi, who chaired the round-table discussions on labour and social security. Joshi's speeches played a crucial role in acquainting the conference audience with the ILO's work, mission and future objectives, including the forthcoming Asian Regional Labour Conference scheduled for autumn 1947.[78] Although divergent views were expressed during the discussions on the forms of labour organisation, principles of arbitration and strike regulations, the working group reached broad consensus on most issues. Among the key conclusions drawn from the panels on "Transition from Colonial to National Economy", "Agricultural Reconstruction and Industrial Development" and "Labour Problems and Social Services" was the imperative to improve the conditions of both agricultural and industrial labourers across Asia. With the overarching aim of "rais[ing] the standard of life" for all Asian nations, agricultural reconstruction and industrial development were recognised as fundamental priorities, highlighting also the intended implementation of standard employment.[79] Regarding labour organisation, the participants largely adhered to the ILO model. The group's final report explicitly emphasised the centrality of ILO conventions, envisaged as a "basic minimum" of future labour standards. Furthermore, the establishment of tripartite organisations was strongly endorsed.[80] Overall, discussions concerning labour and economic issues proceeded with minimal contention. Despite the presence of divergent economic systems, such as the distinctive Soviet model, the conference ultimately projected an image of a unified Asia posed on the threshold of a "renaissance" and the "spring" of a new era.[81] Reflecting the atmosphere of the conference and its aftermath in a letter to the ILO Director Edward Phelan, R. Raghunath Rao remarked that

78 N.M. Joshi, in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 173.

79 N.N., in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization,113, 154.

80 N.N., in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 171–172.

81 Sarojini Naidu, in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 28–29.

> [b]y all accounts, the Conference was more successful, as an expression of the present awakening in Asiatic countries to the realities of the prevailing political, social and economic conditions, than what had been thought possible when it was first contemplated. I heard echoes of it in the countries I visited and can bear testimony to the large measure of interest it evoked in those countries. There is good reason to regard this Conference as a most useful preliminary to our forthcoming Preparatory Regional Conference at New Delhi.[82]

Although the Asian Relations Conference was not originally conceived by its organisers as a preliminary event for the Asian Regional Labour Conference, the conceptual frameworks of both conferences bore strong resemblance in many respects. A key distinction, however, lay in the degree of decolonial critique and the organisers' readiness to engage with ceasing or former imperial powers. As will be demonstrated later, the ILO Asian Regional Labour Conference remained significantly entangled with both former and current colonial powers, whereas anti-imperialism was a fundamental premise of the Asian Relations Conference.

Shortly after the conference, in May 1947, and largely influenced by the Hindu-dominated INC, a new trade union organisation was established. The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) emerged from the former *Hindusthan Mazdoor Sewak Sangh*, a society involved in social reform and welfare activities.[83] Following a pattern reminiscent of previous splits within the trade union movement, the principal cause of this division was the alleged communist takeover of AITUC.[84] According to N.M. Joshi, however, the democratic structures within AITUC remained as securely protected as ever. Rather, he argued that with INTUC, the former Congress members of AITUC sought to found an organisation adopting a different approach to labour arbitration and strike action. Historically, AITUC, though generally supportive of resolving labour disputes, had opposed compulsory arbitration and the prohibition of strikes. For the INC, anticipating future governmental responsibilities, these issues were of vital importance. The sensitivity of the topic of compulsory arbitration had already surfaced during the discussions at the Asian

82 R. Raghunath Rao to Edward Phelan (April 10, 1947), ILO Archives, MI 80.

83 Kaul, N.N. (1956): India and the International Labour Organisation. Delhi: Metropolitan Book Co, 100.

84 N.M. Joshi, Statement by the All India Trade Union Congress (May 7, 1947), ILO Archives, RL 33-3-1.

Relations Conference, highlighting the diversity of opinions among Indian delegates.[85] Regarding the INC's stance on labour, Joshi predicted that

> [t]he remedy for the present difficulty lie[d] in sympathetic understanding and prompt redressal of grievances. Unfortunately, the bewildered Congress Ministries th[ought] that the easy way to get out of the difficulty lie[d] in dividing the ranks of labour. They w[ould] live and learn, but, in the meantime, the mischief ha[d] been done.[86]

The formation of INTUC thus paved the way for a more conservative approach by the INC towards labour organisation and governance in India. This shift became manifest in the Industrial Truce Resolution passed a few months later, whereby the government, employer organisations and INTUC-affiliated trade unionists collectively endorsed a political strategy prioritising increased production, without necessarily guaranteeing a corresponding rise in wages.[87] A few months after INTUC's establishment, on August 15, 1947, India was declared an independent state, severing constitutional ties with the United Kingdom. With the coming into effect of the Indian Independence Act, legislative sovereignty was transferred to the Indian Constituent Assembly and Jawaharlal Nehru assumed office as the first Prime Minister of India. Simultaneously, the former territory of British India was partitioned into the two independent dominions of India and Pakistan. This partition triggered vast migratory movements involving Muslim, Sikh and Hindu refugees, and was accompanied by widespread violence, including sexual violence and acts of genocide, that claimed between 250,000 and 2,000,000 lives.[88] The Congress

85 N.N., in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 164–166.

86 N.M. Joshi, Statement by the All India Trade Union Congress (May 7, 1947), ILO Archives, RL 33-3-1.

87 Ahuja, Ravi (2020): 'Produce or Perish'. The Crisis of the Late 1940s and the Place of Labour in Post-Colonial India. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 54(4), 1090. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17001007.

88 The large difference in figures is explained by Ian Talbot & Gurharpal Singh (2009): The Partition of India. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 61–62. For an introduction to the concept of communalism and an overview over the extensive historiography of the Indian partition, see also Ian Talbot (2021): Contested History. The Rise of Communalism and the Partition of British India. In: Fischer-Tiné, H. & M. Framke (eds.): Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia. London: Routledge, 92–104. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431012-9.

Party's significant shifts in governmental labour policy thus coincided with the chaotic and tragic upheavals of partition.

7.2.4 The Preparatory Asian Regional Labour Conference, October 1947

In the same hall where, two months prior, he had been handed power on Indian Independence Day, on October 27, 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, opened the first Preparatory Asian Regional Labour Conference of the ILO at New Delhi's Old Parliament House. Delegations from Afghanistan, Australia, Burma, Ceylon, China, the French Union, including Cambodia, Cochin China, France and the French establishments in India and New Caledonia, Laos, India, the Malayan Union, the Netherlands Union, New Zealand, Pakistan, Siam, Singapore and the United Kingdom participated. Additionally, observers from Nepal, the US, the United Nations and the WHO were present. In the absence of Director-General Edward Phelan, the ILO was represented by Belgian officer Jef Rens (1905–1985), alongside other officers including K.M. Kuriyan, Cheng Hai-feng, R. Raghunath Rao and C.W. Jenks, who served as legal counsel.[89] Overall, the conference, which encompassed fourteen official sittings and various informal events, adopted an impressive twenty-two resolutions before closing on November 8, 1947.

In his opening speech, Jawaharlal Nehru emphasised the deep entanglement between political freedom and economic prosperity. He argued that only now were many Asian countries able to pursue economic stability, having addressed, or, in some cases, hoped to soon address, the more immediate question of political independence.[90] A key rhetorical device he employed throughout his speech was a simile comparing poverty to a sickness spreading uncontrollably. This image carried multiple historical references. On one hand, it evoked the concept of the "sick man of Europe", originally used to describe the declining Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a similar image emerged with Qing China dubbed the "sick man of Asia". In both instances, the metaphor illustrated the political and economic weakness of a nation or empire

89 Edward Phelan was prevented from participating because he had to be present during the General Assembly of the UN. See ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 103.

90 Jawaharlal Nehru, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 2.

within its broader regional context, Europe or Asia.[91] Typically, this comparison was used by outside observers asserting their own power in contrast. On the other hand, Nehru's simile also alluded to the ILO's 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, which stated that "poverty anywhere [wa]s a danger to prosperity everywhere".[92] According to Nehru, poverty now resembled "some infectious disease somewhere" threatening "healthy conditions elsewhere". Even "rich and powerful countries" could be affected by the disease of Asian poverty.[93] With these words, the Indian Prime Minister sent a clear message to the non-Asian participants. By emphasising poverty's contagious nature and the serious economic challenges facing Asian nations, Nehru placed the continent within a global context and warned against neglecting Asian problems—neglect that could ultimately impact the "rich and powerful" European countries who considered themselves secure. Moving beyond an external diagnosis of Asia's "sickness", Nehru confidently acknowledged the continent's economic difficulties while also charging the audience with the responsibility to seek remedies for this ill-health—an objective he set as the core aim of the beginning ILO conference.

Connected to these economic challenges were issues of colonialism and political independence. For the first time, the ILO allowed representation and participation of territories that were not yet independent and therefore not full member states of the organisation. This included Burma and Ceylon, still under British rule until 1948, the Malayan Union (later the Federation of Malaya) until 1957 and Singapore until 1965. Cochinchina (the Southern part of today's Vietnam) remained under French rule until 1949, while Cambodia and Laos were under French control until 1953 and French India until 1954. As of 2026, New Caledonia remains a French dependency. Indonesia finally achieved independence from Dutch rule in 1949. Despite acknowledging the general constraints faced by the ILO as an international organisation bound by the decisions of member states' governments, Jawaharlal Nehru, in his opening speech, openly condemned the absence of representation of Japan, Korea, the Indonesian Republic, at the time engaged in the undeclared Indo-

91 Amelung, Iwo (2020): Introduction. In: Amelung, I. (ed.): Discourses of Weakness in Modern China. Historical Diagnoses of the 'Sick Man of East Asia'. Frankfurt: Campus, 10–12.

92 ILO (1944): Declaration of Philadelphia. In: ILO https://webapps.ilo.org/static/english/inwork/cb-policy-guide/declarationofPhiladelphia1944.pdf (last accessed: January 22, 2025).

93 Jawaharlal Nehru, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 3.

nesian War of Independence against the Dutch Empire, and Vietnam, which was at war with France. Reiterating that "sickness w[ould] spread" even if the "patient" was not yet "dying", Nehru criticised the actions of the dominant metropolitan powers and expressed hope that soon "every form of colonialism" would disappear from Asia. Only then, he argued, could the ILO's work in Asia, strengthened by this first regional conference, truly reach all the peoples of the continent.[94]

7.2.5 Between Participation and Exclusion. Labour Representation Under Colonial Rule

Through the invitation of Asian territories not yet independent from colonial rule, the ILO sought to provide a more balanced representation of Asian interests at the first Asian Regional Labour Conference, addressing a longstanding criticism of the organisation's structural Eurocentrism. However, this effort also heightened the sensitivity of the declining colonial powers, which became increasingly invested in projecting an image of harmony to deflect attention from ongoing wars of decolonisation. As a result, in at least two documented cases, colonial governments directly intervened in the selection of the workers' delegates, in violation of ILO regulations requiring nomination by the most representative workers' organisation. These breeches were forcefully protested by the respective labour movements.

One such case involved the Malayan Union. Cheng Lu (?–?), a member of the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions, submitted a formal complaint to N.M. Joshi of AITUC, alleging that the British colonial authorities had wilfully violated ILO guidelines. According to Cheng, the government had manipulated the nomination process by selecting and influencing worker delegates under false pretences.[95] His organisation, the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU), formerly known under the name of Pan-Malayan General Labour Union (PMGLU), was closely aligned with the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). In the immediate post-war period, inspired by the Indian independence movement, the MCP had mobilised labourers in opposition to British rule, gaining substantial influence among workers.[96] In June 1948,

94 Jawaharlal Nehru, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 3.

95 Cheng Lu to N.M. Joshi (n.d., approx. September 1947), PMML, AITUC Papers 172.

96 Bosma, Ulbe (2020): Communism, Cold War and Commodity Chains. Southeast Asian Labor History in a Comparative and Transnational Perspective. In: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 97, 166. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547920000022.

a year after Cheng Lu's protest, the British colonial government banned the PMFTU outright under emergency regulations.[97] Cheng's objection to the selection of "reactionary elements" among the delegates, individuals willing to cooperate with colonial authorities, must be read as an early indication of the government's hostility to PMFTU, culminating in its total suppression. Faced with an unprecedentedly broad Asian audience of government, employers' and workers' representatives, the British sought to ensure that the Malayan delegation would not use the conference as a platform for anti-colonial agitation.

A similar situation occurred in French India. The communist labour leader and independence activist Varadarajulu Kailasa Subbiah (1911–1993) reported that in the lead-up to the conference, the French colonial government had intensified repressive measures against the labour movement.[98] According to Subbiah, the authorities had created "front" unions to undermine the legitimacy of independent organisations and had manipulated membership figures to justify their authority to appoint the workers' delegates. At the time of British India's independence in August 1947, France still held five separate enclaves on the Indian subcontinent, which would only be transferred to India de facto in 1950 and 1954, and de jure in 1962. Instead of nominating Subbiah, the French authorities appointed R. Dorairaj (?–?) as workers' delegate for the French Establishments in India and New Caledonia.[99] In letters of protest sent to the AITUC and the conference secretariat, Subbiah described Dorairaj as an "imperialist agent" acting on behalf of both the French Indian and metropolitan French governments, tasked with portraying a misleadingly positive image of labour conditions in the French Empire.[100] Subbiah's protest, which was circulated among all workers' delegates, had a decisive impact: the group collectively agreed to exclude R. Dorairaj from their meetings.[101]

In fact, V.K. Subbiah and R. Dorairaj knew each other far better than Subbiah's impassioned letter of protest would suggest. Fifteen years earlier, shortly

97 Fong, Leong Yee (1992): The Impact of the Cold War on the Development of Trade Unionism in Malaya (1948–57). In: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 23(1), 60. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400011292.

98 For Harold Butler's contact to Subbiah in 1937 and more biographical information, see Chapter 4.3.1.

99 The spelling of the name ("Doreradjou", "Dorai Raj", "Dorairaj") is inconsistent in the official sources. Here, the latter version is used as this was the one replicated in other research articles. During the conference, additionally, a different Mr. J.M. Dorairaj was a member of the Singaporean delegation.

100 V.K. Subbiah to N.M. Joshi (October 20, 1947), PMML, AITUC Papers 172.

101 Pierre Goumain to President of the Conference (n.d.), official ILO translation from French original, PMML, AITUC Papers 172.

after the launch of Mohandas Gandhi's and the INC's Civil Disobedience Movement in British India, widespread anti-colonial sentiments had also reached Pondicherry (now Puducherry), then under French rule. These currents led to the formation of several youth organisations, among whose key organisers were R. Dorairaj and V. Subbiah.[102] Over time, these youth initiatives evolved into the first trade unions of Pondicherry, rallying large numbers of mill workers. While Subbiah gradually rose to prominence as a labour leader, he was also challenged by other local politicians seeking influence among the working class. Though initially aligned with the INC, Subbiah increasingly sympathised with the communist CPI. In 1942, following a period of imprisonment, he formally launched the Communist Party of French India.[103] By this point, the former collaborators Subbiah and Dorairaj had parted ways due to growing political disagreements. Even if a majority of mill workers in Pondicherry may still have considered Subbiah their rightful representative—though this claim, too, had its detractors—his participation in the Asian Regional Labour Conference appeared to the colonial authorities as a political risk they were unwilling to take. Officially, the Government of French India, represented by the colonial administrator Pierre Goumain (1912–1994), accused Subbiah of communist agitation, of leading violent attacks against the administration and of betraying the interests of the mill workers. Goumain claimed that, for these reasons, the workers themselves had chosen R. Dorairaj as their representative.[104]

These two cases illustrate that the participation of independent workers' delegates from colonial territories remained deeply contested. Although, more than two decades after initial calls for an Asian Regional Labour Conference, the colonial powers had finally been compelled to accept its convening in 1947, they continued to exclude voices critical of imperial authority, especially those with anti-colonial or communist affiliations. In contrast to regular International Labour Conferences, the ILO had further refrained from establishing a Credentials Committee for the Regional Conference, thereby offering

102 More, Jean-Baptiste Prashant (2023): Towards Freedom in Pondicherry. Society, Economy and Politics under French Rule (1816–1962). London/New York, NY: Routledge, 113–116.

103 More, Jean-Baptiste Prashant (2023): Towards Freedom in Pondicherry. Society, Economy and Politics under French Rule (1816–1962). London/New York, NY: Routledge, 145, 153.

104 Pierre Goumain to President of the Conference (n.d.), official ILO translation from French original, PMML, AITUC Papers 172.

no mechanism for the examination or verification of delegates' legitimacy.[105] While it is impossible to determine whether this omission was a deliberate decision by the ILO, it nevertheless reflected a broader pattern of preferential treatment extended to colonial governments. The mere inclusion of workers' delegates from colonial territories was framed as an act of benevolence, despite the fact that their participation was neither free nor fully representative. In this way, the conference itself became a site of anti- and decolonial contestation, exposing the enduring power imbalances between governments and workers' representatives. Yet, as demonstrated by the case of Subbiah's successful protest, workers still retained some capacity to resist and thereby demonstrated their agency. By collectively excluding the colonial authorities' chosen delegate from their discussions, the workers' group not only challenged the legitimacy of the ILO's procedures but also voiced a broader critique of colonial domination. Their act of exclusion effectively mirrored the many years in which they themselves had been excluded, symbolically inverting the hierarchy that had long silenced them.

7.2.6 The Seeds of Development. The ILO, the Postcolonial State and Agricultural Labour

Although communist anti-colonial interventions, such as those advanced by V.K. Subbiah, were ultimately prevented from materialising within the conference proceedings, the recent independence of India and the broader wave of anti-colonial sentiment in Southeast Asia were unmistakably present in the atmosphere of the Old Parliament House in New Delhi. When the ILO's Assistant Director-General, Jef Rens, addressed the audience in his capacity as Secretary-General to the Conference shortly before its conclusion, he described the gathering as a "historic moment" for the peoples of Asia, during which a "strong wind of liberation" could be felt across the continent.[106] The significance of this first Asian Regional Labour Conference, long advocated by various ILC delegates, was heightened by its concurrence with the dissolution of colonial rule in South Asia. As a result, the conference acquired an anti-

105 This was heavily criticised by the Selection Committee which had to serve as a replacement without attaining the same rights as a Credentials Committee usually would. See, for example, Mr. Monk [first name unknown], in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 146–148.

106 Jef Rens, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 101.

colonial character that had not necessarily been anticipated by the organising team of the International Labour Office. In addressing the assembled representatives of workers, employers and governments, Rens was thus also speaking, at least in part, to individuals who had only recently emerged from under imperial domination. While the ILO had historically refrained from overt expressions of support for anti- or decolonial movements, the rapidly shifting political context made it necessary for Rens to engage with these themes. Reflecting on the discussions held during the conference, he remarked:

> Many of you, in all three groups, have been trained in a hard school, which has steeled your character, strengthened your courage and fired your faith. Indeed, the general discussion brought out the close connection and the continuity that exist here in Asia between the national liberation movements and the movement for social progress. If you devote the courage, the faith and the enthusiasm which you have shown in your past struggles to the task of securing for your peoples, and more particularly for the working masses, the material and spiritual advancement for which they are longing, there can be no doubt of your success.[107]

Yet while Rens praised the "character", "courage" and "faith" of his Asian interlocutors, the underlying causes that necessitated such qualities, namely colonial oppression and structural violence, went conspicuously unmentioned. This omission, likely informed by diplomatic sensitivities, avoided direct engagement with the historical power asymmetries at stake. Notably, the United Kingdom, the former colonial power and a participant in the conference, was neither named nor its imperial role scrutinised. This rhetorical evasion was welcomed by Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, a longstanding UK government delegate and prominent member of the ILO's Governing Body. In an internal report, he approvingly noted that, "[b]earing in mind the possible sources of difficulty and conflict", it was "significant that this preliminary Conference passed off without a single major incident".[108] If one of the ILO's objectives was to avoid alienating the British government while acknowledging Indian independence, Jef Rens' approach can be deemed a diplomatic success. This stands in stark contrast to the Asian Relations Conference held earlier that year, where sharp criticism of British, Dutch and French imperialism

107 Jef Rens, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 107.

108 Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, Report on the Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation (December 1947), Kew Archives, LAB 13/307.

had been voiced and colonial powers were deliberately excluded from participation.[109] This comparison underscores the delicate balancing act the ILO attempted: extending a symbolic welcome to a newly sovereign India while maintaining its institutional ties with the still powerful British government.

