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Christians in Global Labour: International Labour Organization and Christian milieux (1919–1969)

This contribution will present a research toward a thesis, which I began last year. It deals with the relationship between the International Labor Organization – which is one of the oldest international organizations, the only one which has survived League of Nations collapse – and Christian milieux i.e. all Christian organizations (parties, unions, NGOs...). The aim is to see:

- how the ILO behaved with these organizations, and
- what attitude Christians adopted toward the ILO. This is one way of viewing how Christians behaved at international level.

The period for this study starts with the creation of the ILO in 1919 and ends with the visit of the Pope in 1969.

Why did I choose the ILO? For the following reasons:

- It is the oldest International Organization with a non-technical purpose (there are also the International Telecommunication Union and the Universal Postal Union which were created in the 19th century – but their activities are mainly technical). So we can have a broad view, and question the period before and after the Second World War.
- It has objectives closely linked to the Church's Social Doctrine: the trade unions, relationships between employers and employees, tripartism (governments, workers and employers are represented), all of these objectives of the International Labour Organization are also linked to Church's Social Doctrine.
- Because of a characteristic that makes the ILO particular in the landscape of international organizations: it is the only organization which has a priest in its Office: the ILO has had a Jesuit Priest in its Office since 1926. This doesn't exist in any other international organization: except in the case of Father Emmanuel de Breuver, who was the Head of the Energy and Transport Section at the UN in the 1950s.

This latter issue is indeed part of the first problem this research will aim to explain: how and why the ILO has tried, since the beginning of the 1920s, to develop a close relationship with the Christian Churches and Catholic organizations. The main effort was made by the first Director-General, Albert Thomas. And it should be a bit odd, as Albert Thomas was a French socialist, and as his election was partly due to an agreement with the International Federation of Trade Unions (socialist).

On the other hand, the research also aims at explaining how Christian churches and organizations have reacted to this relationship with the ILO as an international organization, with a tripartite system, and as a forum in which they met political ideologies such as liberalism, fascism and communism.

The archives for this research are various: most of them are in Geneva. First, and obviously, I am searching in the archives of the International Labour Office which are very well preserved in Geneva. Also, there are the archives of the World Council of Churches. Here in Rome, there are the Vatican Secret Archives, and the archives of the *Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari*. There are also the archives of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions in Leuven, as well as various personal papers (August Cool, Mgr Cardijn...). I should also mention the archives of the French Confederation of Christian Trade Unions.

The historiography treated includes several issues:

- First, I need to say that it is a quite new subject. There are only two types of work on it: first, the books or articles, which have been written by the Jesuit officials of the International Labour Office, and a study by Maurice Barbier in 1969, however, without the use of primary sources.
- Then, several recent research projects have to be taken into account:
 - on Christian trade unions, with for example the work of Patrick Pasture
 - on the ILO, since a Century Project has been set up by the Organization: important research has been undertaken and several meetings have been held. A network of researchers on international organizations also exists, under the direction of Professors Sandrine Kott, Daniel Palmieri and Davide Rodogno.
- And of course, I can benefit from the work which has been undertaken on Christian Democracy and on the relationship between the Holy See and the international organizations. There are also several books or articles on relationship between the Catholic milieu and some international organizations, such as the work of Joseph Rossi for the National Catholic Welfare Conference and the UN.
- However, I should underline the scarcity of the work on the relationship between the World Council of Churches – and the bodies that preceded it – and international affairs. This is especially true for the period after 1945.

After one year of researching, using the archives of the International Labour Organization in Geneva, a part of the Vatican archives, the CFDT archives in Paris and a part of the archives of the International Confederation of Christian Trade Union in Leuven, I can give some results of this research.

First of all, one may be conscious that there have been four or five ways in which Christian actors could participate in ILO's activities:

- First, as governmental delegates: this was the case for the members of Catholics parties, or Christian Democratic parties.
- Second, as employers' associations: there were only a few catholic employers' associations, very often too weak.

- Third, they also may participate as workers organizations: and that has been the main way for Christian actors since 1919 and furthermore since 1921 with the birth of the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions.
- Fourth, in the Interwar period and even more since 1945, the ILO has been in relationship with some Christian NGOs, organizations and associations.
- Fifth, especially since 1926, the Office has been trying to get in touch with various catholic personalities – bishops, catholic universities etc.

Since the mid-XIXth century, Christian churches and organizations had been interested in the idea of an international body for the creation of international labour law. This was really important because it would serve both the Christians and Albert Thomas in order to justify their collaboration. For example, we can recall the propositions of the protestant Daniel Le Grand, or the attempts made by the Swiss Catholic Gaspard Decurtins. We should also mention the book written by Mgr Ketteler, bishop of Mainz.

