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ANTHONY CAREW

## THE SCHISM WITHIN THE WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS: GOVERNMENT AND TRADE-UNION DIPLOMACY

The creation of the World Federation of Trade Unions in October 1945 was intended as a major step towards international trade-union unity. Less than four years later, in January 1949, the secession of its British, American and Dutch affiliates, soon to be followed by the bulk of Western trade-union centres, left the international labour movement more divided than ever. Narrative accounts of the WFTU's brief life as a united body and of the developments leading to the schism have long been available and are not matters of contention.<sup>1</sup> As to the cause of the split, however, there is less agreement. The ostensible reason for the secession was the failure of the WFTU to reach agreement with the International Trade Secretariats (ITSS) on their relationship with one another.<sup>2</sup> Those who split away always contended that disagreements over trade-union matters led to the rupture. In recent years, however, with the opening up of national archives, attention has turned to the influence of governments in the field of international trade unionism. In particular the interventionist role of the US State Department acting through the American Federation of Labour has been chronicled.<sup>3</sup> However, as yet no full account of the activities of the

<sup>1</sup> John P. Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement 1940 to 1953* (Ithaca, 1954); Lewis L. Lorwin, *The International Labor Movement* (New York, 1953); V. L. Allen, *Trade Union Leadership* (London, 1957); Walter Schevenels, *Forty-Five Years International Federation of Trade Unions* (Brussels, 1956); Jean-François Michel, "La scission de la Fédération syndicale mondiale (1947-1949)", in: *Le Mouvement Social*, No 117 (1981), pp. 33-52 (pp. 38ff. on the internal alignment of forces).

<sup>2</sup> At its foundation the plan had been to incorporate the ITSS, trade-union federations grouping unions by industries and trades, into the new structure as industrial departments. Disagreement arose over the degree of autonomy that the departments should have and no solution was reached. Discussions between the WFTU and the ITSS continued from 1945 to 1948 without success. From the beginning the TUC made its continued membership of the WFTU contingent on a satisfactory settlement of this issue.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969); Roy Godson, *American Labor and European Politics* (New York, 1976); Peter Weiler, "The United States, International Labor and the Cold War: The Break-Up of the World Federation of Trade Unions", in: *Diplomatic History*, V (1981), pp. 1-22.

British Foreign Office in this area is available. Given the fact that the British Trades Union Congress was the instigator of the schism and the single most influential union centre to leave the WFTU, an examination of Foreign Office relations with it would seem to be warranted. Equally the relationships between the Foreign Office and the State Department and between the TUC and the American Congress of Industrial Organisations, the two principal Western centres in the WFTU, are matters of considerable interest.

*Early Foreign Office and State Department interests in the WFTU*

During the first eighteen months of the WFTU's existence it operated without undue internal conflict. This was facilitated by the cordial relationship that existed between the three key national union leaders in the executive bureau, Walter Citrine of the TUC, Sidney Hillman of the CIO and V.V. Kuznetsov of the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions. During 1946 the international climate in which the WFTU operated deteriorated with the onset of the Cold War, and internal strains became more apparent in the summer of that year when Citrine and Hillman departed from the scene. Arthur Deakin of the Transport and General Workers Union, who replaced Citrine as president of the WFTU, was rather more suspicious of the Russians and inclined to be critical of what he regarded as their tendency to dominate the Federation. Deakin was urged by his TGWU predecessor, Ernest Bevin, now Foreign Secretary, not to take the job on the grounds that the WFTU would gradually fall under Russian control and that a non-Communist president would give a false impression of unity. However, Deakin felt that he could prevent such a development.<sup>4</sup> Not unnaturally, he was regarded with mistrust by the Russian unions for the outset.<sup>5</sup>

Against this background the Foreign Office began to consider ways of influencing the behaviour of labour organisations in the international field. In September 1946 Bevin first mooted the idea of creating a post in the Foreign Office for a Labour Relations Officer who would monitor the international scene. The job involved liaising with the Labour Party and the TUC and might, on the surface, have seemed a progressive move to enable party and union thinking to filter into Foreign Office policy-making circles. In fact the intention was quite the reverse, to create a mechanism for keeping the Labour Party and the TUC on a course approved by the Foreign Office. From an early stage it was clear that the job would be

<sup>4</sup> Allen, *Trade Union Leadership*, op. cit., p. 290.

<sup>5</sup> Lord Citrine, *Two Careers* (London, 1967), p. 237.

mainly concerned with combatting the thrust of Communism in the international labour field. No difficulty in liaising with the Labour Party was foreseen. The party's International Secretary, Denis Healey, was trusted at the Foreign Office. It was decided that he could be shown classified information, and with a Labour Government in office direct contact with Bevin's office could easily be arranged. Being more diffuse, the industrial wing of the labour movement was more difficult to deal with, and this was to be the main area of responsibility for the Labour Relations Officer. The most important function here was expected to be the briefing and debriefing of trade unionists travelling abroad on delegations. Bevin took a personal interest in the creation of this post, was very keen that the work should get off to a good start and insisted that the incumbent operate as flexibly as possible without hierarchical constraints. By April 1947 Hubert Gee of the Ministry of Labour, a member of Bevin's wartime Ministry of Labour staff, had been seconded to the post and at once held his first meeting with Deakin to discuss WFTU affairs.<sup>6</sup>

In this development the Foreign Office was ahead of the State Department, but by the beginning of 1947 officials in the latter were also pressing for a tougher American line on the WFTU. In January 1947 John Hickerson, Acting Director of the Office of European Affairs, wrote of the WFTU in the strongest terms: "There has been so much misinformation about this federation that it is time it is recognised for what it is — an international political machine inimical to this country's foreign policy".<sup>7</sup> Three months later the US Embassy in Paris voiced urgent criticism of the WFTU.

It may not be tactically desirable for the American Government to denounce WFTU as instrument of Communism, but from our past experience it seems [...] that failure to support courageous syndicalist opponents of Communism [...] will unquestionably have generally depressing effect wherever in the world there is a struggle to prevent capture of [...] labor movements by Communists.<sup>8</sup>

What caused particular concern in both the US and Britain was the increasing tendency for WFTU publications to criticise the policies of Western Governments without any balancing criticism of Soviet society.

<sup>6</sup> Interchange of information between the Labour Party, the TUC and the Foreign Office; note on discussion with Mr Deakin with regard to the WFTU, April 24, 1947, FO 371/67613. All Foreign Office documents referred to are lodged at the Public Record Office, London.

<sup>7</sup> Hickerson, memorandum to Russell, January 3, State Department Central Decimal File, 800.5043/6-2347. All State Department documents referred to are to be found in the Decimal Series and are lodged at the National Archives, Washington (DC).

<sup>8</sup> US Embassy Paris, cable to State Department, April 12, 800.5043/4-1247.

There was effective Communist control of the publicity department in the WFTU secretariat, and the administration of the secretariat generally was to become one of the major sources of friction within the Federation. Both Governments now followed a similar strategy in briefing their labour leaders and alerting them as to the significance of Soviet policy and intentions.

The first major events in the WFTU calendar following the adoption of this strategy were the meetings of its general council, executive committee and executive board in Prague in June 1947. TUC General Secretary Vincent Tewson and Deakin met Foreign Office representatives before going to Prague and were brought fully up to date with British Government policy on the issues scheduled for discussion. At this stage no attempt was made to persuade the TUC to withdraw from the WFTU in spite of the Federation's continued sniping at both it and the Labour Government. It was accepted in the Foreign Office that it was better to stay in and keep the Federation steady rather than split, form an opposition group and thus cause another open confrontation with the Russians.<sup>9</sup> A vigilant but cautious approach was called for. The Foreign Office were satisfied that the TUC delegation would defend British interests: "the attitude of the TUC as represented by Mr. Tewson and his entourage has been helpful in the extreme."<sup>10</sup> A senior Foreign Office official noted that in general "Tewson knows our views and when he can exert some influence without unduly exposing himself does so."<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, on the eve of the Prague meetings Under-Secretary of State Dean Acheson met Secretary-Treasurer James Carey, head of the CIO delegation, and his deputy Michael Ross for some "straight talking". Carey was told that the US Administration was unhappy at the way the WFTU was operating as a vehicle for furthering Soviet influence. However, Acheson accepted Carey's argument that it was important for the CIO to stay in the WFTU. It was felt anyway that the CIO was unlikely to withdraw as long as the TUC remained in membership and also as long as it stood to gain in terms of international prestige relative to its rival, the AFL, by continued affiliation. However, the State Department was hoping for a firmer line from the CIO and some indication of its willingness to play a more forceful role within the Federation.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> P. Mason, minute, May 7, FO 371/64485 B.

<sup>10</sup> D. J. McCarthy, minute, May 10, FO 371/67613.

<sup>11</sup> P. Gore-Booth to British Ambassador Moscow, June, FO 371/67613.

<sup>12</sup> P. Nitze, memorandum to Acheson, May 16; memorandum of conversation Acheson, Carey and Ross, "The CIO position in the World Federation of Trade Unions", May 19, 800.5043/6-2347 and 5-1947.

Part of the difficulty about taking a stronger line against the WFTU, as both the American and British Governments realised, was that it had developed an image as a respectable body with a substantial reputation in international circles. Another problem from the point of view of the Governments was that the WFTU did reflect the strong desire on the part of trade unionists all over the world for organisational unity. In the TUC this mood was still pronounced in late 1947. At the annual TUC Congress in September the fraternal delegate from the AFL was given a very hostile reception when he attacked the WFTU and by implication Russian union membership of it.<sup>13</sup> Faced with that situation the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Hector McNeil, concluded that the TUC was unlikely to make a real stand within the Federation until such time as the rank and file of TUC affiliates began to object to the fact that their leaders were devoting so much time and energy to the political machinations of the WFTU and in the process neglecting their proper industrial functions. The Foreign Office strategy was therefore to be on the constant lookout for policy lines adopted by the WFTU that directly threatened British industrial interests: "When we can show that British bread and butter is harmed by a WFTU proposition then we should shout."<sup>14</sup> A few months later the Foreign Office was to reinforce this approach with a concerted anti-Communist, anti-Russian propaganda campaign aimed at British trade unions. In the mean time the British Embassy in Paris, seat of the WFTU headquarters, was asked to provide systematic intelligence about the Federation's ongoing activities and plans, and especially about the internal alignment of forces.<sup>15</sup>

Hector McNeil saw Tewson and Carey for a de-briefing after the Prague meetings. They felt that their prior consultations with the Foreign Office and State Department respectively had enabled them to present a solid front towards the Russians, compelling the latter to take a more conciliatory line. However, the State Department was still dissatisfied with the CIO's failure to assert itself sufficiently. This was attributed to various

<sup>13</sup> Report of the 79th Annual Trades Union Congress, 1947, pp. 455-57. The typical trade-union mentality in this area is well captured by Marjorie Bremner in her discussion of attitudes of trade-union-sponsored Labour MPs. She points out that although the trade-union MPs tended to be the most loyal supporters of Bevin, they were also inclined to be the most anti-American group of Labour Parliamentarians. This she explains in terms of their traditional view of the USA as a capitalist country and their simplistic belief that the USSR was, after all, a socialist country — a land free from bosses. Marjorie Bremner, "An Analysis of British Parliamentary Thought Concerning the United States in the Post-War Period", (Ph.D. thesis, London, 1950), p. 125.