Jef Rens' vision of India's postcolonial present and future reflected pre-war colonial ideologies that portrayed colonised societies as progressing through a gradual process of political and social maturation. This conceptual framework had found one of its clearest expressions in the League of Nations' Mandates System and was partially continued after the Second World War in the United Nations' Trusteeship Council. More broadly, however, the notion of maturation was central to the justificatory logic of colonialism itself. Within the realm of labour policy, the ILO had similarly subscribed to a teleological view of workers' development, imagining a linear evolution from unorganised labour to responsible trade unionism.[110] By 1947, these two strands of thinking had converged, positioning the Indian subcontinent as a pioneer within Asia, deemed sufficiently "mature" to assume responsibility for managing its own labour relations. Yet with this newly conferred autonomy came a range of new challenges, for which Rens offered the ongoing assistance of the ILO. In response to the persistent demands for stronger Asian representation voiced throughout the conference, he pledged to deepen the integration of Asian countries into the organisation. Once Asian nations were "more directly and closely associated" with the ILO's structures, committees and activities, he asserted, the organisation would be enriched by "the wealth of the genius of Asia", including its wisdom and "humane and idealistic philosophy".[111] While acknowledging the historical impediments posed by colonial metropoles to closer cooperation between the ILO and Asian interests, Rens' formulation subtly shifted responsibility. His rhetoric implied that the previous lack of engagement had resulted from limited initiative on the part of Asian actors themselves. This implication overlooked the sustained efforts of Asian workers and trade unionists, who had long demanded greater inclusion within the ILO. These efforts culminated, among other things, in the self-organised 1934 Asiatic Labour Congress as a response to the organisa-

109 N.N., in: Asian Relations Organization (1948): Asian Relations. Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April, 1947. New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 36, 45, 48, 85.

110 Ahuja, Ravi (2004): Erkenntnisdruck und Denkbarrieren. Eine Kritische Bestandsaufnahme der indischen Arbeitsgeschichte. In: *Soziale Welt* 15, 350, Footnote 2.

111 Jef Rens, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 109.

tion's inaction and the obstructionism of colonial authorities. Despite Rens' generous praise for Indian virtues, his vision of Asia's role within the international system was marked by clear asymmetries. Pointing towards the continent's future responsibilities, he concluded: "[i]t must be admitted that you [India] have still further to go than some others, and it is for you [India] to catch up".[112] While avoiding explicit reference to a "development vs. underdevelopment" dichotomy, the comment nevertheless reinforced a hierarchy in which India remained positioned as a subordinate, required to traverse a predefined path of development before being recognised as an equal by the industrialised West.

Despite these cutting remarks and hierarchies implicit in some of the conference rhetoric and the fact that the ILO's Director-General had not found a way to be present, the conference ultimately emerged as a significant milestone in the evolving relationship between the ILO and Asia. The strength and visibility of the Asian delegations, particularly the Indian team, which was represented by an impressive eighty-six delegates, including substitutes and advisers, ensured that the conference was widely perceived as a success. Originally conceived as a preparatory meeting rather than a decision-making forum, the conference agenda deliberately avoided detailed technical questions. Instead, it addressed broader themes such as social security, labour policy and the future direction of ILO engagement in Asia. For Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, the conference surpassed expectations. He praised the "remarkable" contributions of the many "inexperience[d]" participants and concluded that the meeting had succeeded in laying out "a sound, practical and progressive programme of action for Asian countries over the next few years in the field of labour legislation and social advancement generally". In his view, it marked "a turning point in the social history of the Far East".[113] Labour representatives from AITUC similarly expressed satisfaction with the outcomes. In their closing statement, they lauded the conference as "a great success" and welcomed the ILO's promise to take a "more active interest" in the challenges faced by Asian labourers.[114] For many contemporary observers, therefore, the conference represented a key moment in the redefinition of relations between Asia and the ILO. It has likewise been celebrated in later Indian historiography as a landmark in

112 Jef Rens, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 110.

113 Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans, Report on the Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation (December 1947), Kew Archives, LAB 13/307.

114 N.N.: Speech (approx. November 1947), PMML, AITUC Papers 172.

India's international engagement after independence.[115] While some scholars have assessed the long-term impact of the conference more cautiously, pointing to its lack of formal decision-making authority, the symbolic significance of the event should not be underestimated. The participation of newly independent states alongside colonies still under foreign rule made the conference an important performative moment of postcolonial visibility.[116]

Although the Asian Relations Conference had more explicitly anti-colonial overtones and excluded colonial powers from participation, both conferences converged on one central issue: the urgent need to advance agricultural development in Asia. Numerous delegates at the ILO conference called for greater attention to the conditions of agricultural workers and for improved labour organisation within the rural labour force.[117] This focus must be understood in the context of the newly independent Indian state, where "development" was embraced as a core rationale for governance. While much of the administrative machinery inherited from the colonial regime remained intact due to financial and personnel constraints, development planning was recast as a national priority, essential to both legitimacy and welfare. Development thus became a fundamental aspect of India's state-building efforts. In the shadow of the 1943/44 Bengal famine, which left an indelible cultural trauma, the Indian government placed food security and nutrition at the centre of its early policy agenda, prioritising agricultural reform and planning as a response.[118] Within this context, for the ILO to remain relevant to its Asian members, it had to extend its mandate and capacities to address the specific needs of rural labour. Although the ILO had engaged with agricultural labour questions since the 1920s, these efforts were heavily Eurocentric, focused primarily on waged agricultural workers in Europe. Following the establishment of the Agricultural Service in the 1920s, the 1930s saw a modest expansion of scope and outreach, and by the end of the decade, Asian experts had begun to

115 Dhyani, S.N. (1977): International Labour Organisation and India. In Pursuit of Social Justice. Delhi: National Publishing House, 134.

116 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 118. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

117 See, for example, Shri Ram, in: ILO (1948): Preparatory Asian Regional Conference of the International Labour Organisation. New Delhi October–November 1947. Record of Proceedings. Geneva: ILO, 34.

118 Unger, Corinna R. (2018): The Decolonization of Development. Rural Development in India Before and After 1947. In: Jerónimo, M.B. & J.P. Monteiro (eds.): Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World. The Pasts of the Present. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 255–257. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60693-4_10.

participate in the work of the new Permanent Agricultural Committee.[119] Nevertheless, prevailing European perspectives on India and the broader region continued to prioritise industrial over agricultural development. This bias was evident even in the preparatory missions for the 1947 conference, during which ILO officers failed to visit a single agricultural site, focusing exclusively on industrial factories.[120] The Asian Regional Labour Conference thus served as a moment of reckoning. With renewed political agency and confidence, Asian delegations articulated clear expectations for development support in both industrial and agricultural sectors. This demand not only reflected the realities of Asian labour markets but also challenged the ILO to broaden its frameworks and address the legacies of colonial oversight in its approach to global labour policy.

7.3 The ILO's Relationship with Independent India, 1948–1957

With the appointment of David Morse (1907–1990) as the new Director-General of the International Labour Office in 1948, the ILO embarked on a new strategic course. Under Morse's leadership, the organisation developed its so-called Technical Assistance Programme (TAP), which aimed to address demands for practical support rather than focusing solely on standard-setting. Drawing on Section IV of the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, Morse formulated a programme designed to assist member countries, particularly those considered still "underdeveloped", in expanding their systems of employment policy, vocational training and economic development. Central to the TAP was the concept of "manpower", encompassing a range of initiatives related to the selection, education, training and employment of workers. Initially implemented in post-war Europe as part of broader US reconstruction plans, Morse, clearly inspired by US president Harry S. Truman's Point IV Programme, sought to further develop and extend these "manpower" activities

119 Ribi Forclaz, Amalia (2011): A New Target for International Social Reform. The International Labour Organization and Working and Living Conditions in Agriculture in the Interwar Years. In: *Journal of Contemporary European History* 20(3), 325, 328–329. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777311000336, and Amalia Ribi Forclaz (2025): Cultivating Fields of Progress. Agriculture and the International Labour Organization, 1920s–1950s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 119–124. https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191945014.001.0001.

120 International Labour Office Mission Tour Programme Group A and Group B (n.d.), and R. Raghunath Rao to A.V. Pai (April 18, 1947), all ILO Archives, MI 80.

in Asia.[121] This initiative was also closely linked to the anti-communist agenda of the emerging Cold War and targeted, above all, the growing number of newly independent former colonies and dependencies.[122] With this new agenda, Morse also aimed to respond to mounting calls for greater Asian representation within the ILO. While the African colonial territories were largely kept at arm's length from ILO initiatives through the CCTA, Asia and Latin America emerged as key regions for the organisation's new development-oriented programme.

7.3.1 Generational Shifts and the Postcolonial State's Role in Labour Legislation

One measure taken to accommodate Asian demands for greater representation, already set in motion under Edward Phelan, was the appointment of R. Raghunath Rao as the first Indian Assistant Director-General in March 1948.[123] Rao, who had been employed by the International Labour Office since 1930, was ultimately chosen following a protracted debate lasting nearly five years. When the position of Assistant Director became vacant in 1944, the Government of India nominated P.P. Pillai as its preferred candidate, a proposal supported by Pillai himself.[124] Edward Phelan, however, envisioned a candidate with a different professional background. In his view, experience in leading an ILO Branch Office did not compare to the "administrative responsibilities of a high order" required for the role, like those, in his words, of an "Assistant Secretary-General in the United Nations".[125] This stance provoked a diplomatic controversy that nearly led the Government of

121 Maul, Daniel (2016): The ILO, Asia and the Beginnings of Technical Assistance, 1945–1960. In: Jensen, J.M. & N. Lichtenstein (eds.): The ILO from Geneva to the Pacific Rim. West Meets East. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Geneva: ILO, 114. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137570901_6.

122 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 124–125. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

123 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 113. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638.

124 Samuel Runganadhan to Edward Phelan (April 8, 1946), ILO Archives, Z 8/1/4/3 (Jacket 1), and P.P. Pillai to Edward Phelan (April 26, 1944), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 1).

125 Edward Phelan to Samuel Runganadhan (April 24, 1946), ILO Archives, Z 8/1/4/3 (Jacket 1).

India to withdraw Pillai from ILO service entirely.[126] Although the crisis was narrowly averted, repeated postponements followed. Ultimately, Rao's significant role in the organisation and successful delivery of the 1947 Asian Regional Labour Conference tipped the balance in his favour. Despite concerns in some quarters that Rao was still too young and insufficiently experienced, the Government of India asserted it could not second a more senior officer to the ILO. Thus, the choice fell to R. Raghunath Rao.[127] Rao's selection was later endorsed by David Morse. Following a joint trip to India in 1949/1950, Morse wrote to Jef Rens: "This trip has been magnificent. It has given me a chance to rest, think, read—and above all to become fully acquainted with Rao. He is a grand character of outstanding culture and further reinforces my estimate of our whole 'direction'".[128] In Rao, the new Director-General saw a like-minded official who shared his vision of enhancing the ILO's relationship with Asia through the provision of technical assistance.

At the same time as the appointments of Rao and Morse, the national consolidation of INTUC, the INC's labour wing, progressed significantly. By June 1948, the Government of India formally recognised INTUC as the most representative body of Indian workers, displacing AITUC.[129] In September of the same year, the eminent labour leader N.M. Joshi resigned from AITUC leadership.[130] Although prompted by a relatively minor dispute over the nomination of a candidate to the ILO's Industrial Committee on Cotton Textiles, Joshi cited "old age and ill-health" as the primary reasons for his resignation. At the age of sixty-nine, he no longer felt able to "shoulder the responsibilities of General Secretaryship", although he continued to advocate for the creation of a united platform for Indian workers.[131] After seven years of retirement, Joshi passed away on May 30, 1955.[132] Joshi's resignation in 1948 marked the end of an important bridge between the ILO and the left-leaning segments of India's labour movement. Despite the ILO's consistent ideological opposition to communism, Joshi had enabled AITUC's broad political spectrum to engage

126 Telegram of Samuel Runganadhan to Edward Phelan (July 12, 1946), ILO Archives, Z 8/1/4/3 (Jacket 1).

127 S. Lall to Edward Phelan (January 10, 1948), ILO Archives, Z 8/1/4/3 (Jacket 1).

128 David Morse to Jef Rens (December 9, 1949), ILO Archives, Z 1/1/1/16 (Jacket 2).

129 N.M. Joshi to The Secretary General, ILO (June 3, 1948), PMML, AITUC Papers 171.

130 Report on the meeting of the Working Committee of AITUC, October 1948 (October 7, 1948), ILO Archives, C 33-8.

131 Report on the meeting of the Working Committee of AITUC, October 1948 (October 7, 1948), ILO Archives, C 33-8.

132 S.D.P. (1955): Obituary N. M. Joshi. In: *The Economic Weekly* (June 4, 1955), 667.

with the organisation. His departure effectively signalled a shift in the ILO's Indian interlocutors, with the INC's political direction and INTUC's priorities replacing the influence formerly exercised by AITUC.

This shift, reflected in the ILO's relationship with Indian labour, must be seen as part of a broader programmatic transformation within the Indian labour landscape. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, labour legislation across India was increasingly homogenised.[133] As historian Ravi Ahuja has argued, during this period, labour became a "legitimate and useable political category [...] in a public sphere that was more responsive to the Indian middle classes than to more subordinated social groups".[134] This development can be attributed to several factors. On the one hand, in the wartime and post-war years, trade union membership expanded significantly, extending beyond the confines of large-scale industries.[135] At the same time, under the leadership of Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar, who served as Minister of Labour between 1942 and 1946, a comprehensive state labour programme was devised. This programme was later implemented by the interim government under Labour Minister Jagjivan Ram (1908–1986), as discussed in the section on the ILO's 1947 visit to India, during which officials also met with Ram to review the initiative. Central to Ambedkar's vision was the belief that each tripartite actor—workers, employers and the state—had corresponding duties. For workers, this included "the duty to work", while employers bore the duty to "pay reasonable wage[s]". The state, occupying an intermediary position, was held responsible for social legislation.[136] From this conception, a new legislative framework emerged that placed the state at the centre and imposed significant restrictions on the right to strike. Arbitration rights had been a key point of contention between N.M. Joshi's AITUC and the newly founded INTUC. When Joshi stepped down from AITUC in 1948, the left's contact to the ILO broke away and the path was cleared for a reconfiguration of the relationship between the ILO and Indian labour, now based on a fundamen-

133 Ahuja, Ravi (2020): 'Produce or Perish'. The Crisis of the Late 1940s and the Place of Labour in Post-Colonial India. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 54(4), 1045. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17001007.

134 Ahuja, Ravi (2020): 'Produce or Perish'. The Crisis of the Late 1940s and the Place of Labour in Post-Colonial India. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 54(4), 1072. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17001007.

135 Ahuja, Ravi (2020): 'Produce or Perish'. The Crisis of the Late 1940s and the Place of Labour in Post-Colonial India. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 54(4), 1069. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17001007.

136 Ahuja, Ravi (2020): 'Produce or Perish'. The Crisis of the Late 1940s and the Place of Labour in Post-Colonial India. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 54(4), 1080. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17001007.

tally altered understanding of labour itself. Whereas Indian labour had previously functioned as a site of anti-colonial resistance, often expressing critiques of capitalism and openly challenging the colonial Indian government during the ILCs, the newly established INTUC, aligned with the INC, came to regard labour as a pillar of the postcolonial state's capitalist development. Within this framework, the state became the principal actor in shaping and regulating labour relations.[137]

7.3.2 Changes in the New Delhi Branch Office, 1948–1954

The late 1940s and early 1950s also witnessed significant changes in the character of the ILO's New Delhi Branch Office, which had been under the leadership of Purushottama Padmanabha Pillai (1894–1977) since 1928. After nearly two decades of service, in September 1946, the interim Government of India under Jawaharlal Nehru enquired whether P.P. Pillai would be willing to assume a representative role for India at the United Nations. With the extensive ILO research mission and the Asian Regional Labour Conference on the horizon, Phelan agreed to grant Pillai special leave for one year following the conference, with the possibility of extension.[138] Under these conditions, in July 1947, P.P. Pillai entered the service of the Government of India as its permanent representative to the UN in New York.[139] During his absence, K.E. Matthew (?–?), formerly the Principal Secretary of the Office, was appointed acting head of the New Delhi Branch Office.[140]

Over the subsequent two years, as Pillai's secondment was extended, Matthew assumed primary responsibility for liaison between Geneva and New Delhi. In India, he closely followed developments within the trade union movement and maintained regular correspondence with Indian delegates to the International Labour Conference. When plans emerged for David Morse's visit to India, including preparations for a Governing Body meeting in Mysore (now Mysuru) and the Second Asian Regional Labour Conference in Ceylon, Matthew undertook much of the preparatory work. He also represented the

137 Analysing the shifts in the behaviour of Indian labour representatives during the International Labour Conferences would constitute a fruitful avenue for future research into India's postcolonial relationship with the ILO.

138 Edward Phelan to M.K. Vellodi (March 14, 1947), ILO Archives, P 2135-E.

139 G.A. Johnston to P.P. Pillai (June 28, 1947), ILO Archives, P 2135-E.

140 Unfortunately, no further information on K.E. Matthew's biography could be found.

ILO at meetings of the WHO and various other UN-affiliated events in India.[141] However, in September 1949, the Government of India unexpectedly requested Pillai's early return to the ILO due to budgetary constraint associated with its austerity programme.[142] This development represented a significant shift for Matthew and was not universally welcomed within the organisation. In support of Matthew, R. Raghunath Rao advised David Morse not to reinstate Pillai prematurely: "It would be fair to let him [Matthew] in charge until the culmination of this work [Morse's India tour] and it would also be an advantage to have him by your side".[143] Without providing further details, Rao also hinted that, during Pillai's absence, the New Delhi Office had undergone substantial changes that could result in "friction" upon his return. It was therefore suggested that Pillai should be granted a period of leave between the conclusion of his UN assignment and his reintegration into the ILO.[144] At the same time, faced with a premature end of his assignment, K.E. Matthew petitioned R. Raghunath Rao to enquire whether a transfer to Geneva might be arranged. Having effectively filled Pillai's role for an extended period, he expressed a "need for a change" and stated unequivocally that he did not wish to remain in the office following the senior official's return.[145]

Unfortunately, the precise reasons for the ILO's hesitation to reinstate Pillai, the suspected internal tensions and K.E. Matthew's wish to be transferred away from the New Delhi Branch Office cannot be fully reconstructed. It is evident, however, that the ILO's New Delhi branch was chronically underfunded. In a meeting with David Morse and R. Raghunath Rao, Matthew complained that the working conditions and remuneration in the office were deplorable, amounting to significantly less than those provided to staff of the Government of India, the ILO in Geneva or other specialised UN agencies operating in India.[146] By the end of 1950, following Pillai's return, further criticism emerged. In a letter to David Morse, Shitla Prasad Saksena (?–?), who had succeeded Matthew, carefully voiced doubts about the office's effectiveness:

141 WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (1967): Twenty Years in South-East Asia 1948–1967. WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. New Delhi: WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, 32.

