Pluralism, Tripartism and the Foundation of the International Labour Organization

Valerio Torreggiani

1   Introduction

On the 8th of June 2018, the 107th International Labour Conference concluded its annual works adopting seven different resolutions. Among them, with the *Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on social dialogue and tripartism* the delegates gathered in Geneva reaffirmed and reinforced one of the founding principles of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its ideology. The text of the resolution reported that "social dialogue and tripartism are essential for democracy and good governance" within a society where "free, independent, strong and representative employers' and workers' organizations, together with trust, commitment and respect by the governments for autonomy of the social partners and social dialogue outcomes are key conditions for effective social dialogue" (ILO 2018, 1). Therefore—the resolution concluded—"the tripartite constituents renew and reaffirm their commitment to promote and apply the principles of social dialogue and

V. Torreggiani (✉)
Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

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tripartism" (ILO 2018, 1). One year later, marking the centenary anniversary of the ILO, the 108th International Labour Conference approved the *ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work*, once again re-stating the fact that "social dialogue, including collective bargaining and tripartite cooperation, provides an essential foundation of all ILO action" (ILO 2019, 5).

Initially set up in 1919 within the framework of the peace treaties ending World War I, the ILO was conceived as an agency of the League of Nations with the objective of dealing with labour problems and socio–economic policies. Since then, tripartism has remained one of its most singular and jealously safeguarded features: article 3 of the ILO Constitution states that "the General Conference […] shall be composed of four representatives of each of the Members, of whom two shall be Government delegates and the two others shall be delegates representing respectively the employers and the workpeople of each of the Members" (ILO 1919, Art. 3).

In 1919, this tripartite-corporatist interest representation solution represented a clear novelty among the political economic answers to the problems arisen by the industrial development of western societies. Overall, since the late nineteenth century, on the dramatic background constituted by the continual escalation of tension between labour and capital, coming to terms with rapidly changing societies became the core preoccupation of the founding fathers of the modern social sciences. Thinkers such as Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, Mosca, Veblen, Michels or the Webbs tried, from their specific disciplinary and political angle, to solve the problem of how societies cohere when traditional customs no longer led to a pacific acceptance of social hierarchy; and specifically, of how societies cope with the unforeseen challenges posed by industrial development, mass democracy and socio–economic grouping.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, and even more in the interwar period, one of the outcomes of these new challenges was precisely the flowering of corporatist, tripartite and economic democracy models across Europe, in both democratic and fascist regimes (Costa Pinto 2017; Pasetti 2016). A great theoretical and political variety characterized the movement (Williamson 1985), ranging from the German *ZAG* in the 1920s, to the Portuguese constitutional reform signed by Sidónio Pais in 1918; from the anti-capitalist syndicalism of Georges Sorel, Hubert Lagardelle, Sergio Pannunzio and Edmondo Rossoni, to

the technocratic project of Walter Rathenau; from De Ambris' constitutional experiment in Fiume in 1920, to the Weimer Republic constitution; from the Belgian Henri de Man, to the German socialist trade union proposals in the 1920s, and to many others (Schmitter 1974; Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979; Moses 1978). Overall, therefore, if "implicit tendencies towards corporatist structures developed both before and concurrently with the emergence of fascism" (Panitch 1977, 629), during the interwar period a corporatist form to imagine and reshape such a troubling scenario assumed a great importance putting, as recently stated by Costa Pinto, "an indelible mark on the first decades of the twentieth century" (Costa Pinto 2019, 7).

Furthermore, at the end of World War I the emergence of ideas and procedures of interest representation in the European political culture coincided with, and was reinvigorated by, the conservative, business-led decontrol movement, which rapidly gained the uppercut in the post-war reconstruction projects, both in continental Europe (Maier 1975; Tooze 2014) and in Britain (Cronin 1991). Here, for instance the "Treasury view" of austerity promptly succeeded to roll back labour gains achieved during the war (Mattei 2017b), leading to an undisputed conservative hegemony in the interwar period.