<sup>14</sup> Gore-Booth to British Ambassador Moscow, June.

<sup>15</sup> Gore-Booth to British Ambassador Paris, June 5, FO 371/67613.

factors: absence of a clear foreign-policy position on the part of the CIO, paralysis among the leadership arising from current Left-Right struggles within the organisation at home, and general lack of experience and background information.<sup>16</sup> Consequently the State Department was advised to make available to responsible CIO leaders information bearing on WFTU affairs.

Specific material including details which the CIO could use publicly if it so desired might prove particularly effective. This would [. . .] provide it with the materials which will enable it to pursue more effectively its own interests, *and when the chips are down, the interests of the US.*<sup>17</sup>

*The Marshall Plan and the crystallisation of the Cold War*

As the WFTU's governing body was meeting in Prague, the announcement of the Marshall Plan for aid to Europe on June 5, 1947, brought the growing conflict between the great powers to crisis point. The Russians, followed by their Eastern European satellites, refused to have anything to do with the proposal, while 16 Western European Governments formed a Committee on European Economic Cooperation (CEEC) and agreed to work on the preparation of a collective case for aid from the United States. Marshall Aid now became *the* divisive issue, displacing the unresolved question of WFTU-ITS relations and the problem of the Federation's central administration. For several months the TUC made no public pronouncement on the Marshall Plan. In part this was due to the fact that the "Plan" was as yet only a general idea. But more particularly the TUC was trying to avoid any step that would antagonise the Russians and embarrass Foreign Secretary Bevin while there remained a chance of achieving his major foreign-policy goal – an international agreement over the future of Germany. The four powers in the Council of Foreign Ministers were due to make one final attempt to settle this matter in November-December 1947. Not before December would the TUC commit itself on the Marshall Plan.

Meanwhile it was the Russian response to the Marshall Plan, the creation of the Cominform in September 1947, that helped to deepen the division in the WFTU and caused the opposing camps to harden their position. On October 5 the Cominform issued a statement opposing the Marshall Plan as a scheme drawn up by Wall Street and American monopolists for domination of Europe. The statement signalled the abandonment of "united front" tactics. As the Foreign Office interpreted it, Russian

<sup>16</sup> US Embassy Prague, cable to State Department, June 11, 800.5043/6-1147.

<sup>17</sup> Laurence A. Steinhardt, US Embassy Prague, to State Department, 800.5043/7-147. Emphasis added.

strategy was to polarise allegiances within the labour movement with the “progressives” grouped around the Communists and the remainder branded as “reactionary forces of capitalism”.<sup>18</sup> In November Kuznetsov made a speech to the Russian Trade Union Council in which he advocated the expulsion of “all reformist or oppositionist elements from the WFTU”, a statement that Arthur Deakin understood to refer to him personally.<sup>19</sup> The aim was to discredit social-democratic leaders of the labour movement and by December the line had filtered down through national Communist parties. Official declarations called for the removal of right-wing labour leaders from office and for radical changes in domestic policies. Trade unionists were under pressure to disown or rally around their existing leadership. The partisan nature of the WFTU secretariat under General Secretary Louis Saillant was now clearly visible. In September an issue of the WFTU *Information Bulletin* had been given over almost entirely to an article from the *Economist* which discussed the TUC in contentious and critical terms. There was no accompanying editorial note to put the criticisms in context. Between November 1947 and February 1948 the *Information Bulletin* published a string of statements from organisations opposed to the Marshall Plan, but none from those supporting it.

These were the circumstances in which the Foreign Office through its Information Research Department emerged as the first Western government Ministry to adopt a highly organised and aggressive counter-thrust to Communist propaganda. Christopher Mayhew, Bevin’s Parliamentary Secretary, had proposed a covert propaganda offensive two weeks after the Cominform attack on the Marshall Plan. By the end of 1947 the IRD had been launched as a secret propaganda organisation. Originally intended to attack capitalism as well as Communism and to promote ideas of the “Third Force”, its line soon became purely anti-Communist. In attacking Communism the emphasis was on bread-and-butter issues aimed at winning the hearts and minds of workers. In addition to factual information grey propaganda was also used. IRD material was distributed to trade unionists and influential opinion formers in the labour movement. It found an important outlet in the anti-Communist organisation Freedom First, which was established in April 1948. This body’s leadership included several TUC General Council members and its newsletter was edited by Herbert Tracey, Director of Publicity for the TUC. Within a year an international edition of the newsletter had been launched, the activity

<sup>18</sup> The basis of this interpretation was an article in *Bolshevik*, November 15, reported in British Ambassador Moscow to R. M. A. Hankey, December 17, FO 371/71648.

<sup>19</sup> Allen, *Trade Union Leadership*, p. 298.



being subsidised by the IRD. The propaganda programme was beginning to make itself felt in the spring and summer of 1948, and became particularly influential from October 1948.<sup>20</sup> Thus throughout 1948, the critical year for the WFTU, the Foreign Office was working systematically to build up an anti-Communist sentiment within the trade unions.

The issue of Marshall Aid was forced onto the WFTU agenda by the CIO. Not as yet officially committed to the proposal, the CIO wanted a discussion of its merits within the international labour movement. In a fiercely contested development it succeeded in being allowed to read into the record of the WFTU's November-1947 executive-board proceedings its call for an exchange of views on the Marshall Plan. No discussion was permitted, but it was agreed that the topic would be placed on the agenda for the next executive-board meeting anticipated in February 1948. The CIO's initiative called for a response, and at its December General Council meeting the TUC came out firmly in support of the principle of Marshall Aid. The objective of both the TUC and the CIO now was to have the Marshall Plan discussed in an international labour forum where there would be an opportunity to concert a position of support before the legislation governing the programme came before the US Congress in mid March 1948. Timing was of the essence. The WFTU was the appropriate forum, but if the executive board blocked discussion or if the February meeting were to be put off, there would still be time to convene an international conference on the subject outside the confines of the Federation.

This was where the paths of the TUC and the AFL crossed. From the very announcement of the Marshall Plan the AFL had been strongly in favour of it, recognising its potential as an anti-Communist weapon.<sup>21</sup> The annual AFL Convention in September 1947 had resolved to convene an international conference on the Marshall Plan, and since the end of the WFTU's executive-board meeting in November Irving Brown, the AFL's

<sup>20</sup> General Council members belonging to the Freedom First Group included Sir George Chester (NUBSO), Lincoln Evans (ISTC) and Andrew Naesmith (Textile Unions), Department of State, Division of Biographic Information. Of these, Evans and Chester were at the time members of the International Committee of the TUC, Evans and Naesmith were members of the Anglo-American Productivity Council, under whose aegis much of the American-British trade-union liaison in this period was conducted. On the IRD see Richard Fletcher, "How the FO Waged Secret Propaganda War in Britain", in: *The Observer*, January 29, 1978; Lyn Smith, "Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department: 1947-77", in: *Millennium, Journal of International Studies*, IX (1980), pp. 67-83.

<sup>21</sup> The distinguishing feature of the AFL's international policy was its virulent anti-Communism. It had declined to affiliate to the WFTU, refusing to have any dealings with the Russian trade unions. In the years after 1945 the AFL made common cause with several ITSS in a bid to prevent the latter being subsumed under the WFTU.

representative in Europe, had been vigorously canvassing support for such a conference. In the course of two visits to London in November and December 1947 he had held talks with right-wing members of the TUC General Council and with Herbert Tracey at TUC headquarters, and through the personal intervention of the US Under-Secretary of State he had managed to see Bevin.<sup>22</sup> In the AFL's eyes, a conference such as they were proposing would be important not just for voicing support for the Marshall programme, but would also be the basis for a new anti-Communist trade-union International.

There was certainly some attraction for the TUC in this proposal. The British were quietly afraid that the WFTU would comply fully with the letter of the CIO request and convene a conference on the Marshall Plan. In that case there was every possibility that the consensus of opinion would be against the Plan, with the result that it would either be stillborn or launched without the support of organised labour. A conference held outside the WFTU was much more likely to succeed. However, there was another major consideration for the TUC. Regarding itself as the natural leader in international trade unionism, the TUC was already operating with one eye on the situation that would arise following a split in the WFTU. If, as seemed possible, the Marshall Plan was to cause a breakup of the Federation, the TUC was determined to maintain the maximum support for its position both among its own members and among other national union centres. That meant that the TUC had to behave with strict constitutional propriety. It had to be seen to be acting correctly and not plotting with outside organisations like the AFL against the Federation. The best that the TUC could hope for would be a WFTU refusal to discuss Marshall Aid. Then they would be free to act independently, but first the Federation had to be given the chance to comply with the CIO's request. In the mean time the TUC felt it necessary to stay aloof from all politicking involving the AFL.

### *Stalling the AFL*

The months from December 1947 to February 1948 were a tense period for the TUC. It was compelled to mark time and was prevented from disclosing its intentions publicly, while all around pressures were impelling it to take decisive action. Irving Brown's meetings with a faction within the TUC appeared to be an attempt to bounce the organisation into the arms

<sup>22</sup> Herbert Tracey, memorandum of conversation with Irving Brown, November 21, 1947, TUC file 978; Lovett, cable to US Ambassador London, November 29, 851.504/11-2747. TUC documentation is lodged at the TUC, London.

of the AFL. Following his talks in London the State Department was informed through the London Embassy that Bevin was likely to urge the TUC to sever its ties with the WFTU as soon as possible, and that the AFL would probably be approached informally by the TUC in the latter part of December about the possibility of their jointly convening a Marshall Plan conference. Neither of these points reflected the reality of the situation: Bevin was inclined to share the TUC's caution about precipitate action and had advised Secretary of State Marshall in person that the AFL be told to "go slow" for the moment. The TUC itself was clearly dead set against conspiring with the AFL. But such speculation was likely to raise hopes and set in motion a bandwagon that the TUC might find hard to stop. Brown enlisted the support of the Belgian union centre FGTB in pressing for an independent conference. Between Christmas 1947 and the first week in January these two organisations issued public statements about the urgent need for a conference and indicated their willingness to convene one. All this speculation as to when the conference would take place proved a major test of the TUC's nerve. Throughout the risk run by the TUC was that serious misunderstandings would arise between it and the other centres, with the latter losing patience and convening the Marshall Plan conference without the British.