142 S. Lall to David Morse (September 12, 1949), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2). A letter reveals that, originally, Pillai's name had been suggested for the Indian Liaison Mission in Tokyo. See B.N. Chakravarty to P.P. Pillai (September 30, 1949), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

143 R. Raghunath Rao to David Morse (September 24, 1949), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

144 R. Raghunath Rao to David Morse (September 24, 1949), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

145 K.E. Matthew to R. Raghunath Rao (October 12, 1949), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

146 Notes of a talk between David Morse, R. Raghunath Rao and K.E. Matthew (December 17, 1949), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

> To be very honest and frank, I an mot [sic] happy about every thing [sic] here but I am not disappointed and I am trying to do my best in a most cooperative spirit though I must admit the progress so far has been very slow. […] I feel that the Delhi office staff is too desk bound and that in the interest of their knowledge they must go out of Delhi Office occasionally—particularly the members of the Research section—study some local problems on the spot in their respective states or areas with which they may be familiar.[147]

Saksena, who had previously conducted an extensive and widely cited study on labour conditions in Cawnpore (now Kanpur) during the war, also brought with him experience from the Ministry of Labour.[148] In contrast, the small and static New Delhi branch of the ILO appeared outdated and disconnected from practical concerns. Beyond this methodological critique, Saksena also struggled personally with his superior, P.P. Pillai. A conflict over Saksena's official title revealed the extent of Pillai's autonomy and the lack of oversight from Geneva. Initially employed as "Deputy Secretary", a title Saksena understood, based on K.E. Matthew's precedent, to be equivalent to "Deputy Director", he discovered that Pillai, without his knowledge, had attempted to downgrade him to the more junior rank of "Secretary". Despite receiving a salary significantly higher than of the two other staff members and having documentation to support his claim, Saksena found Pillai unwilling to make exceptions. Pillai insisted that all subordinates belonged to the same rank and that no individual would receive special treatment under his authority.[149]

These examples, Saksena's personal dispute and his critique of the outdated, desk-bound nature of the office, highlight the marginal position long held by the New Delhi Branch Office within the broader structure of the ILO. When Pillai was appointed Director of the newly established Indian Branch Office in 1928, he had been the first Indian officer employed by the League of Nations' Secretariat. At the time of his nomination, Harold Butler noted that

147 S.P. Saksena to David Morse (December 31, 1950), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

148 Unfortunately, little is known about S.P. Saksena (also Saxena). Between 1936 and 1945, he published several statistical studies about labour conditions in Cawnpore (now Kanpur), such as Shitla Prasad Saxena (1938): Wages and Labour Conditions in Cawnpore. Allahabad: Bureau of Statistics and Economics Research United Provinces, and Shitla Prasad Saksena (1945): Cost of Living Indices at Cawnpore. In: *Sankhyā: The Indian Journal of Statistics (1933–1960)* 7(2), 179–184. Between 1947 and 1950, Saksena was employed in the Indian Ministry of Labour, accompanying the Indian delegates to the meetings of the Governing Body and the ILCs. In 1950, Saksena was recruited as a loan from the Government to the ILO New Delhi Branch Office and later continued working for the Government in the Ministry of Works, Housing and Supply.

149 S.P. Saksena to P.P. Pillai (December 18, 1950), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

virtually no other suitable Indian candidates were available. This unique position and the absence of serious competitors enabled Pillai to entrench himself in his role and impose steep hierarchical structures below him with little resistance. Indeed, in its early years, the New Delhi Office had largely served a symbolic function in the ILO's strategy to appease demands from Asian delegates. Although Pillai had begun his career as an ambitious and capable officer, by the late 1940s he had grown disillusioned by Geneva. His efforts to secure a higher salary and his candidacy for the post of Assistant Director-General had both been repeatedly rejected.[150] By this point, however, particularly following Indian independence, the planning enthusiasm of the INC government and the emergence of a new cadre of international officers within the UN and its specialised agencies, Pillai's autocratic leadership style and the overly bureaucratic, insular working methods of the New Delhi Office clashed with the forward-looking, modernising impulses of figures like Saksena.

A few months later, in 1951, the New Delhi Branch Office collapsed in disarray. In an anonymous aide-mémoire addressed to David Morse, the office staff levelled serious allegations against Pillai. On the one hand, they accused him of misappropriating ILO funds, unjust personal enrichment from the Branch Office's property and gardens and the exploitation of staff for private purposes. Pillai, who resided in the same building as the office itself, was alleged to have used the ILO budget to cover household expenses for himself and his family, including utilities, domestic help and maintenance.[151] In addition to these financial accusations, Pillai's professional conduct was also brought into question. The anonymous complainants claimed he lacked meaningful relationships with Indian trade unions, employers' organisations and other international bodies based in New Delhi—arguably among the most fundamental responsibilities of his role. His seemingly close relationship with the Indian government was dismissed as the product of unethical friendships with influential individuals such as S. Lall and V.V. Giri, who were said to shield him from scrutiny and permit him near-total autonomy. Most damning was the character assessment of Pillai's personal behaviour and leadership. He was described as regularly

> com[ing] down from his residence upstairs for a couple of hours in the morning and in the after-noon [sic] either to attend to his purely personal work or to

150 Krishnamurty, Jayasankar (2011): Indian Officials in the ILO, 1919–1947. In: *Economic & Political Weekly* 46(10), 56.

151 Anonymous aide memoire to David Morse (approx. 1951), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

> spell disaster on an otherwise even tenor of smooth working, by picking holes, exhibiting temper and neurotic behaviour. No one can satisfy a suspicious man, who is himself useless and senile, but believes that he is the most intelligent man in the world and has contempt for the intelligence of everyone else.[152]

This passage makes clear the extreme personal animosity felt by the authors towards Pillai, employing terms such as "useless" and "senile", that, while unverifiable, indicate the degree of internal resentment. Regardless of the factual basis of these accusations, they still show the depth of discontent within the New Delhi Branch Office and reveal a broader institutional failure on the part of the ILO's Geneva headquarters to provide effective oversight. While the protestors primarily placed blame on Pillai, they also pointed to the ILO's long-standing "non-interference" and its broader indifference towards the financial and administrative workings of its Indian outpost. In this view, it was only through the interplay of a disillusioned official and a Eurocentric international bureaucracy that Pillai had managed to accrue what was termed "despotic powers". Although the immediate repercussions of the aide-mémoire remain unclear, it is evident that the accusations had a lasting impact. By February 1953, Pillai was placed on administrative leave and in April 1954, he formally entered retirement.[153] He was succeeded by Vadakke Kurupath Ramunni Menon (1903–1974).[154]

7.3.3 Increasing Productivity in India, 1952–1957

From the early 1950s onwards, the ILO's work in India progressively focused on efforts to "increase productivity". These initiatives, which took shape through various projects under the ILO's TAP programme, reflected both post-war international developments, largely influenced by the United States, and the specific context of early postcolonial state building in India through

152 Anonymous aide memoire to David Morse (approx. 1951), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/1 (Jacket 2).

153 Note on Dr. Pillai's administrative situation (November 20, 1952), ILO Archives, P 2135.

154 Prior to his engagement with the ILO, Menon had been an Indian civil servant, employed, among others, at the Ministry of Labour. He published widely on Indian labour legislation. See, for example, V.K.R. Menon (1956): Recent Developments in Certain Aspects of Indian Economy. New Delhi: ILO, V.K.R. Menon (1956): The Influence of International Labour Conventions on Indian Labour Legislation. In: *International Labour Review* 73(6), 551–571, and V.K.R. Menon (1959): The International Labour Organisation and South East Asia. In: *United Asia* 11(1), 40–44. Later in life, he published his memoirs as V.K.R. Menon (2000): The Raj and After. Memoirs of a Bihar Civilian. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications.

development planning. While the focus on increasing productivity was by no means unique to India or Asia, it was in these contexts that the discourse revealed itself as an extension of earlier debates surrounding colonial and racialised conceptions of labour.

In 1953, the French economist Jean Fourastié (1907–1990), affiliated with the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), introduced the subject of labour productivity to the readership of the ILO's *International Labour Review*. According to Fourastié, the scientific study of productivity emerged from interdisciplinary research among engineers, economists and sociologists, who sought to better understand the social processes underpinning economic development and to identify ways to save time and resources in industrial production. In his rather grand formulation, "the concept of productivity [wa]s, therefore, essential to an understanding of humanity itself".[155] The sole objective of productivity, the economist argued, was the "achievement of social progress", defined by heightened living standards and enhanced purchasing power for wage earners. Realising this objective, however, required a transformation of "the whole mentality" of a country.[156] The study of productivity thus combined elements of behavioural psychology with larger sociological and economic analyses of society and applied them to technical contexts.

The sudden rise in productivity studies during the early 1950s was largely driven by US-led post-war reconstruction efforts, most notably in the Marshall Plan. From 1948 onwards, this foreign aid programme invested $13.3 billion into Western European economies, aiming to foster economic recovery following the Second World War, deter the spread of communism and promote capitalist development. A lesser-known component of the Marshall Plan was an international exchange scheme centred on so-called productivity missions. These missions sought to disseminate American industrial and managerial practices among European managers, workers, experts and multipliers. For this purpose, groups of up to thirty participants from individual European countries were sent to the United States, where they were introduced to the latest tools, technologies and research on labour productivity. The missions were coordinated by the OEEC.[157] Over the course of the programme, which lasted into the late 1950s, several thousand Europeans travelled to the United

155 Fourastié, Jean (1953): Towards Higher Labour Productivity in the Countries of Western Europe. In: *International Labour Review* 67(4), 342.

156 Fourastié, Jean (1953): Towards Higher Labour Productivity in the Countries of Western Europe. In: *International Labour Review* 67(4), 343, 354.

157 The historiography of the import of productivity studies to Europe has grown during the last decades and often includes national case studies. See, for example, Nick Tirat-

States, while a few hundred American experts undertook reciprocal visits to Europe.[158]

Under David Morse's leadership and within the framework of the ILO's TAP, the promotion of productivity likewise became a central institutional objective. Prior to Jean Fourastié's formulations, the ILO's Declaration of Philadelphia (1944) had already established the raising of living standards as one of the organisation's primary goals. Morse thus expanded the ILO's engagement with economic expertise and integrated the concept of productivity into its broader developmental agenda. Inspired by the American model, he adopted the structure of productivity missions and incorporated them into the ILO's strategic programming.[159] While the OEEC concentrated on organising productivity missions within Western Europe, the ILO assumed responsibility for similar initiatives in non-European contexts, including Israel, India, Egypt, Pakistan, Brazil, Bolivia, Hong Kong and Ceylon.[160] Although a few delegations also travelled to Geneva to study productivity within the ILO itself, the majority of missions involved teams of international experts being dispatched abroad at the request of national governments. Similar to other ILO interventions, these projects operated on the basis of national sovereignty and could not be extended to colonial territories, with Hong Kong being a notable

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500 & Jim Tomlinson (1997): Exporting the 'Gospel of Productivity'. United States Technical Assistance and British Industry 1945–1960. In: *The Business History Review* 71(1), 41–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/3116329, Paula Cristofalo (2008): Les missions de productivité dans les années 1950. Une tentative pour importer en France une fonction d'expertise syndicale. In: *Travail et Emploi* 116, 69–81. https://doi.org/10.4000/travailemploi.4064, Louise Micksell (2017): Doing It for Themselves. The Steel Company of Wales and the Study of American Industrial Productivity, 1945–1955. In: *Enterprise & Society* 18(1), 184–213. https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2016.55, Jorrit van den Berk (2020): The Intermediary is the Message. US Public Diplomacy and the Marshall Plan Productivity Drive in the Netherlands, 1948–52. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 56(2), 411–433. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009420940027, and Jan Stöckmann (2023): Spreading the Culture of Economic Growth. Productivity Missions and the Americanization of the German Economy. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 58(1), 92–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094221127533.

158 Stöckmann, Jan (2023): Spreading the Culture of Economic Growth. Productivity Missions and the Americanization of the German Economy. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 58(1), 96. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094221127533.

159 Maul, Daniel (2012): Human Rights, Development and Decolonization. The International Labour Organization, 1940–70. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 135. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230358638, and Sandrine Kott (2019): ILO: Social Justice in a Global World? A History in Tension. In: *International Development Policy* 11 [Online]. https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.2991.

160 N.N. (1957): I.L.O. Productivity Missions to Underdeveloped Countries: I. In: *International Labour Review* 76(1), 3.

exception. This restriction partly explains why much of the African continent, which largely remained under colonial rule during this period, was excluded from the productivity mission programme.

A common feature among the countries selected to receive assistance through ILO productivity missions was their classification as "underdeveloped"—a perception initially shaped by institutions based in Europe and North America, such as major international organisations, and later adopted by actors within the often newly independent states themselves. The concept of "development" must be understood as multi-dimensional, its meanings varying according to the social and political contexts.[161] In the case of the ILO, development was primarily framed in economic terms yet remained inextricably linked to colonial and postcolonial ideologies and power structures. Following the Second World War, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) emerged as a global standard for measuring and comparing national economies, thereby popularising the notion of "economic growth".[162] Within this framework, all nation-states were presumed capable of excelling within the capitalist world economy, provided they established the requisite macroeconomic conditions and optimised labour productivity. Consequently, differences in the GDPs positioned national economies on a spectrum ranging from "underdeveloped" to "developed". While, broadly speaking, from the eighteenth century until the 1930s, global disparities had often been attributed to racial hierarchies, the development and growth paradigms of the 1940s and 1950s shifted emphasis towards ostensibly universal economic metrics.[163] National comparisons now revolved around a presumed shared potential for wealth generation, thereby obscuring earlier racialised narratives. As decolonisation progressed, newly independent nations entered the global capitalist race for economic progress. However, the structural causes of global inequality, most notably the enduring legacies of European colonialism in Asia and Africa, were largely omitted from contemporary economic discourse.

161 For an introduction, see Corinna R. Unger, Iris Borowy & Corinne A. Bernet (2022): The History of Development. A Critical Overview. In: Unger, C.R., I. Borowy & C.A. Bernet (eds.): The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 3–16. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356940-2.

162 Halsmayer, Verena & Daniel Speich Chassé (2022): Economic Growth and the Object of Development. In: Unger, C.R., I. Borowy & C.A. Bernet (eds.): The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 23. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356940-4.

163 Halsmayer, Verena & Daniel Speich Chassé (2022): Economic Growth and the Object of Development. In: Unger, C.R., I. Borowy & C.A. Bernet (eds.): The Routledge Handbook on the History of Development. London/New York, NY: Routledge, 25. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356940-4.

Notions of the supposed "laziness" of Asian and African workers or, at the very least, their lack of capitalist incentive, their general "backwardness" and their classification as "underdeveloped" had long been central to racialised labour discourses well before the 1940s and 1950s. Within the ILO, similar assumptions had underpinned the deliberations of expert committees, where various strategies to increase the productivity of colonised and racialised labourers, often involving coercion, were actively debated. In the case of India, the country's "low productivity" was cited as justification for the special treatment it received in the 1919 Hours of Work (Industry) Convention (C01), which permitted longer working hours for Indian workers than those allowed for their Western European counterparts.[164] In the late 1930s, then Director-General Harold Butler, in his publication *Problems of Industry in the East*, identified the enhancement of workers' productivity as the principal prerequisite for Asia's modernisation.[165] He also emphasised the need for greater technical training of Indian workers to familiarise them with the demands of industrial capitalism. Roughly fifteen years later, the ILO's productivity missions to India effectively translated these ideas into practice in the new postcolonial surrounding.

Between December 1952 and May 1954, the first ILO productivity mission to India was carried out. Initially, thirteen trainees from five engineering firms based in Calcutta (now Kolkata) underwent two weeks of theoretical instruction before applying their new knowledge under the supervision of ILO experts. In January 1953, the team moved to Bombay, where they examined productivity levels in textile mills, observing managers and workers alike and assessing their working conditions. From March onwards, similar activities took place in Ahmedabad, a key centre of the Indian textile industry.[166] A second mission, held in Bombay between 1954 and 1955, focused primarily on delivering a series of management training lectures.[167] In May 1955, a community-based project was also launched in Baroda (now Vadodara). This six-week programme offered instruction in "work study", the cornerstone of the ILO's productivity training. Comprising "method study" and "work measurement", "work study" aimed to identify the most efficient method of performing a task and to eliminate "wasted effort and time" in the use of both "material and

164 See Chapter 3.2.2.

165 Butler, Harold B. (1938): Problems of Industry in the East with Special Reference to India, French India, Ceylon, Malaya and the Netherlands Indies. Geneva: ILO, 22–28.

166 N.N. (1957): I.L.O. Productivity Missions to Underdeveloped Countries: I. In: *International Labour Review* 76(1), 22–29.

167 Mr. Riches, ILO Productivity Mission, Some Notes on the Development of the Indian Productivity Centre (January 1956), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/2.

human" resources.[168] These efforts were complemented by targeted courses for different groups, including workers and trade unionists, senior technicians and managers. The final ILO productivity initiatives in the period under study involved attempts to reform the Bombay and Delhi Transport Services.[169]

Overall, the ILO's productivity missions in India yielded mixed reactions and limited results. An internal note reflecting on the history of the first mission, conducted in Calcutta, Bombay and Ahmedabad, noted that the experts encountered considerable "difficulties" in the latter two cities.[170] These challenges appear to have been triggered, in part, by workers' protests. At the time, India experienced high unemployment and workers feared that rationalisation would lead to further job losses. The Indian government, however, continued to promote the introduction of automatic looms in the textile industry, displacing large numbers of handloom weavers.[171] Consequently, "efforts to raise productivity" roused widespread suspicion among workers and trade unionists alike.[172] Further complications arose during the second productivity mission (1954/1955), when its leader disregarded the groundwork laid by earlier ILO efforts. This resulted "not only [in] the loss of six months" of progress but also in internal dissent within the mission itself.[173] Thus, the ILO's attempts to support the Indian government in enhancing economic production were, to a large extent, unsuccessful. On the one hand, the very notion of "raising productivity" was inseparable from the threat of labour displacement and therefore stood in direct opposition to workers' interests. On the other hand, a lack of adequate preparation, communication and project management on the part of the ILO ironically undermined the productivity of the productivity mission itself.

When the intermediate results of four years of engagement were assessed in an article for the *International Labour Review*, the organisation was compelled to acknowledge its limited achievements. Even in cases where participants initially welcomed the training, many subsequently abandoned the newly

168 N.N. (1957): I.L.O. Productivity Missions to Underdeveloped Countries: I. In: *International Labour Review* 76(1), 12.

169 ILO (1956): Press Release. Improvements in Delhi Transport Services. ILO Expert's Work (December 11, 1956). In: ILO Archives, C 33–800.

170 Mr. Riches, ILO Productivity Mission, Some Notes on the Development of the Indian Productivity Centre (January 1956), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/2.

171 Myers, Charles A. (1956): Labour Problems of Rationalisation. The Experience of India. In: *International Labour Review* 73(5), 432–439.

172 N.N. (1957): I.L.O. Productivity Missions to Underdeveloped Countries: II. In: *International Labour Review* 76(2), 154.

173 Mr. Riches, ILO Productivity Mission, Some Notes on the Development of the Indian Productivity Centre (January 1956), ILO Archives, Z 9/33/2.

introduced methods, either by choice or due to contextual constraints. The anonymous author attributed this disappointing outcome to both Indian employers and employees. Among the participating firms, some showed "failures to understand the importance of industrial engineering to the economic operation of the enterprise" and demonstrated "a marked lack of drive". Managements were criticised for focusing predominantly on commercial matters while neglecting the technical dimensions of production and most were not "sufficiently convinced of the value of the productivity techniques being demonstrated and taught".[174] On the workers' side, high labour turnover and absenteeism "due to sickness or often to sheer irresponsibility" were identified as major impediments.[175] Ultimately, the ILO's efforts to transplant American productivity models into the Indian economy proved largely unsuccessful. While the report avoided overt racial references, it nonetheless reproduced earlier stereotypes, now extended not only to workers but also to Indian managers and employers. These groups were portrayed as irresponsible, stubborn and resistant to learning. These deficiencies were seen as hindering India's ability to compete in the global economy. At this stage, both the ILO and its commissioner, the Indian government, struggled to convince their target audiences of the merits of American-inspired work study methods. To mask these shortcomings, official narratives placed blame on the alleged lack of cooperation from workers and management alike.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Indian development planning increasingly embraced pilot schemes aimed at modernisation and structural transformation. In the First and Second Five Year-Plans (1951–1956; 1956–1961), Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru prioritised the development of the primary sector, with a strong emphasis on agriculture, as well as the expansion of the public sector and rapid industrialisation.[176] By the late 1950s, the international rise of "scientific management", managerialism and the emerging field of "organisa-

174 N.N. (1957): I.L.O. Productivity Missions to Underdeveloped Countries: II. In: *International Labour Review* 76(2), 157–158.

175 N.N. (1957): I.L.O. Productivity Missions to Underdeveloped Countries: II. In: *International Labour Review* 76(2), 161.