Rerum Novarum was also a cornerstone, at least because it permitted separate trade unions and gave a real impetus to the development of the Christian social doctrine.

Finally, we can also quote the fact that the Holy See was a member of the International Association for Labour Legislation (IALL) founded in 1900 in Paris.

But the fact is that when the ILO was created in 1919, the Christian groups were not really in a good position: in the tripartite system which was built up, there were no catholic employers, very few Christian trade unionists and only few Christian governmental delegates. Furthermore, the constitutional formula which was chosen gave them no chance to be really present. I will come back to this point.

However, by 1921 Albert Thomas with the help of Mgr Nolens, a priest from Netherlands who was a governmental delegate at the International Labour Conference from 1919 to 1932, decided to get in touch with the Holy See, in order to examine the way in which the Holy See may collaborate with the ILO.

This gave an impetus for a series of meetings between the Cardinal Gasparri, or Mgr Borgongini-Duca, and Albert Thomas, in order to consider the various ways which could be used. Without giving too many details, we can note that these contacts have been made either by Albert Thomas himself, or by Paul Devinat, a French official who represented the ILO to the *Semaines Sociales de France*. Joseph Danel and Eugène Duthoit, from this latter organization, and Gaston Tessier, from the French Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, played a part in the research for a solution.

As a result, in 1926, a French Jesuit from the Action Populaire, a French Center of Jesuits dealing with the social question, Father Andre Arnou, was appointed as a counselor by Thomas. He had to develop the relationship with the Catholic milieu. There are very few archives connected to his work: but we can say that he tried to organize the catholic movements around the ILO, and developed some contacts, for example with Mgr Beaupin and the *Union Catholique d'Etudes Internationales*.

Similar steps were taken toward the Protestant movement: there was a representative of the Office at the Conference of Stockholm in 1925, and a Swiss official; Georges Thelin, who was at this time responsible for the Offices' publications, was given in 1927 the task of developing relationships with the Life and Work movement. He became very involved in the movement.

The other great question was the one of Christian Trade Unions. As I said, Christian Trade Unions weren't well represented at the 1919 Conference. At this time, they weren't well organized. The fact was also that the constitution of the ILO wasn't favorable: the workers delegate had to be chosen between the members of the most representative workers organization. And the Christian Trade Unions were never the most representative organization. Christian Trade Unionists had therefore only a few technical adviser seats. Moreover, there was a deep conflict with the International Federation of Trade Unions (socialist). In 1921, the Netherlands decided to appoint P.J.S. Serrarens, the general-secretary of the International Confederation of Christian Unions as delegate. The IFTU made a claim. The International Court of Justice finally accepted Serrarens appointment. But the conflict didn't end and the great problem for the Christian Trade Unions remained to be represented at the Conference and even more in the Governing Body. However, since 1921, there was an official specially for Christian Trade Unions: Hermann Henseler, a former German trade unionist.

These first contacts were mainly, in Albert Thomas' mind, a way to gain a wide support for the ILO. Indeed, the ILO was not very popular and by the end of the 1920s, some employers were trying to limit its role. As he said to the Christian Trade Unions in 1928 in Munich, the ILO needed to have the support from people representing various faiths and ideologies : because it was the better way to have a wider support.

Christian Trade Unions saw the ILO as a forum for their ideas, a way to put them forward. They also played a part in rejecting fascist delegates, as well as communist delegates. For example, Serrarens and the other delegates and advisors belonging to the IFCTU contested the Italian delegation from 1923. They did the same with the German delegation in 1933, and with the USSR delegation from 1934 to 1939. They also promoted some ideas which were specifically linked to their own program: for example on the status of women at work, on the weekly rest on Sundays, against forced labour in the colonies...

The Second World War was partly a gap in this history. Indeed, the Christian Trade Unions had to stop their activity, since they were in occupied territories. On the other hand, the ILO had to move from Geneva to Montreal, and to diminish its actions. Moreover, it was very difficult to communicate between America and Europe.

However, in preparing the moving of ILO to America, the Director-General John Winant asked Father Albert Le Roy, who was at this time the Jesuit Priest acting as a counselor of the Director-General, to come to Washington and then Montreal with the few ILO officials who were retained. During the war, Albert Le Roy kept then working for the ILO. His work consisted in developing contacts with the American Catholic bishops' conference. . And then he went in mission in the United States, from Washington to Kansas City, Saint Louis and Seattle in 1942, he participated in various meetings including those of the Catholic Association for International Peace. On the other hand, there was no contact between the Holy See and the ILO between 1939 and 1944.