With a major stake in the outcome of this affair the Foreign Office and the State Department injected themselves into the proceedings. From London the US Labour Attaché, Samuel Berger, who was working closely with Brown, advised the State Department that a growing number of the TUC General Council now favoured a break with the WFTU at the next executive-board meeting, but that Tewson and Deakin were weak and vacillating and unprepared to give a lead.<sup>23</sup> Bevin despatched a senior Foreign Office official, Roger Makins, to meet the AFL leaders in Washington to take soundings of their position, and on his return to London Makins briefed the Secretary of State.<sup>24</sup> On the basis of this Bevin cabled the British Ambassador in Washington on Christmas Eve 1947 representing the TUC position as he saw it.

The TUC [. . .] are affiliated to the WFTU, and loyalty to the affiliation is a cardinal point with them and until there is a break [. . .] they are not willing

<sup>23</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, December 30, 800.5043/12-3047.

<sup>24</sup> The AFL leaders had just come from seeing President Truman and were very enthusiastic about Marshall Aid. Makins was told of the AFL's anxiety over the continuing public silence of the TUC on the aid plan. They felt that it would suffer a serious setback if the TUC did not respond favourably. British Ambassador Washington, cable to Secretary of State, December 20, FO 371/62784.

to take part in a conference either formally or informally. Their view is that if they attempted such a thing it would end in a fiasco and the second position would be worse than the first. [. . .] it [A failure by the WFTU to discuss the Marshall Plan] looks very much as if it will lead to a break up. In that case their hands would be clean and this would carry the Trade Unions in this country with them. If on the other hand they did as the AFL suggested, they feel they would be unlikely to get the desired support. Knowing the movement here very well, I think they are correct. They are in touch with other members of the WFTU Executive who are sympathetic to the Marshall Plan, but without the help of the British TUC taking the lead other countries are unlikely to participate.

This was intended as a private briefing for the Ambassador and he was asked to use the information with great discretion. Moreover,

In speaking to the AFL people on above lines, you should emphasise that the difference between us is not one of objectives but of tactics. We are as keen as they are to see that the Trade Union movement is not mis-used in the WFTU or anywhere else for purely Communist ends. I am sure that the TUC will show itself ready and determined to act in the international field at the right time, if and when this proves necessary. In the meanwhile we are not being inactive in Britain, and I hope that the AFL will have noted the steps which the TUC and the Labour Party are taking here to deal with the problem of Communist infiltration before it becomes a danger. Among other things the Trades Union Council [sic] recently passed a resolution with only one dissentient vote to back the Marshall Plan. All this should strengthen the TUC hand at the forthcoming February meeting in Paris and we hope that by then the moderates who have broken away from the French CGT, will have strengthened their position.<sup>25</sup>

The British Labour Attaché in Washington duly held talks with the AFL leaders in the new year. Following Bevin's briefing, he explained the TUC's strategic thinking. The AFL now agreed not to convene a Marshall Plan conference nor to attend one until after the February meeting of the WFTU. Moreover, they agreed that Brown should be instructed to pass on this decision to his friends in the Belgian FTGB leadership.<sup>26</sup>

The Foreign Office line then was to support the approach adopted by the TUC. As long as the unions were broadly on the course approved by the Foreign Office it was prepared to defer to them on matters of tactics. Like the State Department, the Foreign Office was now inclined to the view that the breakup of the WFTU was inevitable and desirable. For the Americans

<sup>25</sup> Bevin, cable to British Ambassador Washington, December 24, Bevin Papers, FO 800/493.

<sup>26</sup> British Ambassador Washington, cable to Secretary of State, January 6, 1948, FO 371/62784.

it was a case of the sooner the better, but the Foreign Office seemed to be more concerned that the Western union centres, and especially the TUC, the CIO and the AFL, should be kept broadly in step with one another, operating with a unanimity of purpose. In the interests of securing this it was willing to be a little more patient. The dual policy of the two Foreign Ministries over the next few months therefore involved a continuing effort to undermine the credibility of the WFTU while acting as intermediaries between their often mistrustful and mutually suspicious national labour movements. While the Foreign Office recognised the importance of the TUC's temporary delaying tactics, there was greater impatience in American diplomatic circles for the convening of a Marshall Plan conference and, what was thought to be its concomitant, a split in the WFTU.

The US Embassy in London was working towards two objectives. In general terms it was urging on the State Department the need to bring more pressure to bear on the British Government if the momentum behind the Marshall Plan was not to be lost. More specifically, it wanted the State Department to stiffen the resolve of the CIO in dealings within the WFTU over Marshall Aid. In a cable to Washington the Embassy stressed the importance of Britain being more active in generating interest in and support for the Marshall Plan among European countries. It wanted to see a British-led resumption of the CEEC talks and asked for clearance from Washington to approach the British Government along these lines. The State Department concurred with this strategy and the Foreign Office was urged to resume CEEC activities on a more formal basis in early February.<sup>27</sup> This pressure also helped persuade Bevin of the desirability of an international conference of Socialist parties on the Marshall Plan parallel to that being canvassed in the trade-union movement. As recently as December 1947 a proposal along these lines made at an international meeting of Socialist parties in Antwerp had been opposed by the British Labour Party. However, by mid January Bevin had given the party the go-ahead signal, and a conference jointly sponsored by the Labour Party and the French Socialist Party was in preparation for March. The US Embassy in London could congratulate itself. All indications pointed to the British labour movement "rapidly shifting from policy of 'appeasement' to more vigorous defence of British interests".<sup>28</sup> The conference of Socialist parties was regarded as important by Foreign Office officials, and Bevin was reminded: "we must clearly do everything we can to help him [Healey,

<sup>27</sup> US Embassy Paris, cable to State Department, January 7, 840.50 Recov. 1-748.

<sup>28</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, January 13, 840.50 Recov. 1-1348.

Secretary of the Labour Party's International Department] and the Party with the ERP [European Recovery Programme] conference."<sup>29</sup>

On the second of its two preoccupations, the question of the CIO's tendency to vacillate, the London Embassy cabled the State Department on December 30, 1947, to express Labour Attaché Berger's fear that the CIO and the TUC would be outmanoeuvred by the Russian trade unions at the WFTU executive board. He was particularly concerned about the lack of firmness in the CIO position, and suggested that a renewed effort be made to have the CIO and the AFL adopt a bipartisan international policy. The CIO was never as close to the State Department as the AFL, and a special effort had often to be made to ensure that its policy line was acceptable to the Administration. Ambassador Douglas was prepared to allow Berger to return to Washington if his presence there was likely to assist that end.<sup>30</sup> However, Cleon Swayzee of the State Department felt that this would not be a helpful move. Like several other American foreign-service officers specialising in labour affairs, Berger was identified in the CIO's mind with the AFL. Swayzee argued that once the State Department had decided that it wanted the CIO to take a position on withdrawal from the WFTU then the Secretary of State himself or his Under-Secretary should be the ones to make a direct approach to the top and speak to CIO President Philip Murray and Carey.<sup>31</sup>

Two weeks later, on January 20, just before the CIO executive was due to meet, the State Department decided the time had come to apply extra pressure, and a meeting took place between Secretary of State Marshall and Murray, Carey and Ross. Murray explained the current thinking of the CIO. He did not know how long they would continue to be a part of the WFTU. Though he had been an early proponent of the Federation, he recognised that it was now polarising over basic questions of principle and practice. Still he thought it was important to hold the WFTU together if possible, since there was a great advantage for American interests in having a forum in which opposing labour movements could meet and talk things over. He felt that a discussion of the Marshall Plan in the presence of those movements who were opposed would be more beneficial than a discussion carried on with those who were of a like mind. For the time being Marshall accepted the "wait and see" approach, and contented himself with the

<sup>29</sup> Unsigned memorandum to Secretary of State, January 24, FO 371/68943. Assistance was indeed forthcoming. Foreign Office officials helped Healey to draft the document that formed the basis of the Conference discussion.

<sup>30</sup> US Ambassador London, cable to State Department, December 30, 1947, 800.5043/12-3047.

<sup>31</sup> Swayzee, memorandum to Nitze and Hickerson, January 7, 1948, 800.5043/1-748.

observation that discussion of his plan by the WFTU executive should not be delayed beyond February.<sup>32</sup>

*Preparing for the trade-union conference on European recovery*

All the manoeuvring since November had taken place under the assumption that the next WFTU executive board would be held early in February, but no firm date had been set. With this meeting likely to be the occasion of a showdown it soon became apparent that the Russian strategy would be to put it off as long as possible in order to hold the WFTU together. The Western interpretation of Russian union thinking at this time, one that appeared to be borne out by subsequent events, ran as follows: a critical phase was looming in French and Italian domestic politics with the possibility of the Communists being able to seize power in the wake of de-stabilising strikes. But a successful outcome for the Communists would require the support of the entire labour movement and a split in the WFTU would jeopardise such unity.<sup>33</sup>

As early as December 18, 1947, at a WFTU secretariat meeting held in London, Saillant had proposed the postponement of the next-scheduled executive board for a few months.<sup>34</sup> By January 21 the TUC had been informed of "difficulties" involved in setting a date for the meeting. Nevertheless the January 28 meeting of the TUC General Council decided to demand that the Federation executive board be convened not later than mid February. In a letter to the WFTU they pointed out that so far they had refrained from giving any guidance on the Marshall Plan to their affiliates, but this was an issue that could not be put off much longer. The TUC requested an immediate reply from Saillant. If the meeting were not held, the TUC would feel free to convene or participate in a separate Marshall Plan conference.<sup>35</sup>

There was no immediate reply from Saillant. The general secretary had conveniently left his office on January 24 for a visit to Germany and was not expected back in Paris until February 6 at the earliest. In fact there was considerable uncertainty as to his whereabouts: even his assistants in the WFTU headquarters could not be sure and Saillant subsequently refused to account for his movements in these two weeks. However, British and American embassy staff in various European capitals pieced together in-

<sup>32</sup> Memorandum of conversation Marshall, Murray, Carey and Ross, January 20, 1948, 840.5043 Recov. 1-3048.

<sup>33</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, November 22, 1947, 800.5043/11-214.

<sup>34</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, December 30, 800.5043/12-3047.

