

# **The Foundation of International Labour Organization A Condensed Background for its Backdrop**

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## **Abstract**

The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottomans compelled Europeans to open new routes for their high profited trade with the East which had been fundamentally damaged. Their sea voyages reached them to unknown spaces for profit-making on both east and west side of the Atlantic. The Mercantilism was momentum and at the same time a theorizing device for their endeavours. Slaves, as commercial commodities and the labour-force, were of the greatest profit and played an undeniable role for the industrialization, the genesis of the Industrial Revolution, and the misery of workers as one of its by-products. In 1919 International Labour Organization was founded as an evolutionary response to the dreadful conditions of workers, and for the strengthening of weakened bases of the liberal economic system. The Conditions and weakness had roots in European expansions and developments. The foundation was also a reactionary measure against the expansion of social uprisings all over the Europe and America, which might

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be led to the downfall of liberal governments in industrialized countries by adopting the Russian Revolution model.

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### **Introduction**

The main concern of “the high contracting parties” to the Versailles Peace Treaty in 1919, the same as “the peoples of the United Nations” in 1945, was to maintain international peace and security. These “peoples” have mandated only one organization (the United Nations) to pursue international peace and security in the wake of World War II. But those “parties” arranged the international scene with two organizations (the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO)) for their concern. Though the “parties” had agreed to the Covenant of the League “In order to... achieve international peace and security”, the organization was instructed to only pursue the achievement of peace, and the cause of security implicitly dedicated to the ILO, by its mandate to secure “social justice”, since “conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation” that endangers “the peace and harmony of the world .”

A memorandum by David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister of Britain, dated March 25, 1919, had portrayed a backdrop for the arranged scene. According to him :

The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution. There is a deep sense [...] of anger and revolt, amongst the workmen against pre-war conditions. The whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the mass of the population from one end of Europe to the other. In some countries, like Germany and Russia, the unrest takes the form of open revolution; in others, like France, Great Britain and Italy, it takes the shape of strike and of general disinclination to settle down to work, symptoms which are just as much concerned with

desire for political and social change as with wage demands. [...] We shall never make a lasting peace by attempting to restore the conditions of 1914. But there is a danger that we may throw the masses of the population throughout Europe into the arms of the extremists whose only idea for regenerating mankind is to destroy utterly the whole existing fabric of society. (Emphases are added)

This portrait did not reflect the aspiration of every human being to live in a world with such economic and social progress that ensures the realization of one's own material and non-material well-being in peace .

To explain this phenomenon, one should trace its origins in European expansion and development that took place in two phases of commercial relations based first on Mercantilism, and then on industrialization and the Industrial Revolution. For the purpose of the present work, the focal point of discussion will be the reflection of such expansion on the status and conditions of labour-force .

So in the first step, I deal with Mercantilism and slavery in some details, since they have had an undeniable contribution to the shaping of industrialization and the Industrial Revolution. The next step is dedicated to taking into account the results of European Developments, in the light of industrialization and the Industrial Revolution, for labourers' conditions, which through centuries shaped an environment that made the creation of ILO a necessity. In the last step, I will provide some noticeable point about the ILO founding environment and the organisation functions .

### **I. The Mercantilist-Expansionist Development of Europe**

From early in 15th century, even before the conquest of Constantinople (thereafter Istanbul) in 1453 by the Ottomans, enterprising princes and merchants of Europe ventured to find a way by the sea to trade with India and China, as the old routes were under Moslems control and their middlemen had marked up tenfold commercial wares. However, the conquest of Constantinople closed the land route for an important trade in

commodities from Central Asia, India and the Far East to Europe, as the only way of the time for making significant profits. It also caused Greek scholars to flee to the West and give a new impetus to learning and science that furnished the occasion for developments of scientific astronomy and improvements in designing ships for less risky sea voyages. For Europeans, these developments eased for Europeans taking a decision to outflank the Turks and expanding their trade with Orient through the sea by safer sailing ships, guns, treachery, and deceit. It was the beginning of a mercantilist development based on its own labour-force .

#### **A.Mercantilism and Labour-force**

The expansion of Europe began by countries bordering the Atlantic. Portuguese and Spanish were the forerunners followed by Dutch, French, and English, among the others. It was in close connection with Mercantilism, based on four beliefs which were prevailed from the 16th until the late 18th centuries. First, the acquisition of wealth enhances State power. Second, the wealth consists of precious metals, gold and silver, that are limited, and consequently, one State's gain is another State's loss. Third, the main task of foreign economic policy is to secure an advantageous trade by encouraged exports and discouraged imports, or plunder, depend on the effectiveness of each method. Fourth, it is necessary that a powerful sovereign regulates the economic life of the State. Upon these beliefs, from the 16th century onwards, almost every European state enacted national laws to ensure that the economies and labour-forces of the territories under their jurisdiction function in ways that complement, and minimize competition with, the economies and the labour-forces of the metropolis. Besides, mercantilists moved out normative and ethical approach from economics and replaced them with facts, figures, and calculations. This approach had its implications for slaves as labour-force since at this phase they were the main source of labour-force .