176 The idea of planning gained increasing traction within the Indian National Congress from the 1930s onwards. In 1938, the INC established the first National Planning Committee. During the 1940s, various planning proposals were put forward, among them the so-called Bombay Plan. Following independence, Five Year-Plans were formally adopted and became central instruments of state-led development. Kudaisya, Medha (2009): 'A Mighty Adventure'. Institutionalising the Idea of Planning in Post-colonial India, 1947–60. In: *Modern Asian Studies* 43(4), 939–944. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X07003460.

tional studies" had begun to shape Indian policy more directly.[177] This shift led to the establishment of the National Productivity Council in 1958 and the foundation of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad in 1961. Recent scholarship has illuminated the complex processes of managerial knowledge transfer between North American experts and Indian elites, largely facilitated by the Ford Foundation. These exchanges contributed to embedding managerial science within distinct Indian political and social frameworks.[178] A notable example is the so-called "Ahmedabad experiment" of 1953, in which a leading scholar from the London-based Tavistock Institute of Human Relations undertook an ambitious study of labour organisation and reform at the Calico textile mills in Ahmedabad.[179] The ILO's productivity missions to India represent another important element in this history. They

177 For a general introduction to the role of management knowledge in postcolonial states, see Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen, Lukas Becht, Florian Peters & Vítězslav Sommer (2023): Worlds of Management. Transregional Perspectives on Management Knowledge, 1950s–1970s. Introduction. In: *Comparativ* 33(5–6), 595–600. https://doi.org/10.26014/j.comp.2023.05-06.01.

178 Van Haaften, Lourens (2021): Management Science and Nation Building. The Sociotechnical Imaginary behind the Making of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. In: *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 58(3), 336. https://doi.org/10.1177/00194646211020308, Dhiraj Kumar Nite, Diksha Solanki & Shuchi Agrawal (2023): Decolonisation and the Management Movement. Re-constitution of Management Institution and Managerial Cadres, India 1947–70. In: *Comparativ* 33(5–6), 627–631. https://doi.org/10.26014/j.comp.2023.05-06.03, and Kena Wani (2024): Pedagogies of Development, Conceptions of Efficiency. Modern Managerialism in Industrial Ahmedabad, 1950s–1960s. In: *Enterprise & Society* 25(3), 737–740. https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2023.8.

179 The scholar's observations were later published as Albert Kenneth Rice (1958): Productivity and Social Organization. The Ahmedabad Experiment: Technical Innovation, Work Organization and Management. London: Tavistock. Recent linguistic and historical analyses thereof are provided by Anindita Banerjee & Brian Bloomfield (2019): Disorganizing through Texts. The Case of A. K. Rice's Account of Socio-Technical Systems Theory. In: Vásquez, C. & T. Kuhn (eds.): Dis/organization as Communication. Exploring the Disordering, Disruptive and Chaotic Properties of Communication. London: Routledge, 172–196, and Kena Wani (2024): Pedagogies of Development, Conceptions of Efficiency. Modern Managerialism in Industrial Ahmedabad, 1950s–1960s. In: *Enterprise & Society* 25(3), 743–749. https://doi.org/10.1017/eso.2023.8. See also Catharina Hänsel (2024): 'The problem is organising time, not work.' Exploring Working Time Regulations and the Determination of 'Scientific Wages' in Ahmedabad through the Archives of the Wellcome Collection, London. In: German Historical Institute London Blog https://ghil.hypotheses.org/2657#more-2657 (last accessed: February 23, 2025). https://doi.org/10.58079/12g2x. The Tavistock Institute's influence on the transformation of British working life is discussed in depth by Daniel Monninger (2025): Der optimierte Mensch. Das Tavistock Institute of Human Relations und der psychologische Wandel der Arbeitswelt, 1940–2000. Bielefeld: transcript. https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839475720.

illustrate the organisation's attempt to contribute to India's economic planning while simultaneously reproducing paternalistic assumptions about Indian labour. These assumptions, rooted in colonial discourse, were subtly rearticulated in the language of international development and technical assistance, revealing the continuities between colonial and postcolonial regimes of knowledge and power.

In sum, this chapter traced the evolving relationship between the Indian labour movement, the British and the Indian governments and the ILO from the Second World War to the late 1950s. The war emerged as a pivotal moment of transformation, both in terms of internal labour organisation within India and in the nature of the government's engagement with the ILO. After decades of advocacy by Asian workers, it was ultimately the imperative of wartime industrial productivity that persuaded the government to reconsider its position. Following the ILO's programmatic shift after the 1944 Philadelphia Conference, the decision was taken to convene an Asian Regional Labour Conference. The anticipation of this event stimulated extensive preparatory missions and renewed research into Asian labour conditions, marking a significant deepening of the ILO's presence on the continent. This engagement constituted a decisive step in strengthening the organisation's relations with Asian delegates, particularly at the governmental level.

When the Asian Regional Labour Conference was eventually held in October 1947, it encapsulated the coexistence of colonial and postcolonial modes of thinking within the ILO. For the first time, non-independent territories were invited to participate. Yet, the persistence of colonial conflicts and the continued presence of colonial powers revealed the enduring entanglements of the organisation with empire, standing in stark contrast to the ethos of the 1947 Asian Relations Conference. Nevertheless, the conference created a platform on which Asian voices could articulate and gain recognition for their own visions of the region's future in matters of labour—voices long marginalised in Geneva. In this context, the convergence of the Indian government's developmental agenda with the ILO's emerging focus on technical assistance became clearly visible. Under the leadership of David Morse, India became a central site for the ILO's TAP. Despite these far-reaching historical transformations in the 1940s and 1950s, key discursive continuities persisted, especially those concerning the presumed limitations of Asian labour within the frameworks of industrialisation and integration into the global capitalist system. When the ILO's productivity measures failed to deliver the desired results, the explanation often rested on perceived cultural deficiencies, such as a lack of motivation or discipline, rather than on structural or institutional shortcomings. Although no longer openly racialised, such assess-

ments retained the cultural hierarchies of earlier colonial discourse. Eurocentric tendencies to transpose Western models onto Asian contexts, underpinned by assumptions of the superiority of European ideals, remained a fundamental aspect of the ILO's operations during decolonisation and at the height of mid-twentieth-century development thinking.

Conclusion

After almost four decades of distinct treatment of racialised and colonised labour, the ILO's establishment of an African Field Office and a tripartite African Advisory Committee in 1958 marked the formal end of the Othering of racialised labourers at the ILO. Although long-standing structures of dependence rooted in colonial rule clearly extended and continue to extend beyond this moment, it nonetheless constituted an important caesura in the organisation's formalised practice of treating dependencies as "special cases" despite the rhetoric of global standards. Across this book, it was possible to trace the institutional development, its inter- and transnational relationships and its epistemic practices, thereby demonstrating how processes of racialisation, empire and labour regulation were mutually constitutive in shaping international labour politics between 1919 and the late 1950s.

From the outset, colonised and racialised labour emerged as a politically and economically salient issue of the interwar period. While the First World War undoubtedly marked a turning point that brought what has been termed High Imperialism to an end, colonialism itself persisted, albeit under transformed modes of administration and international oversight. As a new international organisation, the League of Nations was formally charged with regulating the legacy of German colonial rule through the Mandates system, while simultaneously embodying new expectations of international governance. Certain colonial questions, such as slavery, were now addressed within international bodies staffed with imperial actors. Although these developments did not necessarily transform everyday realities in the colonies, they introduced new bureaucratic constraints for individual empires. Drawing inspiration from the League, the ILO similarly made use of this emerging international order to regulate a subject central to its mission: colonial and racialised labour.

The ILO's approach to colonial and racialised labour needs to be understood as comprising three strategies characteristic of twentieth-century liberal internationalism, shaped by the emergence and expansion of new international organisations like the League. First, the ILO's bureaucracy played a central role by consolidating the administration of thematic bodies of knowledge within an institutional framework. Through the formal institutionalisation of what became the Office's Native Labour Section in the 1920s, the organisation sought to codify its responsibility and authority in the field of colonial and racialised labour. In line with broader League practices, this domain was entrusted to international civil servants. Characteristically for the ILO's reformist agenda, figures such as Harold Grimshaw and C.W.H. Weaver were

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shaped by British reformist traditions associated with the London School of Economics, the Fabian Society and the Labour Party.

As the history of the Native Labour Section demonstrates, however, these bureaucratic structures relied heavily on civil society actors and informal diplomatic channels. With the support of anti-slavery advocacy networks in Switzerland and Britain, which themselves were closely connected to British politicians and colonial administrators yet motivated by imperial humanitarian ideals, the Office was able to exert sustained influence on the ILO's principal decision-making body, the Governing Body. Once established through these alliances, the Native Labour Section gradually acquired a degree of autonomy. This process was accompanied by professionalisation and a shift in self-understanding: from the late 1920s onwards, its officials increasingly conceived of themselves as reformist experts on colonial labour. Over the following decade, the section operated as a relatively autonomous research body, coordinating closely with colonial governments, academic institutions, civil society organisations and other international actors. Together, these networks advanced an institutional vision of colonial labour reform shaped by liberal imperialism and underpinned by racialised assumptions. During this time, the Native Labour Section's research activities primarily focused on Asia and Africa.

The Office's post-war colonial reconfiguration, first as the Dependent Territories Division and later as the Non-Metropolitan Territories Section, continued and adapted this earlier agenda. During the Second World War, figures such as Wilfrid Benson laid the groundwork for a renewed colonial reform programme, which was further institutionalised under David Blelloch and Robert Gavin. In this period, the Office's specialised colonial section increasingly concentrated its activities on the Caribbean and, especially, Africa, marking a shift from earlier preoccupations with Asia. The hiring of the first staff members from colonised territories beyond India introduced new, if limited, perspectives into the Office's research, notably in C.O.J. Matthews' work on Caribbean labour. During the 1950s, the ILO's interventions in Africa intensified, bringing the organisation into epistemic and political conflict with colonial governments, particularly those allied in the CCTA. These tensions underscored the growing salience of Africa as the ILO's primary site of colonial engagement. By the end of the 1950s, the ILO's specialised colonial approach gave way to a more regionalised structure, reflecting the accelerating processes of decolonisation.

Alongside the formal institutionalisation of colonial labour studies within the Office, the ILO also relied on external expert bodies in this field. This constituted a second political strategy. In the context of the twentieth-

century "scientisation of the social", recourse to academic expertise became increasingly important in order to lend legitimacy to the policies of international organisations.[1] Although the Native Labour Section gradually evolved into a knowledge-producing actor in its own right, the mobilisation of external experts remained crucial for securing credibility within transimperial colonial networks. This strategy, however, achieved only partial success, as the conflicts with the International Colonial Institute and later the CCTA demonstrated. Moreover, during the period under study, labour studies had not yet fully emerged as an autonomous academic discipline and, when they existed, were largely concerned with white, Western, industrialised labour. Colonial and racialised labour, by contrast, was constructed as a distinct and exceptional field that required practical experience in colonial administration rather than theoretical knowledge. It was regarded as so particular that it could neither be meaningfully compared with nor regulated according to the same standards as European and white labour. The reliance on technocratic elites thus developed only gradually in later years, most notable under Director-General David Morse in connection with his technical assistance programme.

Instead, the composition of the Committee of Experts for Native Labour (1927–1934), which functioned as the key advisory body shaping the ILO's interwar labour standards for colonised territories, revealed how expertise was constructed along racialised, gendered, imperial and national lines. Members were overwhelmingly drawn from colonial administrations, civil services or military and diplomatic backgrounds. Attempts to include a female expert revealed prevailing assumptions that linked masculinity to colonial knowledge production. While the ILO envisioned the committee as an inter- and transnational expert body, many of its members viewed themselves primarily as national or imperial agents, often producing tension between institutional goals and expert identity. By predominantly appointing elderly men to these positions—individuals whose active involvement in colonial administrations had often ended decades earlier—the ILO and colonial powers introduced forms of knowledge and assumptions rooted in the era of high imperialism. To some contemporaries, these perspectives appeared outdated when measured against more recent notions of modernised colonial administration circulating within the field of international relations. A comparable dynamic persisted in the post-war era. The Committee of Experts on Social Policy in

1 Raphael, Lutz (1996): Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen als methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderung für eine Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 22(2), 165–193.

Non-Metropolitan Territories (1947–1957) was similarly grounded in the civil administrative tradition but gradually expanded to include new profiles. Under increasing pressure, particularly from trade unions, the ILO began integrating Black experts into the committee and, in its final year, transformed it into a tripartite body. This development signalled a broader shift in institutional thinking about inclusion, participation and the definition of expertise.

As a third strategy, colonial and racialised labour was addressed within the framework of international conferences. Much like the annual assembly of the League of Nations, the ILO established the International Labour Conference from its inception as a regularised forum through which it could assert and perform its institutional tripartite ambitions. At the same time, delegates used the established practice of conferencing to exert influence over the organisation and to shape its policies in accordance with their own interests.[2] This dynamic is particularly evident in the numerous interventions of Indian workers' representatives. By persistently criticising racist rhetoric, Eurocentric orientations and the insufficient knowledge of and engagement with non-Western, non-white labour relations, these trade unionists provided important impulses that significantly shaped the ILO's activities. When confronted with institutional and political barriers, they turned to alternative forms of conferencing. This was evident, for example, in the 1934 Asiatic Labour Congress and the 1947 Asian Relations Conference.[3] The centrality of conferencing to racialised and colonial labour activism was especially apparent at the 1947 Asian Regional Labour Conference held in New Delhi.

The book's multi-perspectival and actor-centred approach enabled a sustained case study of India's complex and evolving relationship with the ILO across two chapters. By shifting the analytical vantage point, it became possible to reconstruct how the ILO was perceived beyond Geneva and the Western world. Analyses of the internal debates within the Indian labour movement revealed that cooperation with the ILO was a contested issue. While some prominent figures, like N.M. Joshi, championed collaboration with European-centred organisations like the ILO, other actors within the Indian trade union

2 Heffernan, Mike, Jake Hodder, Stephen Legg & Benjamin J. Thorpe (2021): Introduction. In: Heffernan, M., J. Hodder, S. Legg & B.J. Thorpe (eds.): Placing Internationalism. International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 4. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350254831.0006.

3 Heffernan, Mike, Jake Hodder, Stephen Legg & Benjamin J. Thorpe (2021): Towards An Historical Geography of International Conferencing. In: Heffernan, M., J. Hodder, S. Legg & B.J. Thorpe (eds.): Placing Internationalism. International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 25. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350254831.0007.

milieu advocated for more explicitly anti-colonial, Pan-Asian or socialist and communist forms of political organisation. Incorporating these more radical perspectives beyond the immediate institutional context of the ILO helps to illuminate both the possibilities but also the limits of the organisation's influence. From the global vantage point of colonised and racialised workers, the ILO's persistent Eurocentrism could itself appear provincial.[4] While 1947 undoubtedly stands as a watershed moment in Indian history, the year also marked a significant turning point in the broader relationship between Asia and the ILO. In preparation for the Asian Regional Labour Conference, the ILO undertook an extensive diplomatic and research mission across Asia, laying the groundwork for future engagement with both independent and non-independent territories. This initiative exemplified the ILO's ambiguous position between colonial legacies and postcolonial aspirations. The case of India further illustrated how colonial labour discourses were reconfigured through the language of development planning and international assistance, particularly in the context of the ILO's Technical Assistance Programme in the 1950s.

Throughout the forty years under analysis, it must be acknowledged that the workers' group constituted the most consistent driving force pushing the organisation towards greater equality in representation. Through sustained lobbying at the International Labour Conferences and within the Governing Body, workers' representatives articulated important forms of protest against the positions advanced by colonial governments and employer delegates. Although their actions remained largely embedded within the ILO's model of tripartite conciliation and capitalist logics, rather than more radical strategies such as those pursued by Indian communists or the League Against Imperialism, they nonetheless exerted significant pressure from within the structures of liberal internationalism.

Beyond institutional structures, this study has traced the circulation and persistence of colonial and racialised discourses across ILO bodies and practices. Theories linking racial identity to productivity, work discipline and suitability for capitalist modes of production continued to shape the ILO's policies well into the post-war period. These assumptions were not confined to the organisation's publications but reverberated through its expert committees, conference debates and fieldwork. The annual International Labour Conferences served as key arenas where national, racial and political affiliations collided, both reinforcing and occasionally contesting imperial hierarchies. The ILO thus functioned as a powerful node in the international production of

4 Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2000): Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference. Oxford/Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 8–9.

racialised labour knowledge, reflecting broader colonial epistemologies even as it increasingly positioned itself as a reformist or developmental actor. These racialised labour discourses extended far beyond the institutional boundaries of the ILO. They influenced wider understandings of the labour performed by racialised bodies in ways that have endured beyond the formal end of colonial rule and the dissolution of imperial dependencies.

Processes of racialisation and colonialisation also fundamentally shaped the ILO's contribution to the production and reproduction of material and epistemological inequalities. Although the ILO was founded with the stated aim of improving the living and working situation of workers worldwide, the organisation was deeply embedded in global power structures that upheld the supremacy of European political, economic and epistemological models. These structures privileged capitalist economies, Western norms of governance and the imagined superiority of whiteness. From the outset, such assumptions informed the ILO's labour policies and underpinned its institutional practices. This racialised and colonial worldview manifested in the ILO's normative output over the course of the research period. Labour standards and conventions often codified differential treatment for colonised and racialised populations, casting them as the Other and legitimising practices of physical, psychological and economic exploitation that would have been deemed unacceptable for white workers in independent nations. By legally sanctioning these inequalities, the ILO became complicit in sustaining colonial labour regimes. These dynamics persisted even as many within the organisation, including staff who pursued reformist colonial agendas, believed they were acting in the best interests of workers. While some reforms may have led to local improvements, they rarely disrupted the overarching hierarchies of race, empire and global capital. As such, the ILO's history reveals how internationalism could be both a vehicle for reform and a mechanism for reproducing imperial power.

Epistemologically, the ILO functioned as a powerful international forum for the production and circulation of knowledge about global labour. Situated in Europe and for much of its early history led almost exclusively by white actors, the ILO, like most Eurocentric forms of organisation of the time, contributed to the reproduction of epistemic inequalities by systematically excluding racialised and non-European actors from its most influential structures. Previous research has aptly highlighted the tension between the ILO's universalist ambitions and practices that were largely shaped by Eurocentrism. Building on this scholarship, it was demonstrated how leading ILO officers appropriated research and knowledge produced by scholars from the Global South, thereby rendering their foundational contributions invisible.

This dynamic was exemplified by the case of the Indian ILO officer R.K. Das, whose research on Indian labour conditions in the early 1930s was passed on to the British Royal Commission on Labour without due acknowledgement. Although, over time, the International Labour Office moved towards greater regional fieldwork, the example of the Asian Regional Labour Conference in the late 1940s illustrated how colonial governments in particular long resisted increased ILO regionalisation. This exclusionary dynamic reinforced a global hierarchy of knowledge in which European and white perspectives were treated as authoritative, while the voices of colonised and racialised people were marginalised or ignored.

Taken together, this book has demonstrated the pervasive influence of racialised discourses in shaping international labour legislation and notions of labour expertise. In doing so, it has opened a new field of inquiry that has thus far remained largely underexplored in historical scholarship. Similar discourse analyses should also be extended to other epistemic communities and discursive spheres that have shaped global labour policy, both within and beyond formal international institutions. Likewise, the study offers a comparative framework for future research on other international organisations. While some connections were drawn to the League of Nations and the United Nations, the proliferation of specialised agencies, particularly in the post-Second World War period, offers fertile ground for further investigation. This work has also traced the gradual transformation of colonial into developmentalist discourses, demonstrating how older racialised ascriptions of difference and Otherness persisted, albeit often reframed in culturalist rather than biological terms. This dual process of discursive continuity and rearticulation reveals the deep entrenchment of racial hierarchies in the governance of global labour, even as the language and forms of international policy shifted. Future research on labour policy would benefit from further attention to this dynamic of persistence and change in the postcolonial world.

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Appendices

Appendix I: The Committee of Experts for Native Labour[1]

I Short Biographies

Belgium and the Belgian Colonial Empire

Alphonse Louis Joseph Cayen (1885–1943) was a Belgian military officer who later served as Director of the mining company *Société Internationale Forestière et Minière du Congo* (*Forminière*) in the Belgian Congo. After beginning his military career in Belgium, he was transferred to the Belgian Congo in 1915. From 1916, he played a central role in founding and directing the Belgian Colonial Propaganda Service. In 1919, he joined the *Forminière*, where he held various positions, including that of Director, until 1931. Beyond his work in the private sector, Cayen contributed to public initiatives, including the Brussels Commercial Fair and the city's colonial education system. He also served on the Transport Commission in Congo. Cayen authored multiple publications on Belgian military campaigns in Africa, colonial administration, travel in the Belgian Congo and colonial labour.[2]

Emile Théodore Auguste Deladrier (1878–1938) was a Belgian pharmacist and geologist who held the position of Secretary-General of the *Comité National du Kivu* (C. N. Ki). Between 1910 and 1912, he was employed by the *Société de Recherches Minières du Bas-Katanga* (Bakat). Following the First World War, he taught at the Université Coloniale de Belgique in Antwerp from 1922 to 1929. In his later career, he served as a member of the Belgian Colonial Council.[3]

Albrecht Léon Joseph Gohr (1871–1936) was a Belgian judge and politician with a specialisation in colonial law in the Belgian Congo. After studying at the University of Liège, he travelled to the Congo in 1894. In 1897, he was appointed Director of Justice and, four years later, became judge at the

1 Sorted alphabetically.

2 Berlemont, F. (1955): Cayen, Alphonse Louis Joseph. In: Biographie Coloniale Belge 4. Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 136–139.