<sup>35</sup> Tewson to Saillant, January 28, 1948, TUC file 564.19.

telligence indicating that Saillant had gone from Germany to Prague to attend, it was thought, a "Marshall Plan conference" of Eastern-bloc trade unionists and, in the process, to consult on strategy with the Russian union leaders.<sup>36</sup> In the event there was no need for a formal reply from Saillant. On January 29 Kuznetsov of the Russian unions cabled Deakin that it was not possible for him to attend an executive meeting in February because of "an important collective bargaining campaign". "Not a single responsible AUCCTU officer can leave USSR for executive board meeting."<sup>37</sup> The February board meeting was off. During the next two weeks the Communist press campaign against the Marshall Plan built up to a crescendo. The *Information Bulletin* carried a front-page attack on Irving Brown which labelled him "a propagandist of American capitalist monopolies", while accusing Carey and other leaders of the CIO and the TUC of seeking to destroy the WFTU.<sup>38</sup> The same week the Soviet trade union journal *Trud* accused Deakin of collaborating with the Foreign Office to destroy the WFTU, a charge that was also repeated in the *New Times*.<sup>39</sup>

Anxious to recapture the initiative, the AFL repeated its insistence on a conference being held at the earliest possible date, and finally announced its own definite intention to stage the gathering in Brussels in March. The Americans and British were now in grave danger of operating at cross purposes. Learning from Saillant that the next WFTU executive board could not be held before April, the TUC enlisted the support of the Benelux trade-union centres in convening a conference on the ERP. Having taken the advice of the Foreign Secretary and his officials, the TUC General Council set the date for the conference on March 8 and 9.<sup>40</sup> The background to this decision was explained by J. R. Rob of the Foreign Office in a cable to the British Ambassador in Washington.

They had consulted me about timing of conference. I advocated early March because this would have a steadying effect in Europe and would show America, before the US vote on the ERP, where genuine trade unionists really stood. TUC accepted this advice and informed the AFL of the decision.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> D. J. Tomlinson (Ministry of Labour), memorandum to Deakin and Tewson, January 27; A. Kolarz, memorandum to Tewson, February 3; E. Bell, memorandum to Tewson and Deakin, February 4, TUC file 564.19.

<sup>37</sup> Kuznetsov, cable to Deakin, January 29, TUC file 564.19.

<sup>38</sup> *Information Bulletin World Federation of Trade Unions*, February 15.

<sup>39</sup> Allen, *Trade Union Leadership*, p. 289.

<sup>40</sup> FGTB to TUC, February 9; minutes of TUC International Committee, February 17, TUC file 978; Bevin, cable to British Ambassador Washington, February 19, FO 371/71806.

<sup>41</sup> J. R. Rob, memorandum to British Ambassador Washington, February 19, FO 371/68943.



The choice of date without consulting the Americans and its announcement as a *fait accompli* caused uproar within the AFL. When Tewson telephoned George Meany, AFL Secretary-Treasurer, to inform him of TUC intentions, the American told him that AFL leaders were already committed on the dates in question and threatened a boycott of the conference.<sup>42</sup>

During the next three days there was frantic diplomatic activity, involving the Foreign Office, the State Department and embassy staffs in Washington and London, aimed at defusing the highly charged situation. The British Labour Attaché in Washington, Archibald Gordon, met Meany following Tewson's telephone call. Later the Embassy cabled the Foreign Office that Gordon was "extremely anxious" and that it would be "difficult to exaggerate the dangers". The AFL could not attend a conference before the last week in March. The Ambassador queried whether or not the TUC decision really was final. "Is it possible to meet AFL's difficulties — I hope so."<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile the US Labour Attaché in London, Berger, suggested that the US Ambassador ask Bevin to contact the AFL with a view to smoothing ruffled feathers. Tewson also agreed that a further approach to the AFL by the Labour Attaché in Washington would be desirable.<sup>44</sup>

What was really unacceptable to the AFL was not the proposed dates so much as the suspicion that the decision on the conference had been made in conjunction with the CIO behind the AFL's back. The AFL had softened its long-standing opposition to participating in a conference with the CIO, but it would not attend a CIO-sponsored conference. On this point Bevin was happy to intervene and cable reassurances to the AFL leadership. Beyond that he was at pains to explain once more the background to the TUC's delicate balancing act in wanting to delay the ERP conference until the WFTU executive board had had a chance to meet while trying to resist the perpetual delaying tactics of the Russians.

They [the TUC] have been under great pressure from other countries to call this conference as quickly as possible. When this was mentioned to me I said that to be of value conference should not be delayed later than about March 9. TUC had to slow things down to give time for WFTU attitude to get clear, especially in view of their affiliated obligations which have a great influence on British trade unionists' attitude. At the same time they have had to meet Russian tactics in WFTU by emphasising urgency of this matter, and by

<sup>42</sup> British Ambassador Washington, cable to Bevin, February 18, FO 371/71806.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Hubert Gee, memorandum "AFL and Trade Union Conference", February 21, FO 371/68943.

flatly refusing to wait for the meeting of WFTU bureau in the first weeks of April. In the light of these considerations the TUC fixed on the date. CIO were not involved. Carey did not know of the decision [ . . . ].

Any delay to March 29 would put the TUC in an impossibly difficult position. The Russians have already been making propaganda capital out of the allegations that the AFL is calling the tune and that real object is to sabotage the WFTU. Any delay would be seized on and used as proof that European unions were completely under AFL domination and that position taken by TUC in WFTU had been shown to be pure sham since they were now prepared to wait until the end of March to suit the AFL's convenience.

Any delay would also give Russians more time to try and drive a wedge between AFL and CIO.<sup>45</sup>

The message was cabled to the British Ambassador with the intention that the Labour Attaché should immediately convey the sense of it to the AFL.

Bevin's appeal was reinforced by the US Ambassador in London, who filled in some of the background for the State Department and advised them to urge the AFL to reconsider its boycott.

Ever since French general strike, formation CGT-FO and breakdown of CFM conference, certain leaders of TUC have been maneuvering to extricate TUC from WFTU and form bona fide trade union international. But in order to carry British trade union movement with them, they have had to move in such a way that any responsibility for split would be fastened on the Communists. They have, therefore, insisted on playing a lone hand in order to avoid appearance of any AFL-CIO-TUC conspiracy to wreck WFTU. Hence the absence of consultation.<sup>46</sup>

J. H. Oldenbroek, general secretary of the ITF (International Transport Workers Federation), one of the ITSs, joined the chorus of voices trying to secure a change in the AFL position. Writing to George Meany he made the telling point that

the Executive Committee of the WFTU will probably have to take disciplinary action against the organisations participating in the conference. My guess is that they would [sic] and moreover would condemn the National Centres concerned for having made common cause with the AFL and the French Force Ouvrière group. Don't you agree that in these circumstances it would be better to hold the conference as soon as possible?<sup>47</sup>

The combined weight of these arguments had the desired effect and the AFL agreed to participate in the conference as scheduled by the TUC. A

<sup>45</sup> Bevin, cable to British Ambassador Washington, February 19, FO 371/71806.

<sup>46</sup> US Ambassador London, cable to Lovett, February 21, 840.50 Recov. 2-2148.

<sup>47</sup> J. H. Oldenbroek to Meany, February 19, Dubinsky Papers, Box 261, file 3 B, International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, New York.

second-ranking delegation would represent the AFL, whose understanding was that the conference would be a preparation for a further, higher-level meeting later in the year.<sup>48</sup>

The prospect that the ERP conference would lead to disciplinary action being taken against participants and thereafter, presumably, a split in the WFTU was a major consideration with the AFL. For them this was the purpose of the exercise. For many in the TUC and the CIO, however, it was enough that the Marshall Plan should be publicly supported. If this could be done without severing their ties with the WFTU, so much the better. Faced with this trend of thought the Foreign Office remained patient, apparently confident of the TUC leadership's ultimate intention of quitting the WFTU. The Federation was due to hold its regular policy conference in October and the assumption in Britain was that that would inevitably be the occasion of a split. From this point on the difference in emphasis as between the TUC and the CIO on the one hand, and the more impatient AFL and State Department on the other, became evident. A cable from the US Ambassador in London to Under-Secretary of State Lovett arguing the case for AFL participation in the ERP conference was framed in the belief that this was the surest way to engineering a WFTU split. The anticipated sequence of events was clear.

March 8-9 conference on ERP represents first step in break-up of WFTU and formation of new international trade union center. Conference will be exploratory and consultative, will take place in private session, and will be limited to discussion of ERP. Nevertheless, we think AFL presence essential in order to strengthen anti-Communist and anti-WFTU elements in TUC and other European trade unions who have always been suspicious or hostile to WFTU, sympathetic to AFL position, and who wish to use conference in order lay groundwork for new bona fide trade union international. We think there is danger conference may prove abortive unless AFL present to press for formation of provisional committee, and arrange for subsequent major conference on ERP. There is still much hesitation and indecision here and in European trade unions, and what is needed at this juncture is some skillful trade union diplomacy rather than full dress knock-down drag-out debate on the international trade union situation. Ultimate break-up of WFTU seems to us to be inevitable but AFL can accelerate break-up if they act skillfully at this time.

In a final passage the Ambassador asked for clarification of Marshall's view of the WFTU following his January meeting with CIO leaders. In London recently Carey had been maintaining that Marshall and Special US Representative in Europe, Averell Harriman, were at one with the CIO

<sup>48</sup> AFL, cable to TUC, February 21, TUC file 978.

in the belief the disintegration of the WFTU should not be accelerated. This was clearly an interpretation that the Ambassador found puzzling and hard to accept: "If this is the case, would appreciate knowing reasons and receiving guidance. Also, if true the opinions expressed above in this cable on the inevitable break-up of the WFTU do not hold water."<sup>49</sup>

No new guidance was offered to the Ambassador and in the absence of such the process of undermining the WFTU would proceed uninterrupted. Brown and the ITF leaders were examining closely the possibilities of using the forthcoming conference as an opportunity to engender a split in the Italian labour movement. It was reported to the State Department that at the first sign of a division in the Italian trade unions over the ERP conference the ITF was ready to lead the Italian transport union in a breakaway from the CGIL.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile the US Embassy in Brussels advised the State Department of Brown's assessment that a split in the CGIL might be engineered through the influence of the Church, though this would be a more difficult task than in France.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Retreating from the brink*

By contrast the TUC and the CIO appeared to veer in the opposite direction. Their public position was to emphasise the importance of international labour solidarity. On February 10 Carey had met TUC leaders in London, and the next day it was announced that the two organisations had resolved to do their best to avoid a split in the WFTU. Both wanted to avoid the charge of being "splitters" in a context where the French CGT had recently split and the Italian CGIL was nearing a rupture. To what extent this was simply a matter of public relations as distinct from principle is difficult to say, but for them to appear as splitters would certainly have set other European unions against the ERP.<sup>52</sup> Giving further credence to State Department fears that the CIO had no intention of leaving the WFTU, Carey now arranged to go to Moscow for three days of personal talks with Kuznetsov between February 24 and 26.<sup>53</sup> He still believed that the Russians could be made to view Marshall Aid in a more favourable light.

*En route* to and from Moscow Carey discussed the international trade-union situation with officials of the US Military Government in Germany.

<sup>49</sup> US Ambassador London, cable to Lovett, February 21.

<sup>50</sup> US Consulate Antwerp to State Department, February 5, 800.5043/2-548.