### **B. Slavery and European Expansion**

From the 16th century, slavery was an activating element of Europe expansion. It, together with capitalism, provided the multifaceted linkages that promoted the rise of the expansion. Indeed slavery had a catalytic function for capitalism. Slaves had two functions. First, as commodities, they could be moved from market to market and sold or exchanged, so producing wealth for European merchants. Second, as additional labour-force and, in some cases, as productive citizens, slaves were incorporated into society. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, slaves and their outputs, the inputs to slave societies, and the goods and services purchased with the earnings on slave products were what mainly moved in the Atlantic and changed it into a trading area, uniting North and South America, Europe, and Africa by the movement of men and women, goods, and capital. The transferred men and women moved to the newly known territories were considerably labour-forces of different types.

### **C. Types of Labour-forces**

From the 16th century, different types of labour-forces had had their own contribution to the economic activities of Europeans, mostly in the Americas. They may be categorized into different groups. One was composed of slaves that may be considered as a kind of coerced labour-force as well. They were African, predominantly, and indigenous people in the second place. They are brought to attention with different names: indigenous workers, Indian workers, indigenous labourers, indigenous slaves, Indian Slaves, African Slaves, black slaves, native American labour force, Indian slave labour force, ethnic and religious groups, Indian labourer, among others. There are also other categories of the slave group based on their quality like skilled workers, field hands, skilled slaves, unskilled slaves, specialists, artisans, and even (illegally)

coerced Amerindians, as well as the quantitative category of gang slavery, and gang labour .

The second group consisted of free labourers with different kinds. They are called as free natives, immigrant-free labourers, white labourers, free labourer, free population, skilled workers, field hands, white workers, free Indians, free workers, free white, free European labour, free Indian labour, free blacks, and so on. The last one is also pointed to as “free people of color” that seems they were “freed slaves .”

In addition to those two main groups, labour-forces of other kinds could be found such as imported workers, indentured servants or unfree workers, workers with a rental contract or hired labour-force, and salaried employees or wage labour of native workers. At times, some of the labour-forces with different qualities were used together, for example, free and slave labour, indigenous workers, indentured Europeans, freed slaves, and free persons. It is obvious that in the latter case they were used by different compositions. The inhumane conditions of slaves, even brutal behaviour with them, were common among those who would profit from these people as commodities and labour-force, the same as other kinds of such forces. Thereupon, explaining the situation of slaves, besides the consequence of slave-force for industrialization and the Industrial Revolution, definitely would be helpful to understand the background of the backdrop at the ILO foundation time .

#### **D.Slaves Situation**

Innumerable behaviours may explain the frightful situation of slaves during mercantile capitalism. The followings are only very few examples. Slaves were regarded as replaceable and interchangeable workers. Sometimes they were considered to be the property of mill owners, cane growers, or those who rented them out. By Spanish, Portuguese, and English, from the middle of the 17th century, gang slavery, in some cases together with lock-step discipline and liberal use of the whip, became the predominant form of slavery in the Americas. The predominance was

itself a consequence of Europeans dreadful behaviours, as those who went to Americas enslaved or killed most of the original peoples of these lands in a manner that four and a half-century after their arrival only rocks and briar had remained .

According to some reports, there were so many natives on all Americas under Spanish conquest that there could never be a shortage of labour even if they were cut up in slaughterhouses. However, the working conditions were such that one generation of slavery was enough to empty the plains. It explains why in the 17th century there were no Indians on some of the Caribbean islands, as a consequence of the horrible conditions in gold, and mercury mines. For instance, there is a horrible account of the exploitation of mercury, which is so poisonous that its fumes will kill a man. However, this material was used in the process of silver extract from crushed rocks. To achieve the material slaves were going “five hundred feet into the earth, down a series of ladders, and climbing up with bags of mercury ore on their backs, at times slipping and falling to their death. Those who surfaced were immediately sent down again .”

In the 17th century, African slaves were labour-force on sugar plantations under the same horrible conditions. According to an account on the conditions of a Jesuit-owned plantation, during the 1630s, Africans were working briskly and moaning without a moment of peace and rest. Whoever saw all that “will say that this indeed is the image of Hell .”

Earlier, at the beginning of the century, the town council of Havana enacted first slave code on slave runaways that established a gradation of corporal punishment with fifty slashes of the first time, two hundred slashes in public for the second time, and death for those who bore arms or headed a runaway gang. The continuance of slaves runaway made the council approve harsher punishments: two hundred lashes in public for the first time runaway, and the same plus mutilation of both ears for the second time. All in all, slave exhaustion enhanced by behaviours such as the exploitation of slaves and making them work immeasurably, by the

unlimited use of the whip as hard as possible. One of the implications of such exhaustion was the price increase of labour-force .