State retrenchment and cost-cutting processes are particularly relevant for the comprehension of how post-war institutions and stabilizing strategies were imagined and shaped. As R.H. Tawney affirmed in 1943, although the spectacle of dismantling state intervention was certainly less impressive of its creation, it was equally important (Tawney 1943). This chapter places the creation of the ILO and its tripartite structure in the wider context of the post-war anti-revolutionary and conservative momentum. In this context, the self-reflexive stabilization efforts pursued by the conservative political and economic elites of the western societies took the form of a "variety of different strategies of stabilization, repression, demobilization, depoliticization and reorganization" (Tooze and Fertik 2014, 232) of which the ILO was an important element. This perspective is consistent with an expanding historiography that stresses the increasing importance of interwar international organizations directed by a technocracy of experts (Laqua 2011; McCarthy 2011; Gorman 2012; Sluga 2013; Cabanes 2014; Jackson and O'Malley 2018). In the post-war context, these civil servants came to believe that their key international function was not just to organize global intelligence, but also to mitigate economic turmoil, restore social order and make international

capitalism feasible once again (Clavin 2013). Together with the spreading of American rationalization and scientific management discourses, these characteristic figures of the twentieth century were crucial in uniting the European establishment against social revolution under the flag of a technocratic truth. Through the inaccessible language of expertise, the new technocrats were in the frontline in conceptualizing and building a post-war global order, which required new modes of governance and regulation, both at national and international level (Maier 1987; Cayet 2010; Nyland et al. 2014; Mattei 2017a).

It is against this flourishing historiographical backdrop that this chapter investigates the theoretical sources of the tripartite idea, whose historical roots in relation to the foundation of the ILO deserves to be better understood (Croucher and Wood 2015).

In this chapter, the notion of tripartism to which the ILO was committed since the beginning of its operations refers to the idea that employers, employees and governments should work as social partners, creating socio–economic policy through formal and informal consultation, cooperation, compromise and negotiation (Nyland et al. 2014; Crouch and Wood 2015). In line with this argument, I consider ILO tripartism as a regime of codetermination that is to be viewed against the background of the transformations of the capitalist ecosystem between the two world wars. In this sense, I assume that the terminological historical variety adopted in the period 1919–1945 to indicate this type of political economy procedures—which ranges from tripartism to corporatism, industrial democracy, guild system, participatory management, economic planning, coordinated economy and others—hides a certain degree of homogeneity of practices and ideas. Eventually, crediting ILO tripartism as a part of a wider multi-political interwar corporatist movement consents to look at the long-term connections between interwar institutions, ideas and projects, and the emergence of the post-1945 coordinated capitalist system (Maier 1987; Eichengreen 2007).

More specifically, as the post-war British civil service acted as "a sounding board for transnational social ideas" (Hidalgo-Weber 2012, 17), I intend to explore one of the many genealogical paths of the ILO tripartite formula, investigating a series of theoretical developments and transfers occurred in Britain during the first two decades of the twentieth century which exerted their influence over the functioning and structure of the ILO. In this regard, the analysis will be centred on a network of British intellectuals, technocrats and civil servants—those who "whisper in

the ear of the Wilsons and the Lloyd Georges of this world," as recalled by Lord Esher in 1919 (Jackson and O'Malley 2018, 1)—exploring their asymmetric and different roles in debating, promoting and eventually establishing the tripartite structure of the ILO and its ideology.

As a result, I will demonstrate how British pluralism offered a model of democratic governance predicated upon a specific conception of political economic organization, i.e. a system of codetermination between interest groups and governments. I will prove how, at the end of the war, British civil servants and technocrats exploited the pluralist model as a tool for creating an international organism aimed at depotentiating socialist-revolutionary impulses, which after 1917 were threatening the capitalist order. In so doing, I will supplement and reinforce the thesis of the ILO as an agency created in order to offer a compromise with moderate trade unions and to contrast violent social revolution (Shotwell 1933). In this sense, the entire post-war conservative reconstruction movement, of which the ILO was part and parcel, is not here interpreted as a simple return to a pre-1914 normalcy, but rather as a way of reinventing and renewing conservative stability, capitalism and social order. As Maier wrote, "stabilization […] does not preclude significant social and political change but often requires it" (Maier 1987, 154). According to this, international tripartism is intended as a new technology of corporatist governance aimed at mitigating intra-group contrasts, eradicating class struggle and promoting international social order. In addition, I will explore the enduring fortune of tripartite practices, examining possible historical connections between ILO tripartism, interwar corporatist projects and post World War II coordinated capitalism.

In order to reach its objectives, the chapter tries to reconstruct the process through which the tripartite idea emerged and developed in Britain since the beginning of the twentieth century, determining the elements of continuity between the following phases: (a) the early twentieth century British pluralist theory, with its attached political, economic and institutional model of group cooperation; (b) the wartime industrial relation system and the reconstruction projects elaborated by the Reconstruction Committee between 1916 and 1917 with the aim of projecting wartime industrial cooperation in times of peace; (c) the efforts of the Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Labour and of the British labour delegation in Paris to establish a tripartite international labour organization between 1918 and 1919. The idea here is neither to argue that

tripartism was a specific British intellectual product, nor that the ILO tripartite structure and ideology was exclusively the resultant of British efforts and ideology. Nonetheless, due to the great importance that historiography has already ascribed to the British civil service in launching and designing the ILO, I contend that the cultural pluralist background of the British stakeholders, as well as the tripartite-corporatist planning experience developed during the war, critically influenced the British labour delegation in Paris and, consequentially, the ILO's institutions and ideology.