<sup>51</sup> US Embassy Brussels, cable to State Department, February 11, 800.5043/2-1148.

<sup>52</sup> Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement*, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>53</sup> Carey, cable to Kuznetsov, February 12, TUC file 564.19.

They in turn passed on to Washington the view that Carey had expressed. Privately the CIO did not want discussion of the Marshall Plan by the WFTU, since the majority would be against the programme. However, the CIO would remain within the WFTU just as the US Government remained within the United Nations. Their purpose would be gradually to win over trade unions presently under Communist control, but outside the Iron Curtain, or at least avoid abandoning such unions to the Communists. This, Carey contended, was the CIO's basic position, one that the State Department had never correctly understood or supported. His own feeling, one shared by many in the British labour movement, was that the truculent behaviour of the Russians was due to economic poverty rather than a desire to overthrow capitalism and extend Communism.<sup>54</sup>

Although Carey felt that the Moscow visit had achieved something, it did not affect preparations for the ERP conference. The conference call went to 34 organisations from 16 countries, including Christian unions unaffiliated to the WFTU as well as the AFL. The statement which formed the basis for the conference discussion had the stamp of TUC caution on it, shying away from any suggestion of setting up a rival organisation to the WFTU. It spoke of the need for a permanent ERP trade-union liaison committee, though, significantly, functioning only in relation to the Marshall Aid programme. The delegates agreed to establish a ten-man Emergency Committee. With Evert Kupers of the Dutch NVV as chairman and Tewson as secretary, its function would be to liaise with the CEEC and to establish the machinery of permanent co-operation with the Marshall Plan administrative apparatus.<sup>55</sup>

The British and American Governments both recognised the potential value of these ERP union structures for the success of the Aid programme. In Britain the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Labour began in earnest to work out the details of how the unions would link in with Marshall Plan administration. Roger Makins of the Foreign Office wrote to Sir Edmund Hall-Patch, head of the British delegation to the CEEC, pointing out that the Foreign Office was anxious to get the trade-union liaison machinery firmly established before the next WFTU meeting. The position was that the unions had been brave enough to defy the WFTU, and "we must now support them".<sup>56</sup> However, under Tewson's leadership the Emergency

<sup>54</sup> OMGUS (Berlin) to State Department, February 24 and March 2, 800.5043/2-2448 and 3-248.

<sup>55</sup> Report of the 80th Annual Trades Union Congress, 1948, pp. 186-88.

<sup>56</sup> Makins, memorandum to Hall-Patch, May 3, FO 371/71806. However, it seems likely that the two Governments held different views as to which parts of the structure should be emphasised. For the Americans the Europe-wide liaison body held the most attraction

Committee itself showed far less urgency in building up the ERP trade-union organisation, and especially in creating the permanent central office that was essential if it was ever to establish a major presence at international level.<sup>57</sup> To the AFL Tewson's cautious approach was a grave disappointment. Irving Brown, a member of the Emergency Committee, wrote to Lovestone, secretary of the AFL's Free Trade Union Committee: "English crowd is beginning to give me a pain in the neck. They are very jealous of maintaining all control of international operations in their own hands."<sup>58</sup> He had pressed for an early re-convening of the ERP conference, but Tewson was against it. In Brown's view Tewson was scared. None of the decisions of the March conference had been implemented, and the TUC wanted ERP issues to be kept at national level between trade-union centres and their own Governments rather than being turned into an international crusade. Brown concluded: "[The] English are weakening in my opinion".<sup>59</sup>

The extent to which the TUC and CIO appeared to be backing away from a frontal collision with the WFTU was reflected in the delicate handling of the Italian labour movement before, during and after the London conference. Both centres resisted pressures from their respective Foreign Ministries that would have involved them more deeply in splitting tactics. Much of the behind-the-scenes manoeuvring associated with the ERP conference involved the Italian unions which the State Department and the AFL in particular viewed as prime candidates for a split. The CGIL were under instructions to boycott the conference. However, the latter well understood Italy's need for aid, recognised the impact that this question would have on the forthcoming general election and were reluctant to close the door entirely on the Marshall Plan.<sup>60</sup> In these circumstances elements of the Christian Democratic, Republican and Social Democratic minority within the CGIL decided to defy the confederation and send a delegation to London.

The status and treatment of the minority spokesmen, Pastore, Canini and Parri, was now a matter of high-level diplomacy. The Italian Prime both as a vehicle for injecting a truly "European" dimension into the Marshall Plan and as a potential counter to the WFTU. The British Government was almost certainly more concerned to establish trade-union liaison at national level. This fitted in with their strategy to minimise the importance of the CEEC, downgrade the element of European integration in the Marshall Plan, and allow the greatest degree of freedom for economic planning country by country.

<sup>57</sup> In adopting this stand Tewson was reflecting the line taken by the British Government.

<sup>58</sup> Brown to Lovestone, March 21, Florence Thorne Papers, AFL Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>59</sup> Brown to Lovestone, April 26, Dubinsky Papers, Box 261, file 3 A.

<sup>60</sup> State Department, cable to US Ambassador, London, March 10, 840.50 Recov. 3-948.

Minister De Gasperi made representations to the British Embassy to see if pressure would be applied to have them admitted to the conference. The British Ambassador in Rome in turn cabled the Foreign Office with details of the delegation. He informed Whitehall that they were all good anti-Communists, and the advice from the Embassy was that they should be met on arrival in London, and given a press interview and a good build-up.<sup>61</sup> However, from the Foreign Office Hubert Gee's advice to the TUC International Department was to admit the CGIL representatives to the conference with observer status only. He also suggested that high-level Foreign Office representations be made to Tewson before the matter came before the TUC's International Committee. Gee was sensitive to the TUC's cautious line, and pointed out that Congress would not want to be seen as splitters, yet to allow the Italian delegation full accreditation would give just that impression. Accepting this reasoning, the Foreign Office decision was to support the TUC and the CIO in their view that it was undesirable to force a division in the Italian movement. To do so would leave the CGIL under unchallenged Communist control, whereas the non-Communists were currently growing in strength and could, in the Foreign Office view, become dominant by the end of the year.<sup>62</sup>

The State Department was much more ready to intervene. Labour Attaché Berger was told to urge the TUC to give the Italians full status as delegates: "Department unimpressed by TUC contention Communists would be enabled thereby resort same practice [i.e., send unofficial delegates to Communist conferences] since Communists usually resort regardless precedents to any practice to their advantage."<sup>63</sup> Berger enlisted the support of American delegates at the conference in asking for full accreditation, but the TUC stood firm against this. As a compromise it was agreed that the Italians should be seated in the main body of the conference with the chairman allowing them to speak. In private they were told that they would be allowed to participate on an equal footing with the other delegates.<sup>64</sup> In the weeks after the London conference the State

<sup>61</sup> Text of telephone message from D. J. Tomlinson (Ministry of Labour) to TUC, March 5, TUC file 564.19.

<sup>62</sup> Gee, minute, March 3, FO 371/71806. Brown completely rejected the suggestion that the anti-Communist faction in the CGIL could become a majority. To Lovestone he wrote: "the British are fostering the illusion that the opposition can build up a legal majority and then take over the leadership at the next convention of CGIL. Can you imagine the CP machine letting this happen? But this fantasy is shared by Sarragat [sic] and his boys". Brown to Lovestone, April 26.

<sup>63</sup> State Department, cable to US Embassy London, March 8, 840.50 Recov. 3/648.

<sup>64</sup> US Embassy London, cables to State Department, March 6 and 9, April 5, 840.50 Recov. 3-648 and 948, 4-548.

Department persisted in its effort to persuade the CIO to intervene openly in Italian labour politics on the side of the anti-Communists, while Carey for the CIO advised the Italians to maintain organisational unity. Berger returned to Washington and held talks with CIO leaders, during which he urged them to send representatives to Italy prior to the forthcoming general election. The purpose would be to give moral support to the non-Communists and to be in a position to help co-ordinate opposition to any Communist-led strikes after the election in the event that the Communists polled badly. The CIO were still reluctant to comply. Berger then drafted a telegram for Marshall to send to the US Ambassador in Rome indicating clearly the State Department's eagerness for American intervention in Italy.

Department feels that split away of CGIL minority and formation of non-Communist trade union center will inevitably occur as in France [. . .]. We indicated to Murray and Carey they can help materially [. . .].

Carey and to some extent Murray still seem reluctant to take any active steps in this direction but AFL will cooperate fully in any such effort.

Will you evaluate possibility and timing of CGIL split; advise us whether CIO-AFL visit would be useful and best time for such visit.<sup>65</sup>

In the aftermath of the ERP conference the TUC and the CIO appeared to lack purpose. How is this to be explained? Having publicly registered a measure of international trade-union support for the Marshall Plan (however lukewarm and inadequate this may have seemed to the AFL), they clearly felt that tactics of caution were now in order. There were two main factors behind this. Though the majority of the TUC and CIO leadership shared the AFL's opposition to Communism, they found the abrasive style of the latter hard to take. Much as they wished for a more congenial and effective organisation than the WFTU and much as they recognised the need to work with the AFL, they were reluctant to be pressured into joining any new international organisation launched under the momentum of AFL politicking. The TUC in particular was increasingly irritated by AFL tactics. This was a major reason why the TUC was unwilling to see the ERP trade-union machinery acquire any real power. Beyond that there was still a residual instinctive attachment to notions of worldwide international solidarity. Both the TUC and the CIO had Communists and Communist-sympathisers among their members, and in official positions and as yet could not afford a head-on collision with them. Expressions of enthusiasm

<sup>65</sup> Memorandum of conversation Murray, Carey, Golden and Berger, March 23, 800.5043/348; State Department, cable to US Ambassador Rome, March 24, 840.50 Recov. 3-2448.



for the WFTU were no longer heard, but in public union leaders still affirmed their support for the Federation.

To what extent these were ritual statements is not clear. Following the London conference, for example, Carey announced that it was less likely that the CIO would pull out of the WFTU than that the USA would pull out of the United Nations.<sup>66</sup> In July 1948 at an ITF conference in Oslo Arthur Deakin spoke approvingly of the WFTU's accomplishments, lamented the split in the French and Italian movements, and hoped that the ITF would not precipitate another split. But was this simply Deakin, the president of the WFTU, showing his public face? At the same conference he assured American delegates in private that he still wanted a rupture with the WFTU – it was only a question of choosing the time. He made the same point to the British Labour Attaché in Oslo: a breach was inevitable if the Federation remained under Communist domination.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, at that same conference Deakin led the resistance to a resolution that would have prevented all future negotiations between the ITSs and the WFTU, and he helped secure the adoption of a compromise resolution under which talks would be allowed to resume.<sup>68</sup> The general position appears to have been that in the spring and summer of 1948 neither the leadership of the TUC nor the CIO were sufficiently confident of full membership support among their own affiliates for any move that would result in a break with the WFTU. The internal political balance of both organisations needed to shift rather more in the direction of anti-Communism before that became a real possibility. In Britain this was where the propaganda work of the Foreign Office's IRD was so valuable.