### **E. Slave Price**

Slaves, as commodities, were subject to demand and supply in the market place. Sometimes, for example by the 16th and 17th centuries, international competition in slave trading had forced down the price of slaves. On some occasions, for example by the 16th century, increased use of slaves caused a rise in their prices. At times, for example, the exceeded prices had led to the replacement of free labourers by slaves or vice versa. It was quite usual to replace slaves of one kind by another, mainly Indians by Africans. In some cases, the reason for such replacement was not quantitative, but qualitative. For example, in 1572 an African worker's price, at engenho Sergipe in Bahia, was \$25000, while for an Indian with similar skills was only \$9000 on average. However, in the long-run Africans were more profitable, since they were kinless and totally moveable labourers. But the Indians could not be moved from their lands permanently. As the dominant cultural group, they could relatively resist to Spanish and European norms of behaviours. In contrast, since Africans were from different linguistic groups had only the European languages in common and must adapt themselves to European norms. Besides, though a slave could live for a whole year with the monthly salary of a free worker, in some cases skilled African workers eliminated the need to hire salaried employees. On the whole, it was the labour-force profitability that in different cases did matter .

### **F. Slaves and Profit**

Slaves allowed Europeans to get benefit so greatly from their conquests in the Americas. Columbus and his men, as the first Europeans, at the beginning used the Indies as slaves in the gold mines. When no more gold could find he turned to the slave trade to secure his promised profits. To establish a profitable export of crops and to farm it by labour-force with



wider profit margins, Europeans transferred sugar plantation from the eastern Atlantic islands nearby Africa to the newly known territories on the west side of the ocean. And they found in sugar handsome profits, in slaves the coerced labour-force as a vehicle towards the profits, and in Africa a trading network for acquiring the slaves .

But, not all Europeans were able to get the benefit of slave labour-force from the beginnings of their economic endeavours. The northern Europeans, who entered the Americas a few decades after Spanish and Portuguese, were not able to develop an extensive Indian slave force. However, they had a cheaper pool of European labourers to exploit. But these labourers were not able to afford their passage to the Americas. Therefore, they had to sell their labour to American Employers by indenture contracts. The English and the French were the primary users of indentured labour. But the rapid growth of English economy in the last quarter of the 17th century and crisis in Europe at the end of it increased the costs of indentured labours and compelled the British and the French to use African slaves for profitably export of sugar to the European market. Anyhow, profit was the determinant factor in the use of slave labourers for economic production .

### **G. Slaves and Production**

After the middle of the 17th century, the owners of plantations and mines were the greatest, and almost the sole, of those who demanded black slaves. It seems that sugar plantations were forerunners among the modern industrial units of the capitalist world depended on slaves as coerced labourers. From the early 17th century, Spain was unable to prevent the Dutch, the French, and the English from occupying the Lesser Antilles. After an initial experiment with cultivation of different agricultural products mainly by free labour, the occupier converted to sugar plantations with slave labour .

The process of setting up large estates in the semi-industrial productive activity to produce sugar for export, which implied the large-scaled

labour-force inputs under a regime of discipline and coercion, sometimes has been called “sugar revolution”, as the process was of great importance to get profit, acquire wealth, and provide capital for the establishment of the industrial mode of production. All in all, the discovery of gold and silver in America, kill off, enslavement and inter the indigenous population in the mines of that continent, the conquest and looting of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of the people of colour, characterized the dawn of the era of capitalist production, an unalienable mode of production for the Industrial Revolution at that time .

#### **H. Slaves and the Industrial Revolution**

At the beginning of the 19th century, the sum in money was more than the total investment in European industry. So, it is by no means an exaggeration to say that the Industrial Revolution was financed with the blood of slaves. The Revolution brought Europe out of its traditional agricultural scarcity and made it the world's main power. For example, England had founded the modern industrial establishment on an accumulated wealth which the slave-based economies of the Caribbean contributed greatly, even strongly, to acquire it. The purchased African slaves by British manufactures were transported to West Indies plantations to produce sugar and other tropical products that their processing created new industries in England. At the same time, maintenance of the slaves and their owners on the plantations provided another market for British industry. The profits of these activities provided one of the main streams of capital accumulation in England, which in turn financed the Industrial Revolution. Of course, it was not the fate of all Europeans to be in the master position. For example, Spain remained a captive of gold fever and Mercantilism for centuries. However, the predominant trend was the replacement of a mercantile capital by an industrial one, and corollary slaves by industrial labourers, which resulted in slavery abolition .

### **I. The Abolition of Slavery**

It has been argued that a political movement, brought up by free-labour migration, resulted to the ending of slavery, in Brazil as an example. It seems that England was a forerunner in such a trend. While the slave-based economies of the British West Indies contributed greatly if did not cause strongly, to the British Industrial Revolution, in the latter part of the 18th century those in England who had founded modern industrial establishment by the accumulation of slave-produced wealth led a movement for the abolition of slavery and slave trade. In fact, the slave-based economies profitability and importance for England had been declined after the American Revolutionary War. In any case, the continuance of slavery and slave trade approved that movement of the kind against the European governments was not enough to agitate slavery abolition. Indeed, it was not humanitarian motives, but economic ones, that induced the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. For example, Brazilian slavery ended indeed as a result of the rise in slave prices with the closing of the slave trade and fall in free labour prices with their immigration by 1880s. Anyways, the abolishment of slavery did not expand to its byproduct, i.e. industrial capitalist production. It lived through the Industrial Revolution and by workers that did not own their instruments of production .