3 Robert, Maurice (1955): Deladrier, Emile Théodore Auguste. In: Biographie Coloniale Belge 4. Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 192–194.

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Court of Appeal. From 1905, he served in the colonial administration as an Officer of Justice and in 1914, he was promoted to Director General of Native Law and Politics. Beginning in 1926, he held dual roles as Director General at Belgium's Ministry of the Colonies and professor of colonial law at the University of Brussels.[4] Gohr was also active in international organisations, serving on the League of Nations' Temporary Slavery Commission and as a member of the ICI. He published widely on colonial legal topics in the Belgian Congo.[5]

Fanny Hélène Marzorati [née **Tolputt de Fallot**] **(?–?)** was a British Belgian women's rights activist and the spouse of Belgian colonial administrator Alfred Frédéric Gérard Marzorati, whom she married in 1922. She lived for a time in the colonial territory of Ruanda-Urundi and later resided in Brussels.[6]

Léopold Mottoulle (1884–1964) was a Belgian physician who worked extensively in the Congolese mining industry. After completing his medical education in Liège, he was employed by the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* in Élisabethville and served in the military before joining the *Société Internationale Forestière et Minière du Congo* (*Forminière*) in 1923. Mottoulle published on social policy in the Belgian Congolese mining sector.[7] He was an active

4 N.N. (n.d.): Albrecht Gohr. In: BnF Data https://data.bnf.fr/de/10310900/albrecht_gohr/ (last accessed: April 10, 2024), N. Arnold & Octave Louwers (1952): Gohr, Albrecht Léon Joseph. In: Biographie Coloniale Belge 3. Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 372–376, and Biographie (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-7.

5 Gohr, Albrecht (1910): De l'Organisation Judiciaire et de la Compétence en Matière Civile et Commerciale au Congo. Liège: Vaillant-Carmanne, Albrecht Gohr (1931): Organisation Judiciaire du Congo Belge. Pouvoir Judiciaire. Brussels: Picard, Albrecht Gohr (1936): De la Compétence Judiciaire des Tribunaux Coloniaux. Brussels: Larcier.

6 Elsie Zimmern to Harold Grimshaw (June 18, 1929), ILO Archives, N 206-2-01-1. See also M. Walraet (1968): Marzorati, Alfred Frédéric Gérard. In: Biographie Coloniale Belge 6. Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 695–704, Jacques Vanderlinden (1994): Pierre Ryckmans, 1891–1959. Coloniser dans l'honneur. Brussels: De Boeck Université, 107–108, 154, and Ingeborg Vijgen (1999): Alfred Marzorati. Portret van een koloniaal ambtenaar-hoogleraar met visie. In: *Brood & Rozen* 4(2), 232–247. https://doi.org/10.21825/br.v4i2.2799. During his political career, Alfred Marzorati. was also in close contact with the League of Nations' PMC. Pedersen, Susan (2015): The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 70, 208–209, 249–254. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199570485.001.0001.

7 See, for example, Léopold Mottoulle (1920): Mortinatalité et natalité chez les enfants des travailleurs Union Minière. In: *Bulletin médical du Katanga* 7(1), Léopold Mottoulle (1934): Contribution à l'étude déterminisme fonctionnel de l'industrie dans l'éducation de l'indigène Congolaise. In: *Bulletin de l'Institut Royal Colonial Belge* 8(3), 210–215, and Léopold Mottoulle (1946): Politique Sociale de l'Union Minière du Haut Katanga pour sa Main-d'œu-

member of the ICI. Mottoulle served as an adviser to the Belgian employers' delegation at the ILC.[8]

France and the French Colonial Empire

Camille Charles André Lejeune (1881–1960) was a French colonial administrator and commercial agent who held various administrative posts in French Indochina and Guadeloupe. He later served as a member of the legislative council of the *Conseil Supérieur des Colonies*, participating in broader colonial policymaking.[9]

Théodore Paul Marchand (?–?) was a French colonial administrator who served as High Commissioner of the Cameroons under French Mandate from 1923 to 1932. In this role, he maintained regular correspondence with the PMC of the League of Nations.[10] His tenure was marked by significant events, including the so-called Affaire des Sixas.[11]

Martial Henri Merlin (1860–1935) was a French colonial administrator who held numerous high-ranking positions across the French Empire. He served as Governor-General of the French Congo and as Governor of French Indochina. From 1918 to 1923, he was the Governor-General of French West Africa and

vre Indigène et ses Résultats au Cours de Vingt Années d'Application. Brussels: Van Campenhout.

8 De Rosenbaum, G. (1977): Mottoule, Léopold. In: Biographie Belge D'Outre-Mer 7B. Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 262–264, and Note (August 11, 1938), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-7-4. For more information on Mottoulle's role in the mining sector, see John Higginson (1989): A Working Class in the Making. Belgian Colonial Labour Policy, Private Enterprise, and the African Mineworker, 1907–1951. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 92–94, 122. For his participation in the ILC, see ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 30th International Labour Conference, Geneva, 1947. Geneva: ILO, xvii.

9 N.N. (2023): Compagnie Nosybéenne d'Industries Agricoles. In: Entreprises Coloniales https://www.entreprises-coloniales.fr/madagascar-et-djibouti/Nosybeenne-ind.-agric.pdf (last accessed: April 15, 2024).

10 Pedersen, Susan (2015): The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 411. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199570485.001.0001.

11 Orosz, Kenneth J. (2000): The Affaire des Sixas and Catholic Education of Women in French Colonial Cameroon, 1915–1939. In: *French Colonial History* 1, 33–49. https://doi.org/10.1353/fch.2011.0008. See also Harold Butler, Note (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-22-2, and Charlotte Walker-Said (2018): Faith, Power and Family. Christianity and Social Change in French Cameroon. Woodbridge: James Currey, 66–73. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787442900.

between 1926 and 1934, he acted as the French representative to the League of Nations' PMC.[12]

Germany

Georg Albrecht Freiherr von Rechenberg (1861–1935) was a German judge and colonial administrator. After completing his studies in Prague and Berlin, he entered the German Foreign Office. Between 1893 and 1895, he served as a resident magistrate in German East Africa, before being appointed vice consul and later consul of Zanzibar from 1896 onwards. From 1901 to 1906, von Rechenberg held consular posts in Moscow and Warsaw. In 1906, he was appointed Governor of German East Africa, a position he held until 1912.[13] During the First World War, he served as a member of the German parliament for the Centre Party (*Zentrum*).[14] He was affiliated with several colonial and scholarly associations, including the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Eingeborenenkunde*, the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* and the *Deutsch-Spanische Gesellschaft*, the latter reflecting his Spanish birthplace.[15]

Great Britain and the British Empire

Selwyn Howe Fremantle (1869–1942) was a British administrator in the Indian Civil Service with a particular focus on labour and cooperative policy.

12 N.N. (n.d.): Martial Merlin. In: BnF Data https://data.bnf.fr/11025481/martial_merlin/ (last accessed: April 10, 2024).

13 For an overview over his time as Governor of German East Africa, see John Iliffe (1969): Tanganyika under German Rule 1905–1912. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Jan-Georg Deutsch (2006): Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa c. 1884–1914. Oxford: James Currey, and, with a comparative approach, Ulrike Lindner (2011): Koloniale Begegnungen. Deutschland und Großbritannien als Imperialmächte in Afrika 1880–1914. Frankfurt: Campus, 435–452, and Jürgen Kilian (2024): Des Kaisers Gouverneure. Sozialprofil, Deutungsmuster und Praktiken einer kolonialen Positionselite, 1885–1914. Bielefeld: transcript, 31–126. https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839472057. The so-called "Rechenberg scandal" has been reviewed in Heike I. Schmidt (2008): Colonial Intimacy. The Rechenberg Scandal and Homosexuality in German East Africa. In: *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17(1), 25–59. https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.2008.0011.

14 N.N. (1916): Freiherr von Rechenberg, Albrecht. In: Reichstags-Handbuch Wahlperiode 1912–1916. Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 23.

15 List of board members of *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Eingeborenenkunde* (April 21, 1925), BAB, R1001-6739, and various letters of *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* (1928–1930), BAB, R8023-664. On his relation to Spain, see Marició Janué i Miret (2008): Imperialismus durch auswärtige Kulturpolitik. Die Deutsch-Spanische Gesellschaft als ‚zwischenstaatlicher Verband' unter dem Nationalsozialismus. In: *German Studies Review* 31(1), 109–132.

Between 1905 and 1906, he conducted research on labour supply in Indian factories and in 1907, he served on the Sanderson Committee in London.[16] From 1907 to 1912, he was registrar of co-operative societies in the United Provinces of India. Fremantle was also a member of the Indian Legislative Council and contributed regularly to the press, writing on Indian political affairs.[17]

Henry Raymond Joynt (1888–?) was a British colonial official in the Malay Civil Service, where he began his career in 1911 following his studies at the University of Oxford.[18] He held various positions, including that of financial adviser to the Federated Malay States.[19] Joynt was also affiliated with the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.[20]

Charles Ernest Low (?–?) was a British colonial administrator who served as Commissioner for the Indian Central Provinces. He was also a member of the Indian Section of the Royal Society of Arts.[21]

Frederick Dealtry Lugard (1858–1945) was a British military officer and prominent colonial administrator. Beginning in 1889, he worked with the British East Africa Company and served as Military Administrator in Uganda. Later, he was employed by the Royal Niger Company. Among his many posts, Lugard was High Commissioner of the Northern Nigeria Protectorate from 1900 to 1906 and Governor-General of Nigeria from 1914 to 1919.[22] Following his retire-

16 Fremantle, Selwyn (1909): The Problem of Indian Labour Supply. In: *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 57(2947) (May 14, 1909), 510.

17 N.N. (1942): Sir Selwyn Fremantle. In: *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* (March 17, 1942), N.N. (1927): Note for the Governing Body Sub-Section, ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-33, Selwyn Fremantle & George Duckworth (1928): Satellite Towns. Community Life. In: *The Times* 44902, 15, Selwyn Fremantle (1929): Planning of Roads. In: *The Times* 45103, 8, Selwyn Fremantle (1929): Naval Policy. In: *The Times* 45189, 10, Selwyn Fremantle (1930): The Pact and The Covenant. Application of Sanctions. In: *The Times* 45450, 8, and Selwyn Fremantle (1930): Economic Housing. In: *The Times* 45464, 12.

18 Biographical sketch (n.d.), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-82.

19 Government of the Federated Malay States (1936): Federal Council. In: *Government Gazette* (September 4, 1936), 2025.

20 N.N. (1937): Ordinary Members. In: *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15, xix.

21 N.N. (1926): Proceedings of the Society, Indian Section. In: *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 74(3833) (March 19, 1926), 586–606.

22 Perham, Margery (1945): Lord Lugard. A General Appreciation. In: *Africa. Journal of the International African Institute* 15(3), 114. Margery Perham's two-volume biography of Frederick Lugard is still fundamental, even though Perham's objective judgment has

ment, he authored *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* and became a member of the League of Nations' PMC and its Temporary Slavery Commission.[23] He was also actively involved with the ICI and the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures.

Granville St John Orde Browne (1883–1947) was a British military officer and colonial administrator. Between 1903 and 1907, he took part in military campaigns in South Africa and Mauritius. From 1909, he served as assistant district commissioner in the British East Africa Protectorate (Kenya) and during the First World War, he rejoined the Royal Artillery for the German East Africa campaign (1915–1918). After the war, he served as senior commissioner and later as labour commissioner in Tanganyika, retiring from colonial service in 1931.[24] In 1933, he published *The African Labourer*.[25]

Edpuganti Raghavendra Rao (1889–1942) was an Indian lawyer, politician and public servant. Following a legal career and active engagement with the Indian independence movement, briefly, he was appointed Governor of the Central Provinces in 1936. In 1939, he became adviser to the Secretary of State for India, joined the Department of Civil Defence and, in 1941, became a member of the Indian Viceroy's Executive Council.[26]

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been rightfully questioned, as she was a close friend of the late Lugard and herself an active pro-colonial writer. Perham, Margery (1956): Lugard. Vol. 1: The Years of Adventure 1858–1898. London: Collins, and Margery Perham (1960): Lugard. Vol. 2: The Years of Authority, 1898–1945. London: Collins. For the (too) subtle criticism on Perham's biography, see Mary Bull (1991): Writing the Biography of Lord Lugard. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19(3), 117–136. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086539108582850.

23 Lugard, Frederick (1922): The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa. London: Frank Cass & Co.

24 Clayton, Anthony (2004): Browne, Sir Granville St John Orde. In: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40958. A critical analysis of Orde Browne's biography is given by Stephanie Vivian Van Dam (2019): 'Smirking Prostitutes' and 'the Problem of the Unfit Worker'. Sir Granville Orde Browne's Cross-Institutional and Imperial Career and the Imagining of an Ideal Type Colonial Labourer, 1885–1945. Leiden University: MA Thesis.

25 Orde Browne, Granville St John (1933): The African Labourer. London: Oxford University Press.

26 S. Lall to C.W.H. Weaver (October 12, 1939), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-33-2, and A.P. (1942): Dr. E. Raghavendra Rao Dead. In: *Civil & Military Gazette Lahore* (June 16, 1942), 5.

Italy and the Italian Colonies

Giuseppe Ostini (?–?) was an Italian military officer and colonial official affiliated with the Italian General Immigration Commission in Rome.[27] Between 1909 and 1915, he headed the Italian Royal Commercial Agency in Gondar, Ethiopia. Prior to this appointment, he had travelled Ethiopia together with the Italian Royal Geographic Society, about which he later published a report.[28]

Lodovico Pollera Orsucci (1870–1953) was an Italian military officer and colonial administrator. He served as regional commissioner of the Gash-Barka region in Eritrea and briefly held the governorship of Eritrea from 1920 to 1921.[29] In the late 1920s, he became Colonial Director in Italy's Ministry of Colonies.[30]

Japan and the Japanese Empire

Itō Nobufumi [falsely also **Nobumi**] **(1885–1960)** was a Japanese diplomat and delegate to the League of Nations.[31] In 1925, he briefly served as Japan's interim ambassador to Germany before assuming the role of Deputy Director

27 Albert Thomas to Commandant Ostini (July 17, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-34.

28 Ostini, Giuseppe (1913): Note di geografia agronomica. Rome: Presso la Reale società geografica. For more biographical information, see Massimo Zaccaria (2012): Agenzie commerciali, compagnie di navigazione e näggadras. La definizione dello spazio coloniale nell'Eritrea italiana. In: Rosoni, I. & U. Chelari Dirar (eds.): Votare con i piedi. La mobilità degli individui nell'Africa coloniale italiana. Macerata: EUM, 273–312.

29 Zaccaria, Massimo (2023): Bāsh-Būzūq and Artillery Men. Sudan, Eritrea and the Transnational Market for Military Work (1885–1918). In: Vezzadini, E. et al. (eds.): Ordinary Sudan, 1504–2019, Vol. 1–2. Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 254. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110719611-009. For the relation to his brother Alberto Pollera, who was an Italian colonial administrator, settler and anthropologist, see Barbara Sòrgoni (2001): Etnografia e colonialism. L'Eritrea e l'Etiopia di Alberto Pollera (1873–1939). Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, and Gianni Dore (2003): Identity and Contemporary Representations. The Heritage of Alberto Pollera's Monograph, 'I Baria e i Kunama'. In: *Northeast African Studies* 10(3), 71–99. https://doi.org/10.1353/nas.0.0018.

30 Italian Delegation to the League of Nations to Albert Thomas (February 3, 1928), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-34-1.

31 N.N. (n.d.): Nobumi Ito. In: LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/13740 (last accessed: April 11, 2024). His first name was often mistakenly translated to Nobumi, Nomubi or Nobubumi, but Nobufumi is the correct version. I thank Azuma Satter for her help and translation.

of the Japanese League of Nations Office in Paris. In the mid-1920s, he travelled to the Japanese Mandated Territories.[32] His 1931 publication *La Protection des Minorités* examined the League's approach to minority rights.[33] During the 1930s, Itō was appointed Japanese ambassador to Poland and later became President of the Japanese Board of Information.[34]

Sugimura Yōtarō (1884–1939) was a Japanese diplomat and senior official at the League of Nations. Beginning in 1927, he served as Under-Secretary General of the League and later became Director of its Political Section.[35]

The Netherlands and the Dutch Empire

Daniel François Willem van Rees (1863–1934) was a Dutch civil servant with a long career in the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies. He played a role in the redrafting of agrarian laws and served as Vice President of the Council of the Dutch East Indies (*Raad van Indië*) from 1908 to 1914. Between 1921 and 1934, he represented the Netherlands on the League of Nations' PMC and its Temporary Slavery Commission.[36] In 1928, he published a treatise on international mandates.[37] He had earlier served as Secretary-General of the Dutch Colonial Institute.

Jacobus Johannes Schrieke (1884–1976) was a Dutch lawyer and civil servant. Educated at the University of Leiden, he began his career in the Dutch East Indies as a clerk at the Council of Justice in Jakarta. In the 1930s, he returned to the Netherlands, where he became professor of Constitutional and Adminis-

32 Kasama Akio to Albert Thomas (March 30, 1927), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-35-1.

33 Itō Nobufumi (1931): La Protection des Minorités. Paris: Chauny et Quinsac.

34 Edward Phelan to Itō Nobumi [sic] (July 4, 1936), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-35-1, and Jeremy A. Yellen (2019): The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. When Total Empire Met Total War. Ithaca, NY/London: Cornell University Press, 42. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501735554.

35 N.N. (n.d.): Yotaro Sugimura. In: LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/5209 (last accessed: April 11, 2024), and Thomas W. Burkman (2008): Japan and the League of Nations. Empire and World Order, 1914–1938. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 111–126. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824829827.001.0001.

36 Fasseur, C. (1985/2013): Rees, Daniel François Willem van. In: Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn2/rees (last accessed: May 14, 2024).

37 Van Rees, Daniel François Willem (1927): Les Mandats Internationaux. Le Contrôle International de l'Administration Mandataire. Paris: Rousseau & Co.

trative Law for the Dutch East Indies at Leiden University. During the German occupation of the Netherlands in the Second World War, Schrieke collaborated with the Nazi government.[38]

Portugal and the Portuguese Empire

José de Almada (?–?) was a Portuguese politician and colonial advisor at the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was a member of the League of Nations' (Second) Advisory Committee of Experts on Slavery.[39] He published widely on colonial labour.[40]

Alfredo Augusto Freire de Andrade (1859–1929) was a Portuguese engineer, military officer, politician and colonial administrator. After studying at the Polytechnical School in Lisbon and the École des Mines in Paris, he was appointed General Commissioner of Mines in Mozambique in 1890. He later served as Governor-General of Mozambique (1906–1910), Director-General of Colonies (1911–1913) and briefly as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1914. From 1919, he represented Portugal at the League of Nations and was a member of the League of Nations' PMC and its Temporary Slavery Commission.[41] He published widely on colonial governance and policy.[42]

38 Anrooij, F. van (1989/2013): Schrieke, Jacobus Johannes. In: Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn3/schriekenjj (last accessed: May 14, 2024).

39 Jerónimo, Miguel Bandeira & José Pedro Monteiro (2013): Internationalism and the Labours of the Portuguese Colonial Empire (1945–1974). In: *Portuguese Studies* 29(2), 149. https://doi.org/10.5699/portstudies.29.2.0142.

40 De Almada, José (1913): Comparative Essay on Indentured Labour at St. Thomé and Príncipe. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, and José de Almada (1932): Apontamentos Históricos sôbre a Escravatura e o Trabalho Indígena nas Colónias Portuguesas. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional.