The long-delayed meeting of the WFTU executive board, which began on April 30, 1948, in Rome, confirmed the unwillingness of the TUC and the CIO to bring to a head their disagreements with the WFTU. The Marshall Plan was not discussed. The main debate was over the Federation's administrative failings and the partisan nature of the secretariat under Saillant. The TUC was able to catalogue a long list of serious shortcomings and inefficiencies in the WFTU. On this issue the Russians showed a readiness to compromise. An agreement was reached on several measures designed to subject the secretariat to closer supervision. The TUC went along with this settlement, recognising that there would be

<sup>66</sup> Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement*, p. 135.

<sup>67</sup> US Embassy Oslo, cable to State Department, July 22, 800.5043/7-2248; British Ambassador Oslo to Bevin, July 31, FO 371/72855.

<sup>68</sup> British Ambassador Oslo to Bevin, July 31.

no general support among Western trade-union centres for a split in the Federation over an out-and-out demand for Saillant's dismissal.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, to outsiders the CIO seemed to have lost all sense of direction. In the course of the executive-board meeting CIO delegation leader Carey said that the WFTU was dead, doubted its ability to continue and pointed out that his organisation was prepared to withdraw now that policy was drifting away from the original line.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, after the meeting he stated that a new day had dawned for the Federation.<sup>71</sup> This prompted the TUC to write to the CIO asking for clarification. In reply they were assured that the accommodation reached in Rome had not disposed of the CIO's doubts about the WFTU and that they would continue to wait and see.<sup>72</sup> The CIO still held to the view that its departure from the WFTU would raise problems for the Marshall Plan authorities and complicate their relationship with labour in the ERP countries. For that reason it was inclined to think that it would be more use inside than outside the WFTU.<sup>73</sup>

At Rome the executive had merely arranged a truce. Such agreement as had been reached was little more than a sign of unwillingness on the part of the centres to engage in bruising battles when the prospects for long-term survival of the WFTU were so much in doubt. The TUC still intended to make the achievement of a settlement between the WFTU and the ITSs the decisive test. Before the Rome meeting the State Department's understanding was that the TUC still anticipated a split over this at the WFTU conference in the autumn.<sup>74</sup> What happened in Rome had not changed expectations on this point. Herbert Tracy of the TUC's Publicity Department expressed the view that the Rome meeting had only been a respite for the WFTU. It would still be some months before one could say whether or not the organisation had a future.<sup>75</sup> There was no real basis for unity among the affiliates. For example, the executive had unanimously adopted a resolution in favour of setting up a central council for trade unions in the four zones of Germany. On returning to Britain Tewson and Deakin broached with Bevin the question of the WFTU being allowed to have a liaison body in Berlin to facilitate this policy. Bevin rejected the idea, the TUC leaders concurred and reported back to the WFTU that they were

<sup>69</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, April 7, 840.50 Recov. 4-748.

<sup>70</sup> TUC International Committee Minutes, June 16.

<sup>71</sup> Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement*, p. 137.

<sup>72</sup> TUC International Committee Minutes, July 27.

<sup>73</sup> Windmuller, *American Labor and the International Labor Movement*, p. 138.

<sup>74</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, April 7.

<sup>75</sup> Press release, Central Office of Information, May 20, FO 371/72855.

unable to approve the Federation's unanimous resolution on the German question.<sup>76</sup>

The one concrete achievement of the TUC during the summer of 1948 was to successfully resist American moves to strengthen the ERP trade-union liaison machinery in the hope of its becoming an international force in its own right. At the second ERP trade-union conference in July, the high-level follow-up to the March conference, the TUC blocked as it had blocked in March, AFL hopes of turning the ERP Trade Union Advisory Committee into a rival of the WFTU. A decision was made to establish a permanent secretariat in Paris for the TUAC. But at the next meeting of the steering body, the TUAC Emergency Committee, Tewson insisted that the secretariat confine itself to Marshall Plan matters. The TUC also complained about public statements originating from the AFL that the TUAC represented the beginning of a new International.<sup>77</sup> So lacking in commitment to a strong TUAC secretariat were the TUC that nearly six months later the newly established post of full-time secretary still remained unfilled while the candidates under consideration were all low-status union functionaries. All of this was particularly galling to the State Department as well as the AFL. In the month following the second ERP trade-union conference the TUC and the CIO appeared to continue their aimless drift. The US Embassy in London reported that the TUC was still vacillating. As evidence of this it was noted that they were now seeking a postponement of the WFTU conference scheduled for autumn. Hitherto this had been seen as the likely occasion of the final confrontation. In public TUC leaders were still defending the Federation. In view of this the American Ambassador asked for guidance from the State Department. He despaired of any initiative coming from the British, whose leaders simply seemed incapable of decisive action.<sup>78</sup>

The CIO appeared in much the same light. During the summer Clinton Golden, former assistant to the CIO's Philip Murray and recently appointed labour advisor to the Marshall Plan, had been in Europe. In the course of the ERP conference Sam Berger had discussed with him the need to induce the CIO to break with the WFTU. Golden had been in agreement and promised to discuss the issue with Murray on a personal basis when he returned to Washington. Two leaders of powerful CIO affiliates,

<sup>76</sup> TUC International Committee Minutes, July 27; US Embassy London, cable to State Department, August 10, 800.5043/8-1048.

<sup>77</sup> Memorandum of conversation Golden, Swayzee and Tobin, August 20, 840.5043/8-2048; Lovestone, report on behalf of the AFL delegation to ERP Trade Union Conference, July 29-30, Dubinsky Papers, Box 261, file 4 B.

<sup>78</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, August 13, 800.5043/8-1348.

Walter Reuther of the auto workers and Emile Rieve of the textile workers, were also in favour of withdrawing from the WFTU and were putting pressure on Murray. Once again the issue for the diplomats of the State Department and the Foreign Office was the delicate one of engineering close synchronisation between TUC and CIO.<sup>79</sup> As Hubert Gee wrote to the British Labour Attaché in Washington,

we have to be careful in trying to interpret one trade union body to another, nonetheless I feel there are times when we can help through our intimate contacts with some of the persons concerned. [. . .] from now on a good deal is going to depend on the ability of the anti-Communist trade union movements to understand one another and to work together [. . .].<sup>80</sup>

*Manoeuvring for the split*

The annual TUC Congress at Margate at the beginning of September proved to be the turning-point for the British union leadership. All along a major factor in their calculations was a lack of confidence in their ability to carry with them the mass of their own members in any move to abandon the WFTU. Uncertain of their strength, they had wanted to avoid any discussion of the WFTU at the Margate Congress. However, pro-Communist delegates demanded an explanation for the TUC's refusal to invite Saillant as a fraternal delegate and refused to withdraw a motion re-affirming support for the WFTU. In doing so they had miscalculated the mood of Congress. The leadership was forced to defend itself and in a powerful speech Deakin attacked the Russian manoeuvres inside the WFTU. His contribution drew a standing ovation and the vote on the motion represented an overwhelming endorsement of the TUC leadership, in effect giving its delegation to the WFTU an open mandate to act as they felt circumstances required.<sup>81</sup>

The WFTU executive board was due to meet in Paris a week after the Margate Congress. On the eve of the meeting Tewson told Berger in strict confidence that the TUC was now ready for a confrontation and possible break with the WFTU in Paris. However, the CIO, still divided internally on the question of continued affiliation, appeared unwilling to take the leap. A last-minute attempt was made to change the CIO position. Hector McNeil, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, intervened and in informal talks with Berger urged a renewed top-level attempt to bring the CIO into step with the TUC. As the executive board was in session, the US

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Hubert Gee to Archibald Gordon, November 23, FO 371/72856.

<sup>81</sup> Foreign Office circular letter British Embassies, "Report on TUC Conference at Margate", September 14, FO 371/72855.

Ambassador in London cabled the State Department for an indication of Murray's own views on the desirability of a break at Paris. In view of the TUC's readiness to withdraw if supported by the CIO he suggested that Golden again approach the CIO President.<sup>82</sup> However, the CIO delegation were already under firm instructions and had no mandate to withdraw. They were obliged to report back with recommendations for or against withdrawal.<sup>83</sup>

The executive-board meeting was preceded by long awaited discussions between the WFTU and the ITSs. After only one day it was clear that there was no chance of success. Terms that the ITSs might have been prepared to accept a few months earlier were now, in the changed climate of WFTU politics, unacceptable. On September 15, therefore, a joint conference of ITS representatives met and issued a statement that co-operation as envisaged by the WFTU was impractical.<sup>84</sup> The division between the Federation and the ITSs ran deeper than a disagreement over rights to levy dues etc., it was about basic philosophies of trade unionism. As one of the leading ITS spokesmen, M. C. Bolle, observed, "What we have witnessed for the past eighteen months, even more than before, is a conflict of ideas within the WFTU about the very aims and methods of trade unionism [ . . . ]. [It was] idle even to try to reconcile those different ideas within the WFTU."<sup>85</sup>

Following on from this the board meeting was a low-key affair, there being little left to discuss. The Russians displayed a willingness to temporise over the more contentious issues. In deference to the wishes of the TUC, no date was fixed for the next WFTU conference. And it was agreed to hold open the possibility of further negotiations with the ITSs, though there was really nothing more to negotiate over. The Russians were keen to keep the Federation in being for as long as possible, even if it did mean making a series of concessions. For the time being the Soviet press dropped its talk of the need to purge the WFTU of its reformist elements and spoke instead of preserving its unity. The fact that the Russians had not even criticised Deakin for his recent attack at the TUC on the organisation of which he was president was evidence of the extent to which they were prepared to go to smooth things over.<sup>86</sup> However, the latest stalemate over

<sup>82</sup> US Embassy London, cable to State Department, September 16, 800.5043/9-1648.

<sup>83</sup> State Department, cable to US Embassy London, September 18, 811.5043/9-1848.

<sup>84</sup> British Embassy Paris, cable to Foreign Office, September 17, FO 371/72855; TUC International Committee Minutes, October 21.

<sup>85</sup> Allen, *Trade Union Leadership*, p. 308.

<sup>86</sup> W. E. Davies (British Labour Attaché), report on Paris meeting of WFTU Executive Board, September, FO 371/72856.

the question of WFTU-ITS relations gave the TUC the opportunity it had been looking for to pull out of the Federation. On October 21 the TUC International Committee met to consider a statement drafted by Tewson calling for the WFTU to suspend its activities. Should the TUC suggestion be unacceptable to the Federation, then Tewson proposed that it should withdraw.<sup>87</sup> The approach was adopted in substance by the full General Council and on October 27 the TUC formally delivered its proposals to the WFTU. They were to be discussed at the next meeting of the executive board in January 1949. But long before that Kuznetsov for the Russians announced that the idea of suspending the Federation was out of the question. The long-awaited split now seemed destined to take place in January 1949.