### **II. Industrialist Expansionist Development of Europe**

As I earlier made known, Mercantilist capitalism had in different ways contributed to the establishment of capitalist production and the Industrial Revolution as its inalienable part at that time. The same as Mercantilism and its version of capitalism, the new phenomenon had its own implications .

#### **A.Industrial Revolution Implications**

European expansion, which had begun by the mercantile economic system from the 15th century, took an opportunity from the latter part of

the 18th century for the flourish of an economic system that was depended on a revolutionary industrial method of production and greatly changed the main dimensions of the life. Such method (i.e., industrial production or industrial revolution) led to continuous increase in surpluses of machine-made commodities for world markets and to an exceedingly great rise in demand for foodstuffs, minerals and organic raw materials to import for the maintenance of accelerated population growth, urbanization and structural change all through a number of Western Europe economies .

Although the industrial revolution advanced orderly within a growing world economic environment in connection with commerce and migrations of capital and labour, during the long 19th century, the advancement did not bring about any extensive structural changes in the geography of the world trade. While by the last quarter of the century Britain, Belgium, Holland, France, Germany and Switzerland did trade about 70 percent of their manufactured commodities on international markets, Western Europe farms, forests and mines continued to produce almost 60 percent of foods, organic inputs and minerals needed to keep pace with developments of their economies. Thereupon, it is claimed that the destruction of mercantile system-induced displeases with the colonial system in the era of free trade development at the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. But it is not a complete portrait of the real situation since other pieces of evidence tell another story .

With the growth of mass production, the basic strategy of economic relations between the advanced capitalist nations and the rest of the world necessarily changed. Therefore, closed markets of the plantations and settlement colonies were wholly insufficient, given the floods of products pouring out of the new factories. This, while rendering mercantile system, reinforced the need for colonial markets for its sustenance. Slaves and colonial products such as sugar and spice gave their place to the industrial broadened needs, including ever-increasing crave for raw materials, and food for the rapid growth of urban populations. The pressures of

technology advancement, and the capital accumulation process resulted in efforts to transform the non-capitalist societies into customers which led to the breakup of these societies. The breakup had an essential role in market creation and to obtain supplies through commercial agriculture and mining .

The convergence of the developments brought about a new phase of colonialism, in the early 1760s. For example, Britain's victory over France at the end of the Seven Year War (1756– 1763) opened a new epoch. The Paris Peace treaty (1763) was a turning point, therefore the English foreign policy laid greater stress on colonies as markets than as sources of supply. The clothiers' perception of the North American colonies advantages as markets may be perceived as a precedent for that stress. When Europe was trying to shut out English cloth, export to North America almost tripled between 1744 and 1785. The underlying of that policy shift was a laissez-faire Industrial Revolution .

### **B. Laissez-faire and the Industrial Revolution**

According to the doctrine of the Industrial Revolution, i.e. laissez-faire liberalism and individualism, all individuals in society have the same natural right, and even if they do not possess the equal capability, each one at least understands one's own interest. Therefore, the best help to oneself is to let her/his to one's own .

As applied to the economic life, such paradoxical doctrine meant free competition, free internal and external trade, non-intervention of the State, and freedom of labour. So it instigated the sovereigns and aristocratic elites of the 19th century to be more realistic about the controlled economies, and be easily persuaded that a laissez-faire attitude towards the movement of commodities, capital, knowledge, and labour-force internally and externally, might be more effective in the interest of their states and societies. For example, the Bismarck, German Chancellor, disagreed with colonies, as they required a naval fleet for protection and an extensive bureaucratic apparatus for governance, as he believed such

expenses were unnecessary and a laissez-faire based approach to overseas territories, driven by individuals, could bring glory and wealth to Germany without the cost .

The Bismarck disagreement at the same time reveals the existence of another approach towards the laissez-faire doctrine. Influenced by widely spread nationalism with radical tone over Europe, laissez-faire doctrine coupled with protectionism. Therefore, an economically competitive attitude again prevailed on the interstate level. So, while laissez-faire policies were fashionable in the internal sphere, most members of trade and business favoured protectionist policies in the international arena. They claimed that cheaper foreign goods were harmful to domestic, industrial development, and thus lobbied for protective tariffs on certain goods to ensure that their state would rise to the top of a competitive international economy .

Anyhow, the Industrial Revolution had mainly two social effects. First, the search for wealth to feed it resulted in domination and exploitation. Second, in Europe itself, intense differences of opinion arose over how this wealth could best be distributed to ensure the material, as well as spiritual, well being of its users. The principal strategy was universal, entailing the extending use of money and exchange, destroying the competitive native industries, and “imposition of forced labour and recruitment of a labour-force depending on wages”. This quotation represents a comprehensive expression for the conditions of labour-force in the phase of the Industrial Revolution .

### **C. Labour-force Needs**

Just like the mercantile-capitalist system of production, in which African moveable slave labour took the place of “American Indian” slaves who could not be moved permanently from their lands, the industrial-capitalist system appeared wherever serfdom had long been abolished and land bounded peasants were replaced by wage labourers. This conversion took shape forcibly during a period of primitive accumulation which had

preceded the emergence of the capitalist order in Europe and changed the peasant society into an industrial one by transforming agricultural labourers to proletariats and divorcing these direct producers, prime among others, from the ownership of the means of production .