2   A SOCIETY OF SOCIETIES

In general terms, empowering representatives of interest groups with political powers is a way to put in question the idea of state monopoly of political representation and authority. A theoretical challenge of this kind circulated in British academic and intellectual circles since the beginning of the twentieth century. These theories were based on the notion of a society built not exclusively around the atomistic and individualist political representation, uniquely channelled into a traditionally elected parliament, but on the idea of a society established around the institutional collaboration between organized socio–economic interests and the state. The reference goes naturally to the pluralist movement. As recognized by a recent historiographical literature (Bevir 2012; Enroth 2010; Stears 2006; Runciman 2005; Laborde 2000; Nicholls 1994), "pluralism refers to a belief in or sensitivity to diversity in society and government" (Bevir 2012, 2) and, as many other concepts in the history of political and economic thought, it is best illustrated in terms of family resemblance. In this sense, although the label pluralism ends up hiding a plurality of theoretical outcomes, overall it seems to be characterized by a common suspicion, when not an explicit antipathy, towards the idea of a homogeneous nation ruled by a centralized, uniform, monopolistic state. The reasons behind this suspicion/antipathy were certainly multiple, but all of them appear to have arisen both as a reaction to the omnipotent nineteenth century nation-state, and to its parallel individualist and utilitarian philosophical dogma.

Arising out of an intense crisis of the liberal political and economic model, the pluralist agenda started to spread the idea that a post-liberal democracy had to include the representation of non-political interests—in particular organized economic interests—as a way of complementing the traditional mechanisms of elections, parties and political parliaments. That

appeared to be even more necessary in the light of the unprecedented expansion of organizations such as trade unions and employers' federations in the first decades of the twentieth century. In fact, as the massive waves of workers' turmoil of 1910–1914 clearly demonstrated, the gap between the socio–economic power and influence of non-political actors and their actual political power was widely and dangerously growing.

This development posited a serious challenge on the liberal tradition of political economic studies. If the liberal benthamite creed, and thereafter the marginalist economists, neglected the existence and importance of groups in society, considering worthy of analysis only the isolated individual in an international context of competing nation states, the first pluralist school openly rejected these positions and started to defend the standing, autonomy and legitimacy of groups within society. If capitalism was changing society, society required a different political framework. Riding the wave of overcoming economic laissez-faire, and in synergy with similar proposals emerging in continental Europe—e.g. Durkheim, Duguit and La Tour du Pin in France, Giuseppe Toniolo and Santi Romano in Italy, Von Ketteler and Von Gierke in Germany—thinkers such as Frederic W. Maitland and John N. Figgis argued for the existence of a moral and legal legitimacy of groups broadly understood. Thereafter, authors such as G.D.H. Cole began to endorse the idea according to which the process of government should depend on the activity of coordinated and cooperative economic groups, autonomously or alongside parliament. In both cases, the idea of the insufficiency of the existing constitutional structure to reflect the complexity of modern industrial societies permeated the pluralist intellectual climate of the first two decades of the twentieth century. It was a reaction against those theoretical explanations posing the hedonistic felicific calculus at the core of any human actions and crowning the state—intended as government and parliament—as the sole political decision-maker.

Overall, the pluralist project was a challenge to rethink the conceptual categories of the individual, the group and the national community, in order to establish a different, decentralized and functional institutional architecture. In this regard, one of the first pluralist attacks was unleashed against the so-called concession theory, championed by jurists such as Savigny and Blackstone. According to this theory, one of the attributes of state sovereignty was its right to bestow on or withdraw legal personality from other interest groups or associations, exercising the power to recognize an entity's rights and interests. Contrary to this opinion, pluralist

writers led by Maitland affirmed the natural existence of groups in society, granting them a real juridical personality independent from the acts of other political authorities. Largely referring to the work of the German thinker Von Gierke, in his Sidgwick Lecture held at the Newnham College of Cambridge in 1903, Maitland affirmed that "if n men unite themselves in an organised group, jurisprudence, unless it wishes to pulverise the group, must see $n+1$ persons" (Maitland 1911, 316). Hence the group had a reality that simultaneously was composed of individuals and transcended them.