The British union leaders were subjected to criticism for their action from both sides of the ideological divide. The Russians protested that the major justification for this step, the breakdown in the negotiations between the WFTU and the ITSSs, was hardly tenable since a formula had been agreed within the Federation which kept open the possibility of renewed discussions in the future.<sup>88</sup> The Scandinavian unions protested to the TUC over what they termed “unparliamentary” behaviour in precipitating a crisis without consulting other centres first. They were also critical of the TUC’s refusal to put its proposals to a full conference of the WFTU. In fact in Paris the TUC had secured an indefinite postponement of the next conference.<sup>89</sup> Their reasons for opposing an early conference, and especially one that would effectively consider a proposal to place the organisation in suspension, were of course essentially tactical ones. The TUC desperately wanted to avoid the WFTU breakup being directly connected with the Marshall Plan, yet in the heated atmosphere of a full-scale conference it would be impossible to avoid discussion of the divisive influence of the Plan. As Gee understood TUC thinking, it was that while the Communists could not expect a conference to keep the WFTU united, they would make sure that its disintegration was accompanied by a blaze of Communist fireworks. They would present the anti-Communists as splitters and would secure from this the maximum amount of ammunition for propaganda purposes.<sup>90</sup> In substance the Russian charge was accurate. The ITS issue was not the real problem. Rather it was a cover for the TUC’s main concern — the future of the Marshall Plan. For this to succeed it was now seen as necessary to engage in a head-on collision with the

<sup>87</sup> TUC International Committee Minutes, October 21.

<sup>88</sup> British Embassy Moscow, cable to Foreign Office, November 13, FO 371/72856.

<sup>89</sup> British Embassy Copenhagen to Foreign Office, November 11, FO 371/72856.

<sup>90</sup> Hubert Gee to British Embassy Copenhagen, November 16, FO 371/72856.

Communists in the labour movement. And that meant undermining the basis of their legitimacy – the united WFTU.

While content to push ahead towards a breakup of the WFTU, the TUC leadership were still very cautious about any precipitate steps to launch a rival organisation. For one thing they were anxious not to give the impression of conspiring to create a new International while still in membership of the WFTU. To the last they were fastidious on matters of appearance such as this. As in the past, their wariness was also occasioned by fear of being sucked into any scheme masterminded by the AFL. However, before moving towards a new International the TUC wanted prior assurances from both American centres that they would jointly participate in the organisation. Here then was an important task for Foreign Office diplomats. The TUC relied heavily on the British Embassy in Washington to assess the chances of such united action, for, as in the manoeuvring that preceded the ERP conference in March, they were anxious to avoid direct formal consultation with the AFL or CIO over their ultimatum.<sup>91</sup> The TUC hoped that the CIO would follow their lead out of the WFTU, but the CIO were not able to make a positive decision on this until the anti-Communist faction emerged victorious from their annual convention in November. Even then the matter was in some doubt as the Russians indicated privately that they would go to any length short of agreeing to suspension to keep the Federation alive. They were even prepared to sacrifice Saillant and Falin, the WFTU's Russian assistant general secretary. Had the TUC not maintained a firm position at this juncture, the Foreign Office believed that the Americans might have weakened in the face of the "peace offensive".<sup>92</sup>

The four months that separated the WFTU's September 1948 and January 1949 executive-board meetings witnessed feverish international activity behind the scenes as union centres politicked over the establishment of, and manoeuvred for position within, a replacement for the now doomed WFTU. Inevitably Brown and the AFL were prominently involved in developments. However, the TUC managed to navigate the period without succumbing to external pressures. Its single-minded objective was to secure a position whereby it could control events leading up to the formation of a new International and mould in its own image such organisation as emerged. The TUC would take with it into any new body the bulk of the Western European trade-union centres, over which it

<sup>91</sup> Davies, report on Paris meeting; Gee to Gordon, November 23, FO 371/72856.

<sup>92</sup> Gee, memorandum "The Break-up of the WFTU", undated (February 1949?), Ministry of Labour Papers 13/600, Public Record Office.

exercised moral leadership, as well as most of the union centres from Commonwealth countries. The TUC fully understood and accepted that it would have to work in close partnership with the AFL and the CIO, but it had to be sure that in such a relationship it did not become a junior partner. In successfully fending off AFL attempts to seize the initiative TUC leaders ensured that they retained the dominant voice in a small group of union leaders who met secretly in the course of the ERP TUAC meetings in December 1948 and January 1949 to map out future moves.<sup>93</sup> This unofficial group decided once and for all that the TUAC would not form the basis of the new International and that Walter Schevenels, the former general secretary of the old International Federation of Trade Unions and currently an assistant general secretary with the WFTU, should be appointed as secretary of the TUAC office in Paris. It was also decided that following the TUC, CIO and NVV walk-out from the January WFTU executive a liaison committee from the group would prepare a report on the split for general circulation among union centres. This would provide the agenda for discussions on a new International.

#### *Smoothing relations with the AFL*

In following this course the TUC had managed, in effect, to keep the AFL at arm's length at a critical phase. TUC leaders had avoided any direct dealings with the AFL in the period immediately before and after their departure from the WFTU. They had set in motion a consultation process leading to the formation of a new International without taking the AFL into their confidence. And by installing Schevenels, an ally, in a key position in the TUAC they had prevented the organisation falling under AFL dominance. So completely were the AFL outmanoeuvred that it looked as though relations with the TUC would be irreparably harmed. Once again Government foreign-service personnel on both sides of the Atlantic were forced to intervene to retrieve the situation. The formal appointment of Schevenels as secretary of the TUAC bureau, against the wishes of the AFL, provoked a major outcry in Washington. Many Americans still took it for granted that the TUAC was the nucleus of a new trade-union International, and it seemed to the AFL that the TUC and the CIO were attempting to foist Schevenels into a position of leadership in the

<sup>93</sup> The group consisted of Tewson (TUC), Evert Kupers (NVV, Holland), Leon Jouhaux (CGT-FO, France) and Walter Schevenels (Assistant General Secretary WFTU). For details of these secret meetings see correspondence between Jay Krane (a CIO employee attached to the WFTU) and Elmer Cope, October-December 1948, Krane Papers, Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit.



new organisation. Having recently worked for the WFTU, Schevenels was unacceptable to the AFL and they now threatened to withdraw from the TUAC.<sup>94</sup>

Tewson consulted Gee at the Foreign Office on how to respond to the AFL position. The Foreign Office cabled the British Embassy in Washington to explain the situation with regard to Schevenels. He was only being appointed secretary of the Paris liaison office of the TUAC; Tewson remained the secretary of the TUAC proper.<sup>95</sup> And of course the decision had already been taken not to base the new International on the TUAC anyway. In a memorandum by Gee the delicate problem of AFL-CIO relations and the diplomatic task facing the Foreign Office was assessed. The starting-point appeared to be inter-organisational rivalry between AFL and CIO, with the AFL seeking a position of pre-eminence over the CIO in any new body.

The most important immediate question is to find the right way of persuading the AFL not to allow domestic prestige considerations to undermine their own policy and efforts in the international field.

Direct discussions between the TUC and AFL are not likely now to take place before the beginning of March. We have to avoid the appearance of governmental intervention, but there is a lot at stake and it may be necessary, at the right moment and at the right level, to get European point of view over to the State Department and Department of Labour so that it can come to the AFL through that channel. But it will be necessary for someone in the American Administration who carries real weight with the AFL to work on it.<sup>96</sup>

Within the Foreign Office Bevin's attention had been drawn to this problem with the proposal that it might be worth suggesting that "either the US Secretary of State or even the President himself should take steps to instill a little sense into the AFL in a matter which is of importance not to the United States alone, but to the whole world."<sup>97</sup> Bevin's reaction was that there was little that could be done in Britain "to knock some sense into the AFL", but indicated a willingness to discuss the matter with the US Ambassador.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> The AFL's precise complaint against Schevenels was that, as WFTU assistant general secretary, he had recently co-ordinated an international fund-raising campaign to support striking French Communist miners. The AFL had bitterly opposed the strike. *New York Times*, January 25, 1949; statement by AFL International Labour Relations Committee, February 2, TUC file 919.1.

<sup>95</sup> Gee to McNeil, February 1, Ministry of Labour Papers 13/600.

<sup>96</sup> Gee, "The Break-up of the WFTU".

<sup>97</sup> Memorandum (unsigned) to Secretary of State, January 26, Ministry of Labour Papers 13/600.

<sup>98</sup> Gee, minute, February 9, *ibid.*

The relations between the AFL and the TUC-CIO were only successfully repaired in March-April 1949 when a high-level TUC delegation visited the USA for meetings of the Anglo-American Productivity Council on which AFL and CIO leaders were represented. The TUC leaders saw representatives of the two organisations separately. Reassurances were given about the basis for constructing a non-Communist labour International. The path was now open for closer co-operation between the three leading centres. Before the end of April the two American organisations had decided that they would participate in the new body on a roughly equal footing, the agreement having been made possible by the CIO commitment to purge its own Communists.<sup>99</sup>

Meanwhile the British Government continued to use its influence to widen the split in the WFTU. In February Gee noted that although only the TUC, the CIO and the NVV had left the WFTU to date, the Belgians, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Canadians, South Africans and New Zealanders would almost certainly follow shortly. There were problems, though, with the Australian unions, whose loyalties were divided, and the Indian TUC, which appeared likely to remain in the WFTU. On this Gee wrote:

The position in the Colonies is important since we can expect the new WFTU to concentrate in this field. There are some eight or nine movements at present affiliated [to the WFTU], in some of which Communist influence is strong. The Colonial Office have been urged to assist in bringing the facts home to the unions concerned [ . . .].<sup>100</sup>

By the summer of 1949 a large number of union centres had disaffiliated from the WFTU. Two of the most difficult hurdles preventing progress towards a new International had now been overcome — a mass defection from the WFTU had taken place and a *modus vivendi* had been worked out between the TUC, the CIO and the AFL. In June concrete preparations began in Geneva for a series of international meetings that would lead directly to the founding of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in December 1949. There were many issues to be resolved, and the bargaining and manoeuvring for position that went on over the next six months was intense. But the Rubicon had been crossed and the association of most Western trade unions with the WFTU was now just part of history.

<sup>99</sup> TUC International Committee Minutes, April 26; note of private and confidential meeting between AFL and CIO, April 28, TUC file 919.1.

<sup>100</sup> Gee, "The Break-up of the WFTU".