The transformed labourer, hired by a capitalist entrepreneur, was one result of the emergence of industrial society. Uncontrolled growth of squalid towns as a consequence of agricultural labourers inflow in seeking the better pay of the expanding factory system was another one. Anyway, indeed the ultimate benefiter of proletariats endeavours for better payments was the stronger party, i.e. employers, as in response to competitive requests to work they could impose wages and working conditions on workers completely below the minimums necessary for their subsistence .

### **1. Labourer Situation**

Workers were in almost the same situation as slaves except perhaps for very few differences. For example, unlike slavery in which the cost of slave labour-force was nearly fixed, waged labourers had variable cost. Though the differences had no positive outcomes for the waged labourers their similarities had negative impacts on them. In fact, as it is mentioned earlier in the “Slave Situation” section, according to an account on the conditions of a Jesuit-owned plantation, during the 1630s Africans were working briskly and moaning without a moment of peace and rest. Whoever saw all that “will say that this indeed is the image of Hell”. Though this metaphor sought to grasp the essence of a sugar mill, it indeed in some ways heralded the situation of future industrial production and its waged labour-force .

Workers' employment contracts with employers somehow exemplified their dreadful situation. Actually, the workers' position was extremely grave, because their freedom to contract might function only at the time of their engagement. The deal of law with contracts was limited to the conclusion. Its application and consequences were out of the law

supervision, and workers were entirely at the disposal of their employers. Even at the moment of concluding the contract employers had their own whips in hand. First, the abundance of peoples with no property, their competition with each other, and the urgent need to earn their living would oblige workers to accept the imposed conditions of employers and yield to their law, and these people could, at their leisure, wait for the workers' services. Second, employers' knowledge about the degree of workers' needs and workers' lack of proper information about the employers' affairs leveraged the latter on the work conditions. Moreover, the object of the contract between employer and worker, i.e. the commodities to be exchanged, were not the same for the parties. The employer's commodity was a commodity, while for the worker it was human labour. It somehow reveals another difference between slaves and industrial labourers. Slaves, as a commodity in physic and labour, gave way to industrial workers, with only their human labour as a commodity, who would not enjoy even the theoretical duty of slave owners to support and preserve the slaves, and provide their needs .

This situation and a wave of free-market-inspired deregulation of the labour market, which resulted in sharply intensified cross-border competition enabled employers seeking to undercut labour costs and/or resort to the excessive use (exploitation, in other words) of labour. Besides, from the industrial revolution, in the 18th and 19th centuries, onwards the labour movement has been concerned with the weakening of workers' bargaining power by international trade since their employers could hire workers from abroad without any obligation to observe even their national standards for the protection of labour. The appearances of such a situation was too long work hours; child work in mills and mines with no age limit from six and conditions which would bring about malformation of the bines, curvature of the spine, heart diseases, stunted growth, asthma and premature old age; women employment at the most exhaustive labour, even when they were pregnant and again only a week after a childbirth; and widespread drunkenness. At the same time, the



profits of some manufacturers were estimated in thousands. This situation induced movements aimed at changing the catastrophic situation of workers .

## **2. Labour Movements**

Reaction to the workers' situation was led by people who argued that ultimate goals such as the health of the nation, family life and human dignity had a value at least equal to, if not more than, the profit. But their arguments encountered by the employers claim that the reduction of work hours and the prohibition of persons under a certain age from working in factories would raise the price of goods to the consumers, and would have adverse effects on home trade and prosperity, because the cheaper foreign goods would be imported and fill the market over its capacity. Accordingly, an international competition was an obstacle to the establishment and development of humanitarian national legislation. In response peoples individually, and organizations moved against these arguments and their implications for labourers .

### **D. Individual Advocates of Labourers**

Among those who endeavoured for workers' rights were reformers that tried to find a way to lessen the force of unrestricted international competition, by establishing internationalized minimum living standards that the workers should not be allowed to fall below them. The Swiss banker, Jacques Necker (1732-1804) was of the opinion that a country would benefit of the abolishment of Sunday rest-day if its competing countries did not follow the same manner. That is, only in the case of observing by all countries, it could be possible to maintain workers' day-rest. This opinion somehow was reflecting a negative attitude against the improvement of working conditions on the basis that it might lead, through a subsequent rise in the costs of production, to a loss of market share for domestic producers. Necker was the first one who noted that the

worker protection was an international question, though he proposed no idea on protecting workers by international agreements .

Robert Owen (1771-1858) was not the pioneer of international labour legislation, but advocated the international implementation of labour legislation. As the master of the mill and manufacturing community of New Lanark, he shortened hours of labour, improved the living conditions of his workers, made provision for their leisure and the education of their children and established co-operative marketing. In the Congress of the Holy Alliance at Aix-la-Chapelle (1818), Owen suggested, two unsuccessful Memorials, that the Congress appoint a Commission to adopt his ideas and consequently remove the causes of continual generated misery in human society .