41 Cardoso de Matos, Ana (2016): Les élèves portugais de l'École des mines de Paris. In: Bertilorenzi, M. (ed.): Entre technique et gestion. Une histoire des 'ingénieurs civils des mines' (XIXe–XXe siècles). Paris: Mines ParisTech, 175–190, and N.N. (n.d.): Alfredo Freire d'Andrade. In: LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/11768 (last accessed: April 11, 2024). For an analysis of de Andrade's views on colonial labour, see Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo (2015): The 'Civilising Mission' of Portuguese Colonialism, 1870–1930. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 89–90. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137355911.

42 De Andrade, Augusto Freire (1910): Relatórios sobre Moçambique. Lourenço Marques: Imprensa Nacional, Augusto Freire de Andrade (1913): A Questão dos Serviçaes de S. Thomé. Carta de A. Freire D'Andrade. Lisbon: Typografia do Anuário Comercial, Augusto Freire de Andrade (1913): Relatório Feito pelo Director-Geral das Colónias acêrca do livro Portuguese Slavery Escrito pelo Sr. John H. Harris. Lisbon: Imprensa

José Capelo Franco Frazão, Count de Penha Garcia (1872–1940), was a Portuguese politician and colonial official. After a career in domestic politics, he held several influential posts, including Director of the Escola Superior Colonial in Lisbon (1926), President of the Geographical Society of Lisbon (from 1928) and member of the Portuguese *Conselho Superior das Colónias*. From 1929 to 1939, he served on the League of Nations' PMC. He was also Vice President of the ICI (1929–1936) and a member of the International Olympic Committee.[43]

Lopo Vaz de Sampaio e Mello [also: de Sampayo e Mello] **(?–?)** was a Portuguese scholar and professor for colonial politics at the Escola Superior Colonial in Lisbon. He published widely on colonial governance and policy.[44]

South Africa

Herbert Sutton Cooke (?–?) was a South African military officer and colonial official. During the First World War, he held a leading position in the South African Native Labour Corps. He later served as Chief Native Commissioner of the Witwatersrand and Assistant Director of Native Labour.[45] Between 1924

Nacional, and Augusto Freire de Andrade (1925): Trabalho indígena e as colónias portuguesas. In: *Boletim da Agência Geral das Colónias* 3, 3–15.

43 N.N. (n.d.): Count Penha de Garcia. In: LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/6355 (last accessed: April 10, 2024), and N.N. (n.d.): José Capelo, Conde de Penha Garcia. In: Olympedia https://www.olympedia.org/athletes/899095 (last accessed: April 10, 2024). More biographical information is presented in Benedicta Maria Vieira (1972): O Conde de Penha Garcia e a sua vida pública. Ensaio biográfico. Castelo Branco: Estudos de Castelo Branco.

44 Mello, Lopo Vaz de Sampaio e (1910): Questões Coloniais. Política Indigena. Porto: Magalhães e Moniz Lda, and João Carlos Paulo (1995): Education coloniale et 'école portugaise' (1926–1946). In: *Paedagogica Historica* 31(1), 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/0030923 0.1995.11434841. For an analysis of de Sampaio e Mello's views on colonial labour, see Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo (2015): The 'Civilising Mission' of Portuguese Colonialism, 1870–1930. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 89–90. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137355911.

45 Cooke was also reported to educate South African administrators about the "immoral [sexual] practices" among mine workers. Moodie, T. Dunbar, Vivien Ndatshe & British Sibuye (1988): Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines. In: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14(2), 232. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057078808708172.

and 1931, he chaired the South African Alexandra Health Committee.[46] From 1933 to 1936, Cooke resided in Europe.[47]

Henry Melville Taberer (1871–1932) was a South African colonial official and politician. Educated in Grahamstown and Oxford, he began his career as Secretary for Zululand in 1894 and became Acting Magistrate in Eshowe the following year. From 1896 to 1901, he was attached to the Chief Commissionership for Natives in Southern Rhodesia under Cecil Rhodes. After 1901, he served as Native Commissioner of the Central Districts of the Transvaal and later as Manager of the Native Labour Bureau in Johannesburg. He subsequently worked for the Native Recruiting Corporation, associated with the South African Chamber of Mines.[48] Taberer was the author of an influential report on same-sex relations in the South African mining compounds.[49]

Spain and the Spanish Empire

Pedro Saura del Pan (?–1928) was a Spanish diplomat and colonial official. He served as consul in both Germany and Algeria and later became Chief of the Civil Colonial Affairs Section within Spain's Department for Morocco and the Colonies.[50]

Domingo de las Bárcenas y Lopez Mollinedo (1880–1969) was a Spanish diplomat and colonial official. He held the position of resident minister in the Spanish Department for Morocco and the Colonies. In 1942, while serving as

46 Nauright, John (2000): 'An experiment in native self-government'. The Alexandra Health Committee, the State and Local Politics, 1916–1933. In: *South African Historical Journal* 43(1), 223–243. https://doi.org/10.1080/02582470008671914, and John Nauright (2018): 'I Am with You as Never Before'. Women in Urban Protest Movements, Alexandra Township, South Africa, 1912–1945. In: Sheldon, K. (ed.): Courtyards, Markets, City Streets. Urban Women in Africa. New York, NY: Routledge, 259–283. For Cooke's politics, see also Matthew John Smith (1993): 'Working in the Grave'. The Development of a Health and Safety System on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1900–1939. Rhodes University: MA Thesis.

47 Herbert Sutton Cooke to Edward Phelan (September 3, 1936), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-65-1.

48 N.N. (n.d.): Biographical Sketch, ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-65, and N.N. (1932): Death of Mr. H. M. Taberer. In: *The Star* (June 6, 1932).

49 Moodie, T. Dunbar, Vivien Ndatshe & British Sibuye (1988): Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines. In: *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14(2), 231. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057078808708172.

50 M. de Altea to Albert Thomas (September 11, 1926), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-57.

Spanish Ambassador to Rome, Bárcenas attempted, unsuccessfully, to prevent the deportation of Jews from the city.[51]

José Ruiz de Arana y Bauer (1893–1985) was a Spanish diplomat and official of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[52]

Rafael Cavestany y Anduaga (1902–1958) was a Spanish agrarian engineer and politician. After completing his studies in Madrid, he moved to Spanish Equatorial Guinea. In 1935, he joined the Spanish *Instituto de Investigaciones Agronómicas* and later participated in the Spanish Civil War. Following the war, he was appointed Inspector General of Labour. From 1951 to 1957, Cavestany served as Minister of Agriculture under the Franco regime.[53]

United States of America

Joseph Perkins Chamberlain (1873–1951) was an American lawyer and academic. From 1923 to 1950, he was Professor of Public Law at Columbia University. He was active in the American Association for Labor Legislation and served as Vice President of the International Migration Service. Chamberlain was especially engaged in refugee advocacy, focusing on Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution.[54]

Eugene Allen Gilmore (1871–1953) was an American lawyer, colonial administrator and academic. From 1922 to 1930, he served as Vice Governor and later Governor-General of the Philippines. Upon returning to the United States, he became president of the University of Iowa (1934–1940), later serving as Dean

51 Alexy, Trudy (1993): The Mezuzah in the Madonna's Foot. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 166–167, and N.N. (1970): Barcenas y Lopez Mollineado, Domingo de las (1880–1969). In: Diccionario Biografico Español Contemporaneo, Vol 1. Madrid: Circulo de Amigos de la Historia, 234.

52 Harold Butler to José Ruiz de Arana y Bauer (February 9, 1935), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-57-1.

53 López, Carlos Barciela (n.d.): Rafael Cavestany y Anduaga. In: DBE, Real Academia de la Historia https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/11869/rafael-cavestany-y-anduaga (last accessed: May 9, 2024).

54 N.N. (n.d.): Joseph Perkins Chamberlain. In: LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/2388 (last accessed: April 11, 2024), N.N. (n.d.): Guide to the Papers of Joseph Perkins Chamberlain (1873–1951), 1933–1951, RG 278. In: YIVO Archives http://www.yivoarchives.org/index.php?p=collections/findingaid&id=34323&q= (last accessed: April 11, 2024), and Leifur Magnusson to Albert Thomas (June 27, 1927), and Biographical Note (May 30, 1929), both ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-61.

of the School of Law at the University of Pittsburgh and ultimately as Professor of Law at the University of Iowa.[55]

Samuel Reber (1903–1971) was an American diplomat. After graduating from Harvard University, he joined the US Foreign Service in 1926. Between 1929 and 1931, he served at the US Embassy in Liberia, followed by various other diplomatic postings. From 1952 to 1953, Reber held the position of Acting US High Commissioner for Germany.[56]

55 Biographical Note (1937), ILO Archives, N 206-2-0-61-1.

56 N.N. (1953): Samuel Reber to Retire. Deputy U.S. High Commissioner for Germany to Quit in July. In: *The New York Times* (May 30, 1953), 13.

II Overview

TABLE A1 Overview of All Expert Candidates (1927–1934). Sorted by Country, Including Their Dates of Admission to the Committee and Records of Meeting Attendance.

		Admission	1927	1928	1930	1932	1934
Belgium & Belgian Colonial Empire	Albrecht Léon Joseph Gohr	1926	✓	✓	/	✓	✓
	Fanny Hélène Marzorati	1930			✓	✓	✓
	Alphonse Louis Joseph Cayen	1931				/	/
	Emile Théodore Auguste Deledrier	1937					
	Léopold Mottoulle	1939					
France & French Colonial Empire	Camille Charles André Lejeune	1926	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Martial Henri Merlin	1926	✓	✓	✓	/	✓
	Théodore Paul Marchand	1933					/
Germany	Georg Albrecht Freiherr von Rechenberg	1926	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Britain & British Empire	Charles Ernest Low	1926					
	Frederick Dealtry Lugard	1926	✓	/	/	✓	/
	Selwyn Howe Fremantle	1927	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Henry Raymond Joynt	1927	/	/			
	Granville St John Orde Brown	1933					✓
	Edpuganti Raghavendra Rao	1940					
Italy & Italian Colonies	Giuseppe Ostini	1926	/	/	/	/	/
	Lodovico Pollera Orsucci	?	/	✓	✓	✓	✓
Japan & Japanese Empire	Sugimura Yōtarō	1926					
	Itō Nobufumi	1927	✓	/	✓	✓	/
The Netherlands & Dutch Empire	Daniel François Willem van Rees	1926	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Jacobus Johannes Schrieke	1935					
Portugal & Portuguese Empire	Alfredo Augusto Freire de Andrade	1926	✓	/			
	José Capelo Franco Frazão, Count de Penha Garcia	1930					
	Lopo Vaz de Sampaio e Mello	1930					
	José de Almada	1932				✓	✓
Spain	Pedro Saura del Pan	1926	✓				
	Domingo de las Bárcenas y Lopez Mollinedo	1928		✓	/	/	/
	José Ruiz de Arana y Bauer	1935					
	Rafael Cavestany y Anduaga	1935					
South Africa	Henry Melville Taberer	1926	✓	✓	✓	/	
	Herbert Sutton Cooke	1932				✓	✓
USA	Joseph Perkins Chamberlain	1927		✓	/	/	/
	Samuel Reber	1934					✓
	Eugene Allen Gilmore	1938					

Appendix II: The Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories[57]

I Short Biographies

Belgium and the Belgian Colonial Empire

Father Louis Bruyns (1919–2001) was a Belgian Jesuit priest and theologian. After completing his studies in philosophy, theology and classical philology, he served as Inspector of Primary Education at the Jesuit mission in Kisantu, Belgian Congo, from 1945 to 1947. In 1951, he earned his PhD and briefly worked for the United Nations. Subsequently, he held a professorship at the University Centre Lovanium in the Belgian Congo.[58] A member of the *Institut Royal Colonial Belge*, Bruyns published extensively on social and economic developments in the Belgian Congo.[59] In 1968, he returned to Belgium and continued his academic career at the Saint Ignatius University College in Antwerp until retirement.[60]

Father Pierre Charles (1883–1954) was a Belgian Jesuit priest and theologian. Following his studies in philosophy, theology, classical philology and history at the University of Louvain, he earned doctorates in philosophy and theology. He held professorships at Louvain University (1914–1929), the Gregorian University in Rome (1929–1939), Fordham University (1939) and in Rio de Janeiro (1940–1942). Throughout his career, he engaged in missionary work in Southeast Asia, Africa and the Americas.[61] Charles was a member of the *Institut*

57 Sorted alphabetically.

58 CV of Louis Bruyns (May 1954), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

59 See, for example, Louis Bruyns (1949): Le développement social et économique des Bankongo (Territoire de l'Inkisi). Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, Louis Bruyns (1949): De vaststelling van den bruidschat in de streek van Kisantu. In: *Zaire* 3(6), 617–628, Louis Bruyns & P. Pinxten (1950): Paysannats indigènes. Brussels: Ministère des Colonies, Louis Bruyns & P. Pinxten (1951): Paysannats indigènes au Kivu et dans le Ruanda-Urundi. Brussels: Ministère des Colonies, Louis Bruyns & K. Pinxten (1952): De geleide immigratie van de Banya Ruanda in Kivu. In: *Zaire* 6(3), 251–272, Louis Bruyns (1957): Political and Social Problems in the Belgian Congo. In: *International Labour Review* 75(6), 530–542, and Louis Bruyns (1960): Les mutualités au Congo. Problèmes et évolution. In: *Civilisations* 10(2), 225–233.

60 UCSIA Antwerpen (n.d.): Scholarship Fund Bruyns. In: UCSIA https://www.ucsia.org/home-en/themes/europe-solidarity/fund-bruyns/ (last accessed: August 29, 2024).

61 CV of Pierre Charles (n.d.), and Obituary of Père Pierre Charles (February 12, 1954), both ILO Archives, NL 1001. More information on Charles' work can be found in An Vandenberge (2015): Beyond Pierre Charles. The Emergence of Belgian Missiology Refined. In:

Royal Colonial Belge and the ICI, and a founding member of the *Fondation Médicale de l'Université de Louvain au Congo* (FOMULAC).[62] He published widely on missionary questions and colonial labour.[63]

William Paulin Louis van Remoortel (1888–1965) was a Belgian lawyer and politician. From 1919 to 1925, he was a founding member of the Veterans' Party (*Parti des Anciens Combattants*), before joining the Belgian Workers' Party (*Parti Ouvrier Belge*), under which he was elected senator for Brussels in 1936, a position he held until 1961. After failing to secure renomination, van Remoortel joined the far-right *Union Nationale des Indépendants*, affiliated with the *Poujade* movement. Between 1942 and 1944, he resided in Léopoldville in the Belgian Congo, where he served as President of the local Red Cross. After the Second World War, he was Vice-President of the Belgian government's Colonial Commission and from 1954 President of the Native Welfare Fund for the Belgian colonies. He was also a member of Belgian governmental delegations to the ILC and the UN General Assembly.[64]

Prudhomme, C. & C. Dujardin (eds.): Mission & Science. Missiology Revised/Missiologie Revisitée, 1850–1940. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 151–169.

62 On the FOMULAC, see F. Malengreau (1941): Une Fondation Médicale au Congo Belge, la Fomulac (1926–1940). Leuven: Aucam, Sokhieng Au & Anne Cornet (2021): Medicine and Colonialism. In: Vandendriessche, J. & B. Majerus (eds.): Medical Histories of Belgium. New Narratives on Health, Care and Citizenship in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 99–133, and Reinout Vander Hulst (2023): Becoming a Catholic Physician. A Medical Persona at the Intersection of Belgium and the Belgian Congo (1890–1965). University of Leuven: PhD Thesis.

63 Charles, Pierre (1952): Problèmes de Travail et Réalités Africaines. In: *Bulletin Bimestriel Société Belge d'Études et d'Expansion* 152, 584–587, and Pierre Charles (1954): Travail et Psychologie Africaine. In: Museum Lessanium: Les Missions et le Prolétariat. Rapports et Compte Rendu de la XXIII^{e} Semaine de Missiologie de Louvain 1953. Bruges/Brussels/Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 166–177.

64 Carbonnelle, C. (1998): Remoortel (Van), William Paulin Louis. In: Biographie Belge d'Outre-Mer VIII. Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 359–361, and ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xv. On his difficult standing in the Workers' Party and accusations of opportunism, see Guy Vanthemsche (1999): De Belgische socialisten en Congo 1895–1960. In: *Brood & Rozen* 4(2), 43. https://doi.org/10.21825/br.v4i2.2790.

China

Chen Chang-heng (?–?) was a Chinese scholar and politician. He served as delegate to the Chinese National Assembly and was chairman of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Yuan.[65]

France and the French Colonial Empire

Joseph Anoma (1895–1983) was an agricultural industrialist from Côte d'Ivoire. He was instrumental in the founding of the *Syndicat Agricole Africain* (SAA), later serving as its president. Closely associated with the *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI), he played a significant role in the country's early political mobilisation.[66]

Father Eugène Emile Auguste Beaupin (1877–1953) was a French Catholic priest and President of the *Union Catholique des Études Internationales* (UCEI), an organisation that sought to foster ties between Catholic institutions, the League of Nations and the ILO. In the 1920s, Beaupin worked closely with the League of Nations' Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium.[67] He was also a member of the *Comité Catholique des Amitiés Françaises à l'Étranger* and published widely on international and missionary questions.[68]

Jules Marcel de Coppet (1881–1968) was a French colonial administrator. Entering the colonial service in 1905, he first served in Madagascar, followed by posts in Senegal (until 1917), French Guinea (until 1920) and Tchad (1920–1923), with further service in the French Congo. He became Governor of Tchad

65 David Blelloch to Alan C. Burns (January 19, 1948), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

66 Lawler, Nancy (1990): Reform and Repression under the Free French. Economic and Political Transformation in the Côte d'Ivoire, 1942–45. In: *Africa* 60(1), 88–110. https://doi.org/10.2307/1160428.

67 Jerónimo, Miguel Bandeira (2020): Imperial Internationalisms in the 1920s. The Shaping of Colonial Affairs at the League of Nations. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 48(5), 872. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2020.1816620.

68 N.N. (n.d.): Eugène Beaupin (1877–1953). In: BnF Data https://data.bnf.fr/11194911/eugene_beaupin/ (last accessed: August 11, 2024). The publications include Eugène Beaupin (1908): Les Idées Morales d'Homère. Paris: Bloud & Cie, Eugène Beaupin (1914): Les 'Jardins d'Enfants' et le Problème de l'Éducation. Paris: Bloud & Gay, Eugène Beaupin (1918): Les Catholiques Français et l'Après-Guerre. Paris: Bloud, Eugène Beaupin (1925): Le Rayonnement Spirituel de la France. Paris: Les Amitiés Catholiques Françaises, and Eugène Beaupin (1950): L'Organisation Internationale du Travail et les Problèmes Sociaux en Pays de Mission. Beckenried: Seminar Schöneck.

in 1929, followed by appointments as Governor of Dahomey (1933–1934) and French Somaliland (1935). In 1936, he was named Governor of French West Africa, serving until 1938, and briefly Governor of Madagascar in 1939/40 before being dismissed by the Vichy regime. Reinstated in 1944, de Coppet served as High Commissioner of Madagascar from 1946 to 1947.[69]

Roger Dubled (?–?) was a French industrialist and Director of the *Compagnie des Cultures de la Côte d'Ivoire*. Between 1942 and 1945, he also presided over the *Chambre d'Agriculture de Côte d'Ivoire* (CACI).[70] In 1946, he served as an adviser to the French delegation for the International Labour Conference.[71] When participating in the expert committee, Dubled was nominated by the employers' delegation to the ILO's Governing Body.

Antoine Lawrence (?–?) was a Guinean trade union leader and educator. He served as a member of the French Economic Council and the *Conseil supérieur du plan pour la modernisation et l'équipement des territoires d'outre-mer*. He taught at the Collège libre des sciences sociales et économiques in Paris and co-founded the Youth Council of the French Union, representing the Guinean Youth Council.[72] Between 1956 and 1958, he served as President of the World Youth Bank Group.[73]

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69 Wilfrid Benson, Minute Sheet (August 21, 1945) and Wilfrid Benson to F. Barry (November 21, 1945), both ILO Archives, NL 1001. Baty-Delalande, Hélène & Pierre Masson (2020): Introduction. In: Baty-Delalande, H. & P. Masson (eds.): Gide et la question coloniale. Correspondance avec Marcel de Coppet, 1924–1950. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 9–29. For more biographical information, see Alain Couturier (2006): Le Gouverneur et son miroir. Marcel de Coppet (1881–1968). Paris: L'Harmattan.