After the Second World War, Albert Le Roy resumed his work in Geneva and the former relationships with the Holy See, the IFCTU and the Catholic NGOs.

With the Vatican, the first letters were exchanged in 1944. They mainly spoke about the ILO's activities during the war. In the years following, the main issue in the relationship between the Holy See and ILO was the migration question. Catholic organizations were well-involved in the question of migration in the post-war period. The ILO, on the other hand, was searching to extend its field of action: and migration was a field in which the Office tried to show its expertise. There were then some contacts with the War Relief Service of the NCWC for example. But at the Naples Conference in

1951, the American delegation refused ILO's blueprint (and decided to create a new organization, the PICCME (Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movements of Migrants from Europe)).

The Confederation of Christian Trade Unions also resumed its relationship with the ILO. A French Christian trade unionist, Jean Brodier, was appointed to Workers Relation Division of the ILO in 1947. His duties were to maintain the relationship with the Christian Trade Unions. In the Postwar Period, the situation was a bit different for the Christian trade unions: the relationship with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions was better than it had been in the interwar period with the International Federation of Trade Unions. They even could unite against the communist World Federation of Trade Unions. The Christian trade unions had then more and more delegates at the International Labour Conference. However, except in rare cases, they failed in being elected as members of the Governing Body. In 1951, as Brodier decided to follow his own career in the Office, another Christian trade unionist was appointed: Theo Grinevald. He was a real go-between and gave his former colleagues a lot of information. The Christian Trade Unions played a great part in defending the freedom of association in the ILO bodies. Several claims were introduced, for example against Spain.

But there were two issues that transformed the relationship between the Christian milieux and the ILO:

- First, the Cold War. Until 1954, the ILO was quite apart from the great quarrel between the United States and the USSR. The latter wasn't a member of the ILO since it had left it in 1939, as it had been expelled from the League of Nations. But there was some rumor about the fact that a great part of the ILO officials would have been communists – especially from a part of the American catholic actors. The question became more acute in 1954, with the re-entry of the USSR and several communist countries. Director-General Morse tried to counter this rumor by sending Father Le Roy and then Father Joblin on a mission to America. Morse also met the Pope five times and even if one can't draw any general conclusion, we should note that one of these meetings took place in 1954 and that the ILO conducted widespread publicity around it
- Second, the development of technical assistance as a main activity of the ILO and other UN bodies. Indeed, after the Second World War, the ILO increased its field action, in the framework of the Declaration of Philadelphia and the United Nations objectives. Technical action was another ground for collaboration between the Churches and the ILO. Indeed, the Churches, with their missionaries, were already established in the countries which were given the technical assistance. Moreover, the question of development, of the role of the Church in the modern world, became more and more important, at least in the Catholic Church. In several cases, the Churches then helped the agents of the technical assistance to work with the rural communities. As a main example of it, we should mention the actions of the Andean Program: the missionaries and even several Bishops of Peru or Ecuador helped the ILO officials in their actions towards the rural communities. Technical assistance also interested many Christian NGOs, among others the International Catholic Organizations. On another side, the Jesuit of the ILO - mainly Father Joblin - was in touch with those who were thinking about a new way of acting for the Church.

By the way, the fact is the relationship with the Holy See became deeper under David Morse directorship. Morse went to Rome at least five times to see the Pope: the first time in 1950, then in

1954 (Morse and the Governing Body met the Pope in Castelgandolfo), in 1958, in 1962 and 1967. The ILO is mentioned by name in the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961). Moreover, when Mgr Montini was elected as Paul VI in 1963, it was good news for the ILO: indeed, Mgr Montini was the Roman prelate who was the best informed about the Organization: his own brother, Lodovico, had been appointed for a short-term contract by Albert Thomas in 1923; and since the 1930s, Albert Le Roy had gotten in touch with him. In 1967, Paul VI decided to extend the mandate of Father Henri de Riedmatten, Permanent Observer of the Holy to the United Nations in Geneva to all the specialized agencies based in Geneva – this was the sign of the establishment of official relationships between the Holy See and the ILO. A stronger sign was the visit of Paul VI in Geneva in June 1969 for ILO's fiftieth anniversary: the Pope made a very important speech and met each group of the Conference, and the Director. It was a cornerstone for a renewed relationship.

To conclude, I shall point out several limitations:

- The scarcity of the archives for the interwar period
- Despite the archives present in Geneva at ILO headquarters being very well preserved, there is still a lack concerning all the questions that were not included in the official files. So there is a need for an examination of personal papers.
- Finally, the fact that even if the ILO is an international body, national realities remained very present.

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