Daniel Le Grand (1783-1859), a French manufacturer, was the first one who continuously advocated the international labour legislation. Between 1840 and 1848, he appealed to Swiss, German, French and British statesmen and civil servants, arguing that the prosperity of a State was closely bound up with the physical well-being of its working class, and urged that governments of all Industrial countries negotiate on setting right the rough treatments against workers. Moreover, Le Grand warned that persistence in paying attention to wealth would cause the nation one day to be faced with a very huge mass of people hostile to its institutions and greater contempt of all that was once held sacred and “delivering it into the hands of the most savage demagogues .”

The Same as Le Grand, Charles Hindley (1796-1857), an English cotton mill-owner, a politician, and an active in the Factory Reform movement, had proposed there should be taken a coordinated action at the international level to ensure that regulating the labour condition in one country would not put it in a disadvantageous competitive situation in the international market. Frédéric Passy (1822-1912) of France was the other person who advocated the international regulation for labour conditions who described social tensions as dangerous explosives that were hidden in the depths of the community and urged governments to ensure the

internal stability through social reforms if the international peace was to be preserved .

However, by the late 19th century and early in 20th one, some movements tried to soften the hardships of laissez-faire. Among them, there are Soldarisme in France, New Liberalism in Britain, and Progressivism in America. According to Léon Bourgeois ideas in his book *Solidarité* published in 1896, Soldarisme “can only favour the construction of a Republic of people with the hand extended against the closed fist... that will defend the principle of inheritance tax, on income and the establishment of a pension for workers”. New Liberalism in Britain, was based on a body of legislation on social welfare enacted between 1906 and the outbreak of World War I; wider perceptions of economic decline, in comparison with Germany and the United States; awareness of the persistence of poverty and ill health were fueling anxieties over the condition of British society. Three of the government leaders most directly associated with its implementation were Herbert Louis Samuel, Winston Churchill, and David Lloyd George. American Progressivism in the US, applied “a variety of responses to the economic and social problems of industrialization introduced to America”. Social reformers, like Jane Addams, and journalists, like Jacob Riis and Ida Tarbell, were powerful agents for the American Progressivism expression. They tried, inter alia, to reveal the evils of corporate greed, and fight against the fear of immigrants. On a national level, Progressivism gained a strong advocate in the White House when Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901. Progressivism ended with World War I when many Americans associated President Woodrow Wilson's use of progressive language ("the war to make the world safe for democracy") with the war. However, the unparalleled destruction created by the War led to increased support among the great powers of the time for an organization, not only to regulate labour standards for the steadily growing international population of industrial workers, but also to preserve peace in the post-war highly dangerous situation. In spite of

these efforts, supports of international regulation by earlier reformers were the first signs of the approach to international organized advocacy towards labourers' rights .

### **E. Internationally Organized Labour Movement**

During the 19th century, the labour movement grew and became a strong force in society. In 1848 the hostility to existing institutions emerged violently, as had been predicted, but the liberal revolution failed. Though this failure temporarily hindered the efforts of reform, it reinforced the views of all those who felt that existing society, dominated by the possessing class of capitalists, could not or would not let itself be reformed and, therefore, had to be overthrown .

Social conflicts, which from the second half of this century increasingly transposed to the workplace, pushed workers to become internationally organized. The International Working Men's Association was formed in 1864 with the goal of the protection, advancement and emancipation of the working classes. This brought together trade unionists, a diverse group of political activists and other forces in what became known as the First International. Its creators, Marx and Engels, argued that despite Europe un-precedent development in trade and industry, the living standards of the workers had deteriorated. According to one of the conclusions of the International, workers in different countries had to stand together to achieve better conditions of life, as well as to prevent governments to make use of national prejudices to "squander in piratical wars the people's blood and treasure". Its work continued after 1889 by the Second International, which its demand for an eight-hour working day ultimately took up in the first Convention adopted by the ILO .

However, movements for labour rights were not limited to radical reactions. Towards the close of the 19th-century attempts were made to establish international working-class organizations in the industrial field. Bodies confined to unions in specific trades or institutions. They were

called 'International Trade Secretariats' which the first one was established in 1889 with the creation of international federations of typographers and printers, hatters, cigar makers, tobacco workers, and boot and shoe operatives. At the same time, discussions took place regarding the formation of a trade-union International consisted of the central trade-union organizations of the different countries. The International Secretariat of Trade Union Centres, created in 1901, was the first confederation composed of national trade union centres. In 1902 its tasks were outlined, particularly to form a permanent link between the unions of the different countries, undertake the exchange of information, translate legislation, prepare uniform trade-union statistics and arrange mutual assistance in industrial disputes. It renamed in 1913 as the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) .

Close together with these developments calls for just and equal labour standards and improved working and living conditions for the workers began to be heard by the governments. To establish an international organ of information for labour legislation was suggested by the Swiss government in March 1889, which in August followed by asking European governments for the possibility to hold periodical conferences and, in case of being possible, what should be done about them. Most European countries agreed to discuss on points such as the minimum age, hours of work, employment of women and children in unhealthy and dangerous industries in a non-diplomatic conference. They also agreed to deal with these items through an international convention, and on the means of implementing any convention that would be concluded .