70 ILO (1957): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories: Fifth Session, Geneva, 9th–20th December 1957. Geneva: ILO. In: https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/delivery/41ILO_INST:41ILO_V1/1290145660002676 (last accessed: October 6, 2023), N.N. (n.d.): Historique. In: Chambre d'Agriculture de Côte d'Ivoire https://www.chambragri.ci/en/page/2024-06/historique (last accessed: March 1, 2025), and N.N. (n.d.): Les Presidents de la CACI. In: Chambre d'Agriculture de Côte d'Ivoire https://www.chambragri.ci/en/page/2024-06/les-presidents-de-la-caci (last accessed: March 1, 2025).

71 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xix.

72 M. Luchaire to David Morse (July 10, 1953) and Note on the members of the Commission d'experts pour la politique sociales dans les territoires non-métropolitains (n.d.), both ILO Archives, NL 1001. For more information on the CLSS, see Catherine Bruant (2007): Le Collège libre des sciences sociales, une université parallèle qui traverse le XXe siècle. In: *Les Études Sociales* 146, 3–80.

73 N.N. (n.d.): World Youth Bank Group. In: World Youth Bank Group https://wybg.org/history (last accessed: August 29, 2024).

Charles Mendy (?–?) was a Senegalese trade union leader affiliated with the *Confédération Africaine des Travailleurs Croyants* (CATC) and the *Union Panafricaine des Travailleurs Croyants* (UPTC).[74]

Paul Monié (?–?) was a French civil servant and Assistant Inspector-General of Labour at the French Ministry of Overseas Territories.[75] In 1944, he served as Secretary to the Brazzaville Conference of Governors of the French colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar, working under René Pleven in the French Committee for National Liberation.[76] In 1946, he served as an adviser to the French delegation for the International Labour Conference.[77] Later in life, Monié became a scholar of Cambodian art.[78]

Louis Ignacio-Pinto (1903–1984) was a Beninese lawyer and politician. Educated in literature and law in Porto-Novo, Lyon and Bordeaux, he served as Senator of the French Republic for Dahomey and sat in the Conseil de la République from 1947 to 1955.[79] He later became Dahomey's ambassador to the United States and a permanent delegate to the United Nations. From 1967 to 1970, he presided over Dahomey's Supreme Court and subsequently served as a judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague until his retirement in 1979.[80]

74 Blum, Françoise (2013): Syndicalistes croyants et panafricains. Réseaux des années 1960. In: *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 119(3), 109. https://doi.org/10.3917/ving.119.0099, and Guy Pfeffermann (1967): Trade Unions and Politics in French West Africa during the Fourth Republic. In: *African Affairs* 66(264), 213–230.

75 Marcel de Coppet to ILO (March 1947), ILO Archives, NL 1001/7.

76 République Française (1945): Conférence Africaine Française Brazzaville, 30 Janvier 1944–8 Février 1944. Paris: Ministère des Colonies, 14.

77 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xix.

78 Monié, Paul (1965): Notes relatives à la crémation d'un personnage religieux au Cambodge. In: *Arts Asiatiques* 11(1), 139–155. In all likeliness, Monié was married to the indologist Mireille Bénisti-Monié. Frank, Bernard (1994): In Memoriam Mireille Bénisti-Monié (1909–1993). In: *Arts Asiatiques* 49, 118–120.

79 ILO (1953): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Third Session, Lisbon, 7th–19th December 1953. In: ILO https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1953/53B09_64_engl.pdf (last accessed: November 3, 2024), and Note by A. Jouhaux (May 31, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

80 Eyffinger, Arthur (1999): Louis Ignacio-Pinto. In: Eyffinger, A., A. Witteveen & M. Bedjaoui: The International Court of Justice 1946–1996. The Hague/London: Kluwer Law International, 293.

Bernard Rakotondrazaka (?–?) was a Malagasy trade union leader. He served as Secretary of the *Syndicat fédéral des fonctionnaires, agents, employés malgaches et assimilés des services publics de Madagascar et dépendances* and later headed the *Confédération Générale des Syndicats des Travailleurs de Madagascar*.[81] When participating in the expert committee, Rakotondrazaka was nominated by the workers' delegation to the ILO's Governing Body.

Razafy Randretsa (1904–1962) was a Malagasy politician who also served as Counsellor of the French Union.[82]

Hector Joseph Riviérez (1913–2003) was a Guyanese lawyer and politician. After studying law in Paris, he joined the Paris Appeal Court in 1934. In 1952, he was elected as a senator representing Oubangui-Shari (now in the Central African Republic) in the French *Conseil de la République*, despite never having visited the territory prior to his appointment.[83] He served until 1959.[84] Upon returning to France, he held judicial posts at the Appeal Court in Dijon and Bourges and later at the Supreme Court of the Central African Republic. He also served as a member of the European parliament.[85]

David Soumah (?–?) was a Guinean railroad worker and trade union leader. During the 1950s and 1960s, he served as President of the *Conféderation Africaine des Travailleurs Croyants* (CATC), secretary of the *Confédération Syndicale Africaine* (CSA) and was active in the *Union Panafricaine des Travailleurs*

81 H. Patteet to David Morse (March 20, 1957), Bernard Rakotondrazaka to David Morse (August 7, 1957), both ILO Archives, NL 1001, and Alain Spacensky (1967): Regards sur l'Evolution Politique Malgache, 1945–1966. In: *Revue française de science politique* 17(4), 685.

82 Wauthier, Alexandre (2020): Randretsa Razafy. In: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques. Annuaire prosopographique. La France savante https://www.cths.fr/an/savant.php?id=122386 (last accessed: August 29, 2024), and ILO (1957): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories: Fifth Session, Geneva, 9th–20th December 1957. Geneva: ILO. In: ILO https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/delivery/41ILO_INST:41ILO_V1/1290145660002676 (last accessed: October 6, 2023).

83 Dunstan, Sarah Claire (2020): 'Une Nègre de drame'. Jane Vialle and the Politics of Representation in Colonial Reform, 1945–1953. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 55(3), 663. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009419873038.

84 N.N. (n.d.): Rivierez, Hector. In: Le Sénat https://www.senat.fr/senateur-4eme-republique/rivierez_hector0371r4.html (last accessed: August 29, 2024).

85 N.N. (n.d.): Hector Rivierez. In: Députés Parlement Européen https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/fr/709/HECTOR_RIVIEREZ/history/1 (last accessed: August 29, 2024).

Croyants (UPTC).[86] In 1960, following persecution by supporters of Guinean president Sékou Touré, Soumah went into exile in Senegal.[87] When participating in the expert committee, Soumah was nominated by the workers' delegation to the ILO's Governing Body.

Great Britain and the British Empire

Haroun Popoola Adebola (1916–?) was a Nigerian trade union leader. Between 1941 and 1949, he worked for the Nigerian Railway and from 1946 to 1952 served as Secretary-General of the Nigeria Union of Railway Staff. He was also a member of the Western House of Assembly. Between 1962 and 1969, Adebola was president of the United Labour Congress and served as Vice President of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) from 1965 to 1970.[88]

Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Ungku Abdul Hamid (1922–2020) was a Malayan economist and academic. He began his career in the Johore State Council Civil Service in 1940 and later studied at Raffles College in Singapore. After earning a BA in economics in 1951, Aziz joined the University of Malaya as a lecturer (1952–1961) and became professor and dean of the Faculty of Economics in 1962. He completed his PhD in 1964 and served as Vice Chancellor of the

86 ILO (2010): Pluralisme syndical et prolifération des syndicats en Afrique francophone. Geneva: ILO, 7, and Françoise Blum (2013): Syndicalistes croyants et panafricains. Réseaux des années 1960. In: *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 119(3), 109. https://doi.org/10.3917/ving.119.0099.

87 Blum, Françoise (2014): Révolutions africaines. Congo, Sénégal, Madagascar, années 1960–1970. Rennes: Presses universitaires Rennes. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pur.51437. See also Guy Pfeffermann (1967): Trade Unions and Politics in French West Africa during the Fourth Republic. In: *African Affairs* 66(264), 213–230.

88 Falola, Toyin & Ann Genova (2009): Adebola, Alhaji Haroun Popoola. In: Falola, T. & A. Genova: Historical Dictionary of Nigeria. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 13–14. More information about Adebola's trade union career can be found in Robin Cohen (1974): Labour and Politics in Nigeria, 1945–71. Ibadan/London/Lusaka/Nairobi: Heinemann.

University of Malaya from 1968 to 1988.[89] Aziz published widely on rural development and poverty eradication.[90]

F.L. Brown (?–?) was a British colonial administrator who served in Jamaica between 1935 and 1942 and later in Nyasaland.[91] He was a member of the Nyasaland Society.[92]

Frank Wingate Carpenter (?–?) was a British civil servant who began his colonial service in 1929 as Assistant District Officer in Nigeria. He later held various posts in the British Cameroons and Nigeria.[93] From 1951 to 1954, Carpenter was Commissioner of Labour in Kenya and chaired the Kenyan African Wages Commission.[94]

Eyo E. Esua (1901–1973) was a Nigerian trade union leader and educator. He served as Secretary-General of the Nigerian Union of Teachers and participated in several International Labour Conferences.[95]

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89 See, for example, Ungku A. Aziz (1957): Facts and Fallacies on the Malay Economy. Singapore: University of Malaya, Ungku A. Aziz (1971): The Language and the University. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, Ungku A. Aziz (1972): Access to the University of Malaya. A Case Study Prepared for the International Institute for Educational Planning. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, Ungku A. Aziz (1974): Footprints on the Sands of Time. The Malay Poverty Concept over 50 years from Za'ba to Aziz and the Second Malaysia Five Year Plan. Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Ekonomi Malaysia, and Ungku A. Aziz (2011): Pantun dan Kebijaksanaan Akal Budi Melayu [Pantun (Poems) and the Wisdom of the Malay Mind]. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

90 M.D. Tennant to Robert Gavin (February 12, 1953), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and Ooi Keat Gin & Victor T. King (n.d.): Ungku ABDUL AZIZ bin Ungku Abdul Hamid (1922–2020). In: Ooi K.G. & V.T. King: Handbook of Southeast Asian Studies. Pioneers and Critical Thinkers. Singapore: Springer, 1–18.

91 N.D. Watson to Robert Gavin (November 20, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1002. In 1946, Brown briefly became Acting Governor in the absence of the Governor Edmund Charles Smith Richards.

92 N.N. (1949): The Nyasaland Society. In: *The Nyasaland Journal* 2(1), 58.

93 Carpenter's collection of historical artifacts from this time is now held by the British Museum. The provenance of these goods is unknown. N.N. (n.d.): Objects related to Frank W. Carpenter. In: The British Museum https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG121962 (last accessed: December 20, 2024).

94 O.H. Morris to David Pearson (November 30, 1955), Kew Archives, CO 859/814. For an analysis of his labour politics, see Opolot Okia (2019): Labor in Colonial Kenya after the Forced Labor Convention, 1930–1963. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 183. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17608-2.

95 A.H. Poynton to David Blelloch (June 30, 1948), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xx.

K.D. [also **Dominic K.**] **Foevie (?–?)** was a Ghanian trade union leader. Formerly an engine-driver at the Marlu Mines, Foevie became President of the Gold Coast Mines Employees' Union (MEU) in 1951, a position he held until 1963.[96] That year, he was appointed Managing Director of the State Gold Mining Corporation and Head of the chamber, while remaining Life General Secretary of the union.[97] In his new role, Foevie aligned more closely with management and supported the Convention People's Party (CPP) by introducing its cadres into the mining industry, thereby weakening labour demands.[98] When participating in the expert committee, Foevie was nominated by the workers' delegation to the ILO's Governing Body.

Wilfrid Edward Francis Jackson (1883–1971) was a British colonial administrator. He served as Governor of Mauritius (1930–1937), British Guiana (1937–1941) and Tanganyika (1941–1945).[99]

Ernest Eggay Kwesi Kurankyi-Taylor (1922–1959) was a Ghanian judge, academic and politician. Educated at Mfantsipim, Fourah Bay College and at the universities of Manchester and Cambridge, he earned his PhD in 1951.[100] In the UK, he was active in the Pan-African movement and participated in the 1945 Pan-African Congress. After returning to Ghana, Kurankyi-Taylor lectured at Mfantsipim and the University College of Ghana. Initially a member of the Convention People's Party (CPP), he later joined the National Liberation Movement. Upon independence, he was appointed judge.[101]

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96 Silver, Jim (1978): Class Struggles in Ghana's Mining Industry. In: *Review of African Political Economy* 5(12), 68. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056247808703361, and Jeff Crisp (1984): The Story of an African Working Class. Ghanaian Miners' Struggles, 1870–1980. London: Zed Books, 77.

97 Taylor, Ayowa Afrifa (2006): An Economic History of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation, 1895–2004. Land, Labour, Capital and Enterprise. University of London: PhD Thesis, 217.

98 Silver, Jim (1978): Class Struggles in Ghana's Mining Industry. In: *Review of African Political Economy* 5(12), 69. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056247808703361.

99 N.N. (1941): The King Has Been Pleased to Appoint. In: *The London Gazette* (August 26, 1941), 4962.

100 ILO London to Robert Gavin (30.08.1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and Ernest E. Kurankyi-Taylor (1951): Ashanti Indigenous Legal Institutions and their Present Role. University of Cambridge: PhD Thesis.

101 Hargrove, Jarvis L. (2022): Ghana's Ashanti Pioneer Newspaper. Aim High, Strive Hard, Go Forward. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 179.

Father Thomas McLaughlin (?–?) was a British Catholic missionary and served as Superior General of the Mill Hill Missionaries from 1947 to 1962.[102]

Aubrey Rollo Ibbetson Mellor (1892–1977) was a British colonial civil servant and businessman. He served in the Egyptian civil service from 1919 to 1930 before joining the board of the United Africa Company. Mellor was active in colonial economic policy, contributing to the formation of the Colonial Employers Federation in 1945 and serving on the West African Section of the Chamber of Commerce.[103] In 1946, he served as an adviser to the British delegation for the International Labour Conference.[104] When participating in the expert committee, Mellor was nominated by the employers' delegation to the ILO's Governing Body.

James Clyde Mitchell (1918–1995) was a South African anthropologist. He earned his PhD from the University of Oxford while working at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Lusaka. Mitchell later became the first Chair of African Studies at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now the University of Zimbabwe). Following Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence, he relocated to the United Kingdom, holding the Chair of Urban Sociology at the University of Manchester and later a fellowship at Nuffield College, Oxford, in 1973.[105] He published extensively on sociological and ethnographic topics.[106]

Granville St John Orde Browne (1883–1947) was a British military officer and colonial administrator. Between 1903 and 1907, he took part in military cam-

102 John Eppstein to Pierre de Briey (March 4, 1947), ILO Archives, NL 1001/8.

103 N.N. (n.d.): Mellor, Aubrey Rollo Ibbetson. In: Westminster School's Archive & Collections https://collections.westminster.org.uk/index.php/mellor-aubrey-rollo-ibbetson-1892-1977 (last accessed: December 15, 2024).

104 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xx.

105 Note on the members of the Commission d'experts pour la politique sociales dans les territoires non-métropolitains (n.d.), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and Susan J. Smith (2019): J. Clyde Mitchell. In: *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* XVIII, 93–133.

106 Mitchell, James Clyde (1956): The Yao Village. A Study in the Social Structure of a Nyasaland Tribe. Manchester: Manchester University Press, James Clyde Mitchell (1956): The Kalela Dance. Aspects of Social Relationships Among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia. Manchester: Manchester University Press, James Clyde Mitchell (ed.) (1969): Social Networks in Urban Situations. Analyses of Personal Relationships in Central African Towns. Manchester: Manchester University Press, and James Clyde Mitchell (ed.) (1980): Numerical Techniques in Social Anthropology. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

paigns in South Africa and Mauritius. From 1909, he served as Assistant District Commissioner in the British East Africa Protectorate (Kenya) and during the First World War, he rejoined the Royal Artillery for the German East Africa campaign (1915–1918). After the war, he served as Senior Commissioner and later as Labour Commissioner in Tanganyika, retiring from colonial service in 1931.[107] In 1946, he served as an adviser to the British delegation for the International Labour Conference.[108]

Richard Ogilvy Ramage (1896–1971) was a British colonial administrator. He joined the Administrative Service in Nigeria in 1920 and later served as Assistant to the Lieutenant Governor of Malta. In 1939, Ramage took up a post in the Gold Coast, followed by a transfer to Sierra Leone, where he served as Colonial Secretary until 1950.[109] After his retirement, he participated in several colonial commissions, including the Salaries Revision Commission for British Honduras.[110] He was also a board member of *Civilisations*, the anthropological journal of the Free University of Brussels.[111]

Margaret Helen Read (1889–1991) was a British social anthropologist. Initially trained in history and geography at Cambridge, she engaged in missionary social work in India from 1919 to 1924. She later studied anthropology at the LSE, earning her PhD in 1934.[112] Read became a lecturer at LSE and later joined the University of London, where she was appointed Chair at the Institute of Education in 1940. She served on the British Commission on Higher Education in West Africa and later acted as a consultant to the WHO.[113] She published extensively on education and health in Southeast Africa.[114]

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107 Clayton, Anthony (2004): Browne, Sir Granville St John Orde. In: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40958. A critical analysis of Orde Browne's biography is given by Stephanie Vivian Van Dam (2019): 'Smirking Prostitutes' and 'the Problem of the Unfit Worker'. Sir Granville Orde Browne's Cross-Institutional and Imperial Career and the Imagining of an Ideal Type Colonial Labourer, 1885–1945. Leiden University: MA Thesis.

108 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xx.

109 M.D. Tennant to F. Pickford (April 12, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

110 Robert Gavin to R.O. Ramage (August 14, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

111 N.N. (1965): Nouvelles de l'Institut. Session électorale du 2 septembre 1965. In: *Civilisations* 15(3), 308.

112 Read, Margaret (1934): Primitive Economics with Special Reference to Culture Contact. University of London: PhD Thesis.

113 N.N. (1991): Obituary Margaret Read. In: *Anthropology Today* 7(4), 21.

114 Read, Margaret (1953): Africans and Their Schools. London: Longmans, Green & Co, Margaret Read (1955): Education and Social Change in Tropical Areas. London: Nelson,

S.M. Renner (1894–?) was a Sierra Leonen priest and politician. He received his license to preach in 1918 and was ordained in 1927.[115] In 1946, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Lebanon Valley College in the United States. Renner served as a City Councillor in Freetown, where he was a member of the Education Sub-Committee and the Mining Wages Board of Sierra Leone.[116]

Audrey Isabel Richards (1899–1984) was a British social anthropologist. She studied at Newnham College, Cambridge and the LSE, earning her PhD in 1931. Between 1931 and 1940, she lectured in anthropology at the LSE and the University of Witwatersrand. During the Second World War, she worked for the British Colonial Office (1942–1944) and later returned to the LSE as a reader in 1946. In 1950, Richards became the founding Director of the East African Institute of Social Research at Makerere College in Uganda.[117] She returned to England in 1956, holding positions at Newnham College and the University of Cambridge until her retirement in 1967.[118] Richards published widely on sociological and cultural issues related to East Africa.[119]

William J. Scrivener (?–?) was a labour manager in Northern Rhodesia's copper industry. From 1912 to 1919, he worked for Robert Williams and Co, followed by a stint at the Union Minière's Native Labour Department (1919–1924). He later served as Compound Manager at Bwana Mkubwa and the Rho-

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Margaret Read (1956): The Ngoni of Nyasaland. London: Oxford University Press, Margaret Read (1959): Children of Their Fathers. Growing Up Among the Ngoni of Nyasaland. London: Methuen, and Margaret Read (1966): Culture, Health, and Disease. Social and Cultural Influences on Health Programmes in Developing Countries. London: Tavistock.