*The Foreign Office's role in perspective*

The Foreign Office could stand back and take stock of the new situation. Christopher Mayhew, Bevin's Parliamentary Secretary, drafted a minute which was very critical of the TUC's record as a member of the WFTU. It was answered by a long analysis prepared to Hubert Gee, which attempted to assess the recent developments and future needs with sympathy for the TUC position. As such it reveals the proprietorial interest that the Foreign Office had in the TUC's international affairs. Gee noted that one fact had dominated the TUC's post-war international policy – its membership of the WFTU. As long as it was affiliated to the Federation, trying to keep it together but steadily losing control, it was bound to be an embarrassment to the British Government. The TUC was inevitably compromised: "time after time this meant that the TUC was inhibited from taking action of the kind we wished it to take in support of anti-Communist movements. [. . .] Such inhibitions were deplorable from our point of view".

There were two necessary developments before the Foreign Office could hope to see TUC policy coming more into line with its own: disaffiliation from the WFTU and formation of a new international organisation through which encouragement and support could be given in various quarters against Communist domination overseas. Gee understood the pressure that kept the TUC in the WFTU for so long, especially the strong pro-Russian sentiment among the trade-union rank and file in the early post-war years. But credit had to be given to the TUC leadership for its decisive action following the 1948 TUC Congress. If they had then tried to line up all possible international supporters in advance rather than take a lone initiative as they did, he imagined that they would not have withdrawn in 1949 and possibly not in 1950. "It was in our interest that the TUC should give a lead in getting out and not spend another year discussing tactics with its friends, so on this issue we should congratulate ourselves that the TUC stood firm and stiffened up the CIO to do likewise." On the prospects for the new International Gee was optimistic.

a start has been made and we have helped, and must continue to help, though we cannot, of course, take any direct part in what must be a genuine trade union organisation not subject to government control.

[. . .] while critical of the TUC on many points, I do not take anything like so extreme a view as Mr. Mayhew. The TUC have, after all, taken the initiative in bringing the European trade unions behind ERP. There is no doubt that the Russians regard their secession as a major reverse for Russian policy [. . .].

All the same I entirely agree that there are fields in which we should encourage the TUC to be more active and more alive to their international

responsibilities. In particular there is the question of better information to counter Communist propaganda. It is doubtful whether the TUC have ever really studied what the situation now requires, in terms of money, staff or concentrated effort.

There was also the question of the TUC increasing and widening their contacts with anti-Communist labour groups in various countries.

If they would put half as much effort into assisting some of the other movements as they have expended (quite rightly) on Germany, it would yield them and us high dividends. [ . . . ]

Expansion means more money and more men, and more organisation than the TUC have so far been prepared to put into it. [ . . . ]

We are not going to be able to help at all unless we understand the TUC's own difficulties. But I do feel that the time is ripe for a high-level discussion with the TUC, at which we could follow up the tentative suggestions already made as regards publicity and information and the strengthening of contact with some of the weaker brethren abroad.<sup>101</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The foregoing enables us to make some general observations about the background to the split in the WFTU, in particular on the relationship between the union centres and their Governments and between the national union centres themselves. Finally a comment about "responsibility" for the breakup will be ventured.

It is unrealistic to think of trade unions operating in the international sphere as autonomous bodies. In this area trade unions are not independent of Government. On the other hand it is far too crude to present Western union centres in all circumstances as mere tools of their national Governments. The nature of the relationship differs from case to case. Among Western union centres the AFL was the most active in the international field and the most ideologically committed, having a clear concept of its role in fighting world Communism. In fact the AFL's anti-Communist, anti-Soviet line predated the US Administration's own commitment to a strong Cold War stance. In the international labour field the AFL made the running, supported in the early post-war years by individual State Department officials in the Office of European Affairs who had no faith in the then official commitment to co-operative relations with the Communist world. In 1946-47 the Administration came to embrace a policy position similar to that of the AFL, and there developed an extremely close relationship between the two with US diplomatic

<sup>101</sup> Gee, minute, April 1, Ministry of Labour Papers 13/600.

machinery placed at the service of the AFL and the AFL having decisive influence on Government international-labour policy.

The CIO's relationship with Government was different. After Hillman's death it was less forceful in international affairs, and a growing rift between pro- and anti-Communists among its own members prevented it from acting positively as relations within the WFTU deteriorated. The problem for the State Department was not that the CIO was seen to be a weak actor on the international stage, rather the negative fact that its continued membership of the WFTU constituted a barrier to the achievement of the policy objectives being pursued by the AFL and the State Department. In these circumstances the aim of the State Department was to encourage a bipartisan approach to international issues on the part of the AFL and the CIO or, more precisely, to engineer a shift in the CIO's thinking to enable it to identify with the position already adopted by the AFL. To this end CIO delegations were briefed on the significance of particular international developments. Periodically the CIO leaders were lectured by State Department officials on the nature of international Communism and the real aims of the Soviet Union. It was not necessary to convert the CIO wholesale to the crusading anti-Communist line of the AFL, merely to weaken its commitment to the WFTU and to secure its withdrawal. The prolonged period of wavering prior to the CIO's departure from the Federation reflected both the unresolved struggle for dominance between left and right in the Congress and also the CIO's reluctance to forfeit the international status that came with being *the* American affiliate of the WFTU. The State Department showed little sympathy for this agonising, since it was holding up the vital work of the more important labour organisation, the AFL. Consequently the US Administration became increasingly impatient with the CIO in the course of 1948.

From an early stage the British Foreign Office carefully fostered a relationship with the TUC under which the latter would be susceptible to Government influence. The creation of the Labour Advisory function within the Foreign Office and later the development of the IRD anti-Communist propaganda work, which relied heavily on labour-movement outlets, bound the unions closely to the Government. Less direct conditioning was also taking place. The Foreign Office was actively engaged in combatting the Third Force neutralist foreign-policy option promoted by the labour left. The successful defeat of this in 1948 left the labour movement generally with little alternative but to accept the assumptions of Government foreign policy.

However, the circumstances in which these steps were taken were such that the Government were pushing at an open door: the TUC was not

inclined to resist Government overtures. The TUC trusted the Labour Government – its Government – and especially Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin – its man in the Government. In addition the lessons of the early phase of the Cold War, the repression of social-democratic organisations and trade unions in Russian-controlled countries, destroyed any illusions TUC leaders might have had about the nature of the Russian regime. Increasingly they were disposed to accept Foreign Office guidance in interpreting international developments. Nevertheless the TUC showed considerable determination to conduct its affairs vis-a-vis the WFTU according to its own lights and at its own pace. Here the Foreign Office was prepared to stand back and play a supporting role, demonstrating a greater sensitivity to the domestic concerns of the labour movement than that shown by the State Department in dealing with the CIO. The Foreign Office was evidently sufficiently confident of the general direction in which TUC policy was moving for it to leave detailed matters to the union leaders. In other words, within the limits permitted by this discrete conditioning by the Foreign Office the trade unions were autonomous on questions of tactics.

The TUC were not merely struggling against Communism, though this was their prime enemy. Between December 1947 and January 1949 they devoted considerable energy to frustrating the objectives of the AFL. It was not that they were trying to steer a middle course between the two – there was basic agreement between the TUC and the AFL on fundamentals –, it was the “style” of the AFL that the TUC objected to. There was clear rivalry between the organisations for leadership of the international movement, and much of the manoeuvring that took place in these months was a manifestation of this. The final twelve months of the WFTU’s unified existence should be seen as a prolonged tactical exercise in preparing for a final breakup, a split to be engineered on the best possible terms for the national labour movement concerned, with the blame clearly to be laid at the opponent’s feet.

For the AFL, the sooner the split could be forced the more likely they were to appear as natural leaders in any successor organisation. The TUC had to frustrate as best they could AFL attempts to force the pace in rallying an anti-Soviet coalition of labour centres and avoid being bounced into such a coalition as a reluctant junior partner. They had to keep their purely trade-union disagreements with the Russians to the fore while playing down the more significant political disagreement over Marshall Aid. They had to bide their time until a preponderant anti-Communist mentality replaced the previous pro-Soviet sentiment of the British union membership. Finally the TUC had to select the time and issue for a split so

as to be able to carry with it the largest number of WFTU affiliates. The CIO's main preoccupation was a more narrowly focussed rivalry with the AFL for organisational dominance in the United States. In the course of this struggle prominent membership of the WFTU had proved to be an advantage. The longer a split in the WFTU could be delayed the longer that advantage would obtain. Ultimately a more important factor proved to be the balance of power between pro- and anti-Communists in the CIO, and when the latter wrested overall control even the advantage over the AFL accruing from WFTU affiliation proved expendable. For the Russians, the longer the WFTU remained intact, the greater their potential for influencing foreign labour movements under the cover of a respectable international body. What was required of them, therefore, was a preparedness to make tactical concessions on basic trade-union matters — the administration of the WFTU, relations with the ITSs — and to ensure that any split occurred over “politics” with the odium attached to those seen to be precipitating the split.

Finally, the question of “responsibility” for the split requires comment. It is indisputable that the initiative for this came primarily from the AFL and the TUC, aided and abetted by their respective Governments. They clearly hoped to benefit from the breakup by being in a position to establish a new International more amenable to their own and their Government's foreign-policy interests. On the other hand, the breakup of the WFTU could only deprive the Russians of a major channel of influence in many parts of the world. But to treat the matter at this level and to imply a lack of culpability on the part of the Russians and their Communist supporters in various national labour movements is to ignore the deeper causes.<sup>102</sup> Early post-war Soviet suppression of non-Communist labour and trade-union movements in Eastern Europe had shocked Western trade-union leaders. As the climate of Cold War intensified in 1946-47 the cynical manipulation of national Communist parties and their cadres in the trade-union movement in Soviet interests was plain for all to see. Internal developments in the WFTU simply reinforced these perceptions. The Communist stranglehold of the Federation's administrative machinery and its use for partisan ends was a reminder to union leaders, if such were needed, of the deceit that had been a core element in Leninist trade-union practice since 1919. The merits of the dispute over the relationship between the WFTU and the ITSs were less clear-cut, but the fears of the ITS leaders that their organisations would be emasculated in a Communist-dominated WFTU were

<sup>102</sup> Such is the import of the argument in Weiler, “The United States, International Labor and the Cold War”, loc. cit.

sincerely held. At bottom it is hard to disagree with Bolle's point that the real conflict within the WFTU was about basic aims and methods of trade unionism.<sup>103</sup>

Between the Leninist model of trade unionism as adapted to Stalinist totalitarianism and the model of unionism practised under capitalism there was little common ground. What had brought the two together in 1945 was a shared experience of acting as progress chasers for increased output in the war effort. Now that phase had passed, they had little in common. It is hard to see how a headlong clash between these two rival conceptions of trade unionism could have been avoided for any length of time, save for the WFTU opting for an impotent role in which it steered clear of any contentious activity or debate. In that sense the breakup of the WFTU is perhaps best seen not as something for which one or another side was responsible, but rather as an inevitable outcome.

<sup>103</sup> See above, p. 324.