On the initiative of the Emperor of Germany, the conference did hold in Berlin. It adopted a number of resolutions, but the participant Governments were not in favour of implementing them through conventions. Therefore, they opposed to any mechanism to put in practice these documents. Even recommendations for the regular exchange of legislative and administrative measures to carry out the principles of the Conference between the interested Governments, and periodic meetings

of delegates to exchange observations on the implementation or modification of the principles remained almost untouched. The British did not want to put their industrial laws at the will of a foreign power, and the French Government refused to acknowledge any resolution which would appear to give immediate executive force to the conference resolutions .

Again in 1896, the Swiss Government asked the Governments for the possibility of the establishment of an international labour organization. Their replies made it clear having a supranational body with control and executive powers was an impossible choice, and the only possible one was a body with scientific character, which put untouched the sovereign powers of nations. By the Swiss and Belgian Governments, an International Congress of Civil Social Reformers was convened in Brussels in 1897 which passed a resolution calling for the establishment of an international bureau for labour protection .

Just at the beginning of the 20th century, the International Association for Labour Legislation (IALL) was set up in Basle, with its secretariat already called the International Labour Office. Its establishment was based on the belief that if governments were against the idea of governmental international organizations they might support private non-governmental organizations. The first proposals for international conventions originated inside the IALL to establish interstate agreements on conditions of work. For this purpose, it had brought together a group of private individuals from academia, politics, administration, labour and industry, in hope that research on labour legislation, conditions and statistics would have a moral and instructive effect on governments .

In 1903 the IALL considered that a law limiting night-work of women to ensure them a rest period of ten hours, and the prohibition of white phosphorus in the industry might be dealt with by an international convention, which later realized in two conventions. In 1905 a diplomatic conference, attended by France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Greece, Romania and Serbia was held in Berne to adopt those conventions. It successfully convened an international

meeting of experts, which laid down the basis of the two documents. In the following year, two conventions for prohibition were adopted by this technical (i.e. non-diplomatic) conference: one on the night work of women in the industry, and the other one on the use of white phosphorus in the manufacture of matches .

As IALL legitimacy and influence were limited to a few European states, there was no effective mechanism for the implementation of its conventions, and many governments preferred to develop bilateral treaties. Therefore, up to the start of World War I, a number of bilateral treaties on labour market conditions were signed by industrialized countries. For example, Italian economic competition and conditions of emigrant Italian workers in France provoked the two countries to conclude a labour treaty in 1904, which dealt with accident indemnity, unemployment insurance, age and welfare conditions for young workers in relation to nationals of one country working in the other one. Up to 1915 the number of the bilateral signed treaties reached in twenty .

In 1910 two further Conventions were proposed to prohibit the ten-hour employment for women and young persons in the industry. In 1913 Swiss Government called the Technical Conference in 1913, but the outbreak of the World War I caused the Diplomatic Conference which should have taken place the next year to be cancelled. In sum, though IALL activities were interrupted by the war, it provided an important laboratory for the subsequent work of the ILO .

Pressures of military production necessities such as the demand for munitions and the replacement of a large part of the male labour-force by women on the one hand, and the needs of civil production, the fear between skilled and unskilled workers, the great extension of the repetition of work strikes prohibition, on the other hand, caused social upheaval in the industry which its effects aggravated by troubles directly arisen out of the war, such as food price, long hours and Sunday work. This situation compelled governments to pay the attention to the industrial conditions that would maximize efficiency, and prevent fatigue

and health deterioration of workers. This atmosphere was portrayed, notably by a programme prepared by a Trades Union Congress, which held in Leeds in 1916 and attended by delegates from France, Britain, Italy and Belgium. It contained, in details, the rights to be recognised in the Peace Treaty, including

the right to work and freedom of association; the migration regulation by a commission composed of government, worker and employer representatives; social insurance, including the demand that countries that had not enacted insurance laws of sickness, invalidity, old age and unemployment should do so as soon as possible; a ten-hour day (eight in mines and unhealthy industries) and a five and a half day week with a minimum age of fourteen, no night-work for women and children under eighteen; legislation regarding safety, health and factory inspection, with labour participating in such inspection (emphasis is added)

This landscape of the labour needs created the background for the backdrop portrayed by Lloyd George at the time of founding the ILO .

### **III. As Concluding Remarks**

It is said that the origins of the ILO goes back to the era of the Industrial Revolution and transformation of economies and societies by industrialization which brought about the critical question of how to handle the resulted social consequences. However, the present survey briefly traced those origins in the social issues, and in the deterioration of Labour-force conditions, as the blatant forms of inequality and injustice, from the era of mercantilism, which had rooted those issues and conditions, through the age of Industrial Revolution till the end of the World War I .