115 The Secretariat Freetown to T.B. Williamson (November 5, 1952), Kew Archives, CO 859/366.

116 Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans to C.W. Jenks (January 18, 1955), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

117 M.D. Tennant to F. Pickford (April 12, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

118 Firth, Raymond (1985): Audrey Richards, 1899–1984. In: *Man* 20(2), 341–344.

119 Richards, Audrey (1932): Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe. A Functional Study of Nutrition Among the Southern Bantu. London: Routledge/Kegan Paul, Audrey Richards (1939): Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Audrey Richards (1956): Chisungu. A Girl's Initiation Ceremony Among the Bemba in Northern Rhodesia. London: Faber & Faber, Audrey Richards (1966): Changing Structure of a Ganda Village. Nairobi: East African Publishing House, and Audrey Richards (1969): The Multicultural States of East Africa. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

kana mine (1929–1960).[120] During this period, he also held the position of African Affairs Adviser for the Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines.[121]

Hugh Worrell Springer (1913–1994) was a Barbadian lawyer and politician. Educated at Harrison College in Barbados and Hertford College, Oxford, Springer practiced as a barrister in Barbados from 1938 to 1947. He served in the Barbadian House of Assembly (1940–1947) and contributed to the West Indies Committee of the Asquith Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies.[122] A co-founder of both the Barbados Labour Party and the Barbados Workers' Union, he later served as Governor-General of Barbados (1984–1990).[123] Springer published works on Caribbean politics.[124]

George C. Thomas (?–?) was a Sierra Leonean trade unionist and political activist. After the founding of the anti-colonial West African Youth League in 1938, Thomas became the acting editor of its critical newspaper *The African Standard*. In 1940, he was detained for publishing articles against the British colonial administration.[125] Later, he served as Secretary of the Sierra Leone Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union.[126] When participating in the expert committee, Thomas was nominated by the workers' delegation to the ILO's Governing Body.

120 Scrivener's position in the industry is discussed at length by Jane L. Parpant (1983/2018): Labor and Capital in the African Copperbelt. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 182, Footnote 59. She retrieved the biographical information about Scrivener's career from an interview with Dr. A. Charles Fisher (August 21, 1976).

121 Robert Gavin to R.A. Soumaille (November 29, 1956), ILO Archives, NL 1004.

122 M.D. Tennant to Robert Gavin (12.02.1953), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and Antony Murray (1994): Obituary Sir Hugh Springer. In: *The Independent* (May 2, 1994) https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-sir-hugh-springer-1433334.html (last accessed: August 31, 2024).

123 Springer, Kean (2008): Truly a Gentleman. The Life and Times of Sir Hugh Worrell Springer. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 171–173.

124 Springer, Hugh Worrell (1953): On Being a West Indian. In: *Caribbean Quarterly* 3(3), 181–183, and Hugh Worrell Springer (1962): Reflections on the Failure of the First West Indian Federation. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

125 Kaniki, Martin H.Y. (1974): Politics of Protest in Colonial West Africa. The Sierra Leone Experience. In: *The African Review. A Journal of African Politics, Development and International Affairs* 4(3), 451. See also N.N. (n.d.): Rex respondent v. George C. Thomas, JELR 81052 (WACA). In: Judy Legal Database https://lite.judy.legal/amp/case/rex-respondent-v-george-c-thomas-appellant (last accessed: April 16, 2025).

126 Luke, David Fashole (1985): The Development of Modern Trade Unionism in Sierra Leone, Part II. In: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18(4), 630.

The Netherlands and the Dutch Empire

Nicolaas Selhorst Blom (1899–1972) was a Dutch lawyer and civil servant. He earned a PhD in Indonesian customary law (*adat*) from Leiden University in 1923 and began his legal career in the Dutch East Indies, serving as registrar and deputy judge at the Supreme Court in Batavia. From 1931 to 1934, he worked in Padang, West Sumatra and from 1934 to 1941 held senior posts in the Legislation Department of the Ministry of Justice in Batavia, eventually becoming its director. When H.J. van Mook was appointed Minister of Colonies, Blom served as his Deputy. After the war, Blom joined the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and participated in the roundtable conferences on Indonesian independence. He also worked for the UN and participated in the 1946 ILC.[127] Blom later became Government Commissioner for Indonesian Affairs and Director-General for Indonesia before retiring in 1965.[128]

Pieter Honig (1899–1965) was a Dutch chemist and industrial researcher. After completing his PhD in Delft, he began working in the sugar cane industry. From 1927, he held leading roles at the Java Sugar Industry Experiment Station in Pasuruan and published extensively. In 1940, he was appointed Director of the newly established Dutch Indies Institute for Rubber Research (*Rubberfonds*). During the Second World War, Honig fled to Australia and later moved to the United States. He briefly returned to Java between 1947 and 1949, before settling in New York, where he served as an advisor to the West Indies Sugar Company.[129]

Hubertus Johannes van Mook (1894–1965) was a Dutch colonial administrator and academic. Raised in the Dutch East Indies, he studied chemistry and indology in Amsterdam, Delft and Leiden. He joined the Dutch East Indies civil service in Semarang in 1918 and became a member of the *Volksraad* in 1931. A prolific writer on the political and social development of the Dutch East Indies, he began working for the Bureau of Economic Affairs in 1936 and was appointed Minister of Colonies in 1941. After the Second World War, van Mook

127 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xxiii.

128 Jef Rens to A.A. van Rhijn (July 17, 1953), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and R.J.J. Stevens (2013): Blom, Nicolaas Selhorst (1899–1972). In: Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn5/blom (last accessed: August 31, 2024).

129 De Boer, Jan Hendrik (1966): Levensbericht P. Honig. In: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (ed.): Jaarboek, 1965–1966. Amsterdam: KNAW, 383–386.

played a controversial but influential role in the negotiations surrounding Indonesian independence.[130] Following his resignation, he briefly taught at the University of California, Berkeley, California, before working for the UN as Head of the Division for Public Administration in the Technical Assistance Administration.[131]

Portugal and the Portuguese Empire

Gaspar Da Cunha Lima (?–?) was a Portuguese industrialist. He served as Director-General of the Angolan Agricultural Company.[132] When participating in the expert committee, da Cunha Lima was nominated by the employers' delegation to the ILO's Governing Body.

António Vicente Ferreira (1874–1953) was a Portuguese engineer and military officer. From 1913 to 1944, he held a professorship for bridge and railway construction at the Instituto Superior Técnico in Lisbon.[133] Between 1926 and 1928, he served as High Commissioner of Angola during the Portuguese military dictatorship.[134] He was also a member of the Portuguese Colonial Council

130 Robert Gavin to Arnold Zempel (June 18, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and Hermann Walther von der Dunk (2013): Mook, Hubertus Johannes van (1894–1965). In: Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn1/mook (last accessed: August 31, 2024). See also Cheong Yong Mun (1982): H. J. Van Mook and Indonesian Independence. A Study of His Role in Dutch-Indonesian Relations, 1945–48. The Hague: Nijhoff.

131 H.J. van Mook to Robert Gavin (July 29, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

132 ILO (1957): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories: Fifth Session, Geneva, 9th–20th December 1957. Geneva: ILO. In: https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/delivery/41ILO_INST:41ILO_V1/1290145660002676 (last accessed: October 6, 2023). On his involvement with forced labour, see Alexander Keese (2013): Searching for the Reluctant Hands. Obsession, Ambivalence and the Practice of Organising Involuntary Labour in Colonial Cuanza-Sul and Malange Districts, Angola, 1926–1945. In: *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 41(2), 52. https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2013.779116.

133 Matos, Ana Cardoso de & Maria da Luz Sampaio (2019): The Portuguese Schools of Engineers in Lisbon and Porto. Continuity and Discontinuity of the Models and the Creation of the National and International Networks. In: Albuquerque, S. et al. (eds.): Web of Knowledge. A Look into the Past, Embracing the Future. Faro: Editora Sílabas & Desafios, 65–69.

134 The military coup of 1926 led to the 1928 installation of the dictatorship of Antonio Salazar. See also Cláudia Castelo (2019): Gilberto Freyre's View of Miscegenation and Its Circulation in the Portuguese Empire, 1930s–1960s. In: Anderson, W., R. Roque & R. Ventura Santos (eds.): Luso-Tropicalism and Its Discontents. New York, NY/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 32. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781789201147.

and the South African Institute for Race Relations.[135] Ferreira published extensively on colonial topics.[136]

Álvaro Eugénio Neves da Fontoura (1891–1975) was a Portuguese engineer and military officer. He began his career in public and urban administration and served as Director of Railways in Mozambique from 1927 to 1937. From 1937 to 1940, he was Governor of Timor. Starting in 1932, he taught at the Escola Superior Colonial of Lisbon and later the Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarinas.[137] Neves da Fontoura also held various political roles in the Portuguese government and published on colonial labour.[138]

A. Santos Lima (?–?) was a Portuguese civil servant. Educated at the Escola Superior Colonial in Lisbon, he later served in the civil administration of Portuguese Guinea.[139]

South Africa

Claude William Slarke (1898–?) was a South African civil servant. He began his career in the Native Affairs Department and subsequently served as Senior Urban Areas Inspector before becoming Native Commissioner in Durban.[140]

135 Edward Phelan to Portuguese Foreign Minister (January 4, 1946), ILO Archives, NL 1001, and N.N. (1953): Obituary Mr. A. Vicente Ferreira. In: *Civilisations* 3(1), 171.

136 Ferreira, António Vicente (1927): A situação de Angola. Circular-consulta enviada às associações comerciais, industriais e agrícolas da Província de Angola. Luanda: Imprensa Nacional, António Vicente Ferreira (1934): Alguns aspectos da política indígena de Angola. In: *Boletim da Sociedade Luso-Africana do Rio de Janeiro* 9, 57–64, António Vicente Ferreira (1944): Colonização étnica na África portuguesa. Estudo apresentado ao II Congresso da União Nacional. Lisbon: Livraria Ferin, and António Vicente Ferreira (1953): Estudos Ultramarinos. Lisbon: Agência Geral do Ultramar.

137 ILO (1953): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Third Session, Lisbon, 7th–19th December 1953. In: https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1953/53B09_64_engl.pdf (last accessed: November 3, 2024), and N.N. (n.d.): Fontoura, Álvaro. In: Album Fontoura https://www.ahsocial.ics.ulisboa.pt/atom/album-fontoura (last accessed: December 20, 2024).

138 Neves da Fontoura, Álvaro Eugénio (1942): O trabalho indígena de Timor. Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias.

139 A. Ribeiro da Cunha to C.W. Jenks (February 22, 1955), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

140 A.D. Lee to Robert Gavin (March 13, 1951) and David Blelloch to Alan C. Burns (January 19, 1948), both ILO Archives, NL 1001.

In 1946, he served as an adviser to the South African delegation for the International Labour Conference.[141]

Douglas Laing Smit (1885–1961) was a South African civil servant. He entered the Cape Civil Service in 1903 and later joined the Department of Justice in Grahamstown. In 1912, he was appointed Public Prosecutor at East London, South Africa. Between 1918 and 1933, he held several posts within the Department of Justice. In 1934, Smit was appointed Secretary of the Native Affairs Department, a position he held until 1945. He was a member of the United Party and later served as Deputy Chairman of the Native Affairs Commission. Although he grew increasingly disillusioned with his party's politics, he remained affiliated with it until his death.[142]

M. Smuts (?–?) was a South African lawyer and civil servant who, from 1924 onwards, worked at the Native Affairs Department. Between 1938 and 1944, he was employed in the General and Legal Branch of the South African government, before becoming Native Commissioner in 1944. In 1946, Smuts became Chief Clerk at the General Administration in the Department of Native Affairs in Pretoria.[143]

United States of America

Frederick P. Bartlett (?–1970) was an American civil servant. He studied at the University of Chicago, Oxford and Columbia University and joined the US Foreign Service in 1942. In 1946, he served as an adviser to the US delegation for the International Labour Conference.[144] He served as secretary to the US Embassy in London and later participated in diplomatic missions to French colonial territories in Southeast Asia and to India. In 1958, he was appointed Director of the US Bureau of South Asian Affairs.[145]

141 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xxv.

142 Bell, M.M.S. (1978): The Politics of Administration. A Study of the Career of Dr. D. L. Smit with Special Reference to His Work in the Department of Native Affairs, 1934–1945. Rhodes University: MA Thesis, 1–8, 132.

143 A.D. Lee to Robert Gavin (April 5, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001. As far as it is known, M. Smuts was not related to the South African premier Jan Christiaan Smuts (1939–1948).

144 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xiii.

145 N.N. (1970): F. P. Bartlett, 60, Former Diplomat. In: *The New York Times* (January 12, 1970) https://www.nytimes.com/1970/01/12/archives/fp-bartlett-60-former-diplomat.html (last accessed: August 30, 2024).

Ralph Johnson Bunche (1904–1971) was an American political scientist and diplomat. He received his PhD in political science from Harvard University in 1934 and conducted postdoctoral research at Northwestern University, the LSE and the University of Cape Town. From 1928 to 1950, he held a chair of Political Science at Howard University. In the 1940s, Bunche was a member of the US delegation to Dumbarton Oaks, San Francisco and London, where he contributed to drafting the UN charter. In 1946, he joined the UN as Head of the Trusteeship Department. In 1950, Bunche was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and in 1957 was promoted to Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs. Bunche retired in 1971.[146]

James Porter Davis (1889–1977) was an American civil servant. Educated at Mercer University, he served from 1917 to 1925 as American Consul in Marseille, Bangkok and Shanghai. After a period in private business, he returned to public service in 1933. From 1947 onwards, Davis was Director of the Office of Territories in the US Department of the Interior.[147]

Benjamin Gerig (1894–1976) was an American civil servant. He received his PhD from the University of Geneva in 1929 and subsequently worked in the Secretariat of the League of Nations. During this period, he also served as Assistant Treasurer at the Geneva Research Center and was active in the International Service of the Society of Friends (Quakers).[148] Between 1940 and 1942, he taught as associate professor of government at Haverford College. He later joined the US Department of State, where he served as Director of the Office of

146 Ralph Bunche's work at the United Nations and his role in the decolonisation process have been covered in depth by Robert A. Hill & Edmond J. Keller (eds.) (2010): Trustee for the Human Community. Ralph J. Bunche, the United Nations, and the Decolonization of Africa. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, Elad Ben-Dror (2015): Ralph Bunche and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Mediation and the UN, 1947–1949. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315764573, and Kai Raustiala (2022): The Absolutely Indispensable Man. Ralph Bunche, the United Nations, and the Fight to End Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

147 Robert Gavin to C.W. Jenks, Note on James Porter Davis (n.d., 1953), ILO Archives, NL 1001, N.N. (1977): James Porter Davis, Retired in '53 From Interior Post; Was a Consul. In: *The New York Times* (September 1, 1977) https://www.nytimes.com/1977/09/01/archives/james-porter-davis-retired-in-53-from-interior-post-was-a-consul.html (last accessed: August 30, 2024).

148 N.N. (n.d.): Dr. Benjamin Gerig. In: LONSEA – League of Nations Search Engine http://www.lonsea.de/pub/person/4281 (last accessed: August 30, 2024).

Dependent Area Affairs.[149] Gerig was also involved in the work of the UN Committee on Non-Self-Governing Territories.[150] He published widely on the Mandates System.[151]

Guillermo Atiles Moréu (1901–1967) was a Puerto Rican lawyer. He worked at the Department of Finance and later became manager of the State Insurance Fund.[152] In 1946, he served as an adviser to the US delegation for the International Labour Conference.[153] Atiles Moréu published on topics such as social security and workmen's compensation.[154]

Maria Pintado de Rahn (?–?) was a Puerto Rican professor of Social Work. She served as Assistant-Chief of the Bureau of Social Welfare of the Puerto Rican Department of Health.[155] Pintado de Rahn also directed the Department of Social Work at the University of Puerto Rico and was a guest professor in Havana and at the School of Social Work at Columbia University in

149 N.N. (1976): Benjamin Gerig, 82, a former UN aide. In: *The New York Times* (March 5, 1976) https://www.nytimes.com/1976/03/05/archives/obituary-2-no-title.html (last accessed: August 30, 2024).

150 Thacher Winslow to C.W. Jenks (May 15, 1951), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

151 Gerig, Benjamin (1930): The Open Door and the Mandates System. A Study of Economic Equality Before and Since the Establishment of the Mandates System. London: George Allen & Unwin, Benjamin Gerig (1942): Mandates and Colonies. In: Puffer Morgan, L. (ed.): World Organization. A Balance Sheet of the First Great Experiment. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 211–230, and Benjamin Gerig (1948): Significance of the Trusteeship System. In: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 255, 39–47.

152 ILO (1953): Report of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories. Third Session, Lisbon, 7th–19th December 1953. In: ILO https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1953/53B09_64_engl.pdf (last accessed: November 3, 2024).

153 ILO (1948): Record of Proceedings of the 29th International Labour Conference, Montreal, 1946. Montreal: ILO, xiii.

154 Atiles Moréu, Guillermo (1955): El Seguro Social en Puerto Rico. In: *Revista Iberoamericana de Seguridad Social* 4(3), 351–375.

155 Notary Declaration (February 2, 1939), Leo Baeck Institute New York, Rahn Family Collection 1809–2010, AR 25538, John S. Gambs to Wilfrid Benson (March 26, 1946), ILO Archives, NL 1001.

New York.[156] She published extensively on the development of social work in Puerto Rico.[157]

156 N.N. (1945): Sra. Pintado Rahn Dice Intercambio Cultural Con Cuba Debe Continuarse. In: *La Torre. La Voz del Estudiante* 7(191), 1, 7, N.N. (1948): Notes from the Professional Schools. In: *Social Service Revie*w 22(4), 518, N.N. (1946): Directora Trabajo Social U. P. R. Invitada A Dictar Cursillo En Columbia. In: *La Torre. La Voz del Estudiante* 7(202), 1.

157 See, for example, Maria Pintado de Rahn (1944): Adiestramiento del Trabajador Social en Puerto Rico. In: *Revista – Asociación de Mujeres Graduadas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, 16–22.

II Overview

TABLE A2 Overview of All Expert Candidates (1947–1957). Sorted by Country, Including Their Dates of Admission to the Committee and Records of Meeting Attendance.

		Admission	1947	1951	1953	1955	1957
Belgium & Belgian Colonial Empire	William Paulin Louis van Remoortel	1946	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Father Pierre Charles	1951		✓	✓		
	Father Louis Bruyns	1955				✓	✓
China	Chen Chang Heng	1947	✓				
France & French Colonial Empire	Father Eugène Emile Auguste Beaupin	1945	/				
	Jules Marcel de Coppet	1945	/	✓	✓	✓	/
	Paul Monié	1947	✓				
	Louis Ignacio Pinto	1951		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Joseph Anoma	1955				✓	
	Antoine Lawrence	1955				✓	✓
	Charles Mendy	1955				✓	
	Hector Joseph Riviérez	1955				/	/
	Roger Dubled	1957					✓
	Bernard Rakotondrazaka	1957					/
	Razafy Randretsa	1957					✓
	David Soumah	1957					✓
Great Britain & British Empire	Wilfrid Edward Francis Jackson	1945	/				
	Granville St John Orde Browne	1945	✓				
	Margaret Helen Read	1945	✓				
	Father Thomas McLaughlin	1947	✓				
	F. L. Brown	1951		✓			
	Ernest Eggay Kwesi Kurankyi-Taylor	1951		✓	/		
	Richard Ogilvy Ramage	1951		/	✓	/	✓
	Audrey Isabel Richards	1951		✓	/	/	
	Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Ungku Abdul Hamid	1953			/	✓	
	Hugh Worrell Springer	1953			✓	✓	/
	Haroun Popoola Adebola	1955				/	
	Frank Wingate Carpenter	1955				✓	
	Eyo E. Esua	1955				/	
	S. M. Renner	1955				✓	✓
	William J. Scrivener	1955				✓	
	K. Dominic Foevie	1957					✓
	Aubrey Rollo Ibbetson Mellor	1957					✓
	James Clyde Mitchell	1957					✓
	George C. Thomas	1957					/
The Netherlands & Dutch Empire	Pieter Honig	1945	/				
	Nicolaas Selhorst Blom	1947	✓				
	Hubertus Johannes van Mook	1951		✓			
Portugal & Portuguese Empire	António Vicente Ferreira	1946	/				
	Álvaro Eugénio Neves da Fontoura	1951	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	A. Santos Lima	1955				✓	✓
	Gaspar Da Cunha Lima	1957					✓
South Africa	Douglas Laing Smit	1945					
	Claude William Slarke	1947	✓				
	M. Smuts	1951		✓	✓		
USA	Ralph Johnson Bunche	1946					
	Maria Pintada de Rahn	1946	/				
	Guillermo Atiles Moréu	1947	✓	✓	✓		
	Frederick P. Bartlett	1947	✓				
	Benjamin Gerig	1947	/	/	✓	✓	✓
	James Porter Davis	1951		✓			

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