#### **A.Social Circumstances at the threshold of ILO Foundation**

In 1919 the circumstances were conducive to show new thought about social security. Differences in standards of labour and life between, and within, countries were deep sources of tensions, a revolutionary temper



was widespread, and social justice was seen as an essential prerequisite for the maintenance of world peace. In Britain the shop steward movement had honeycombed many of the larger trade unions and undermined the authority of their constitutional executives; in France and Italy the trade union movements showed signs of becoming more and more extremist; the wave of unrest had spread even to the Netherlands and Switzerland. So Britain, France and the United States, the leading actors at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, were preoccupied with labour unrest at home and abroad. Politicians and employers were in anticipation of a huge wave of strikes, social unrest, uprisings and revolutions if workers demand for social justice would not respond urgently. In this environment, various factors came to the point of conjuncture that the creation of ILO was unavoidable .

#### **B. Factors in the Foundation of ILO**

As it has been mentioned, negative attitudes to the improvement of working conditions were premised on the possibility that it might lead to a loss of market share for domestic producers, through a subsequent rise in the costs of production. Besides the revolutionary methods, various other reactions to this argument were the request for some degree of international coordination, based on an evolutionary approach to social change through the creation of an international organization to respond to labour issues, advocated by trade unions and reformist movements .

The trade-unions federations' pressures on governments to include a social-policy programme in the peace treaty after the war, that welcomed by the social-reformist intellectuals, who had themselves long provided active support, were among those reactions that their confluence shaped ILO. Moreover, there was a sense of needing to respond to the domestic demand fast growth and the expansion of international trade and investment in the then industrialized countries and their colonies during the few decades prior to the World War I. Also, it was felt that setting, observing and applying labour standards require the balance of power

among the state, economy, and society. Therefore, ILO also was a byproduct of the need to find some mechanism to establish uniform standards among countries to prevent any one country gains an advantage in trade as a result of inferior working conditions and thus reduced costs of production, and the consequence of an interaction among the trade union movement, social-reformist intellectuals and politicians. Though it can be assumed that ILO was the birth-child of reformism and non-revolutionary movements deal with the dreadful situation of workers, it is not possible to ignore the impact of revolutionary reactions which were widespread all over Europe and even north-America, and exemplified in their version by Russian Revolution .

Based on the fear that the widespread social unrest would follow the Russian Revolution in the wake of its success, the ILO was founded as a foil to a living example of a revolutionary model to address the inequalities, injustices, hardships and privations that workers were faced. A model which in 1919 had been materialized only two years ago in Russia but there were serious signs would be established in Germany, Hungary, Italy, and even in North America. Thus it is not far from the reality that the Russian Revolution had a remarkable contribution to the foundation of ILO and its objectives and functions, though in a reactionary manner .

### **C. Objective, and Function of ILO**

The ILO principal objective was to promote reformist solutions to the explained social circumstances, by humanizing and hence stabilizing capitalist production relations. Therefore, to overcome the revolutionary temper, founders of ILO brought together workers, employers and governments at the international level in the search for common rules, policies and behaviours, as was claimed, that each party could find its own benefits in them. Indeed delegating responsibility for social goals to the ILO had a function to soften and legitimize the dominance of laissez-

faire principles within liberalism, as were followed in French Solidarisme, British New Liberalism and American Progressivism .

The feeling that setting, observing and applying labour standards require the balance of power among the state, economy, and society has given shape to the tripartite system of membership of the ILO. Accordingly, each member state has four representatives in its General Conference and Executive Council: two for the government, one for employers and one for workers .

In theory, the delegates of workers and employers vote independently and are not bound by their government position. That is, the non-governmental representatives may disagree with or be against their governments. National or international organizations of workers or employers may impeach their own governments to violate ILO conventions and basic principles. However, in practice, the scope of non-governmental representatives freedom to oppose their government in the ILO varies considerably and is affected by such factors as the degree and nature of domestic constraint on basic freedoms .

The tripartite system reflects the unchallenged concept of state sovereignty of the international law at the time of ILO inception. Though it has been expressed that this system was aspired to promote universal values and the harmonization of labour norms across borders, denied formal representation to groups such as women workers and migrant workers, for example. Moreover, the notion of universality was very narrow, as harmonization of norms was confined to the industrialized states. Moreover, in its original constitution, the ILO not only refrained to compel the member states to apply or monitor ratified norms beyond their territorial borders but also exempted industrial states from applying those norms to territories within their control, their colonies for example .

In general, the backdrop portrayed by Lloyd George had a landscape of detailed rights. They included the right to work and freedom of association; the migration regulation by a commission composed of government, worker and employer representatives; social insurance,

including the demand that countries that had not enacted insurance laws of sickness, invalidity, old age and unemployment should do so as soon as possible; a ten-hour day (eight in mines and unhealthy industries) and a five and a half-day week with a minimum age of fourteen, no night-work for women and children under eighteen; legislation regarding safety, health and factory inspection, with labour participating in such inspection. This landscape was the product of about a four-hundred-year practice of at first mercantilist and then industrial capitalism coincided with revolutionary socialist and evolutionary reformist reactions which affected the foundation of ILO in their own ways. The revolutionary reaction had resulted in the establishment of the socialist economic and political system in Russia in 1917. As an evolutionary reformist reaction to this system and the collateral threat of its establishment in other countries, as well as a remedy for the dreadful situation of workers and a leverage to strengthen the principles of laissez-faire Contracting Parties to the Versailles Peace Treaty, created the International Labour Organization in 1919.

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