One of the consequences of this perspective was that, in a world crowded with non-governmental economic organizations, pluralist theory recognized that socio–economic associations had their own autonomous life and activities, existing per se and not by the concession of a prince, a state, or any other type of superior political authority. For pluralist authors the process according to which men associate themselves in a stable association in order to reach a common scope—i.e. the process of forming a corporation, to use Maitland's lexicon—was a natural fact of the human society. Thus law had the duty of recognize the resultant group as a "right-and-duty-bearing unit" (Maitland 1911, 307).

However serious the political repercussions of this approach might have been, Maitland never took his legal and sociological reasoning to an explicit political or institutional level, leaving his teaching apolitical, open-ended, and essentially ambiguous. A step towards a clearer political direction was taken by one of his associates, John N. Figgis, who in 1896 took up a job as lecturer in history at St. Catherine's College at the University of Cambridge. Figgis did not share Maitland's hesitancy in embracing the political implications of the pluralist legal thinking. In 1913 he espoused his own political theory in a volume titled *Churches in the Modern State*. Among Figgis' references, a part from Maitland and Von Gierke, an important place was occupied by the seventeenth century German jurist and philosopher Johannes Althusius who, in Figgis' opinion, had the merit of envisaging a state composed of associations operating in a true cooperative society (Figgis 1913a, 202).

Therefore, armed with a medieval corporatist understanding of the society—what Maitland defined as "a 'communitas communitatum', a system of groups [standing] between the state and the individual" (Maitland 1911, 310)—Figgis commenced his battle "against an abstract and unreal theory of state omnipotence on the one hand and the artificial view of individual independence on the other" (Figgis 1914, 206). Combining

Maitland, Gierke and Althusius, Figgis advocated an idea of society as formed by self-governing associations, co-existing in a broader national framework with the central state. It was, as Figgis put it, a "society of societies" (Figgis 1913b, 49), where men's corporate life had to constitute the foundation of a new kind of state. Moving from a critique to the liberal foundations of the nineteenth century Victorian Britain, Maitland and Figgis started to look back to medieval England and early modern Europe in order to explore the metaphysical and legal status of various associations, thereby opening a research path for a different understanding on the relationship between individuals, intermediate bodies and the state (Runciman 2005).

Among this path, although similar in the general outlook, a different perspective on pluralism was provided by G.D.H. Cole, a second-generation pluralist thinker based at the University of Oxford, whose literary exordium is dated in 1913 with the publication of *The World of Labour*. Two distinctive features mark Cole's theoretical journey towards what has been called socialist pluralism, officially known as guild socialism (Stears 1998, 2006). First of all, Cole always defined himself a socialist: not, therefore, an apolitical animal as Maitland, nor a catholic medieval nostalgic as Figgis. Secondly, Cole was a very particular kind of socialist, for he always refused to believe that the solution to working class impoverishment and grievances had to be inevitably a centralized omnipotent collectivist state.

Cole's challenge to the Fabian Society and the Webbs' dominance of British socialist thinking coincided with the outbreak of World War I. The deep alterations brought about by the wartime economic and political system exerted a great influence on his thought, marking a decisive step forward in differentiating his proposals from the ones of the older pluralist theorists. Cole's most relevant works on guild socialism were published between 1917 and 1920. Nonetheless, what it is worth to underline is that, even before the war, Cole had already recognized the mounting importance of the economic groups. In his 1913 volume he explicitly wrote that "everywhere we are faced by the uprising of the group" (Cole 1913, 19), substantially following Maitland and most of all Figgis in contrasting the conviction that group activities were by definition a conspiracy against the public interest. On the contrary, what Cole sustained was that a flourishing associational activity within the political national community was not incompatible with an ordered communal life;

rather, it was considered both natural and beneficial in terms of guaranteeing a more democratic and inclusive decision-making process. If Cole shared Maitland and Figgis' attention to group formation, behaviours and accomplishments, what distinguished his guild socialist theory was an understanding of the group as economically—or functionally, as he put it—defined. In this sense, the guild model frequently recalled by Cole was bound up with a broader interest in the medieval period that intensified in the early twentieth century. If this medieval nostalgia can be traced back to a moral and spiritual critique of the capitalist system—which had a good fortune during the rest of the century (Rogan 2017)—Cole's most famous sources in this sense were Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris (Cole 1951, 3). In Cole's case, however, the guild idea referred not to the relationship between the church and the secular power, as in Figgis, but specifically to the political economic medieval system of the guilds, highlighting its prowess to efficiently orient the overall decision-making process.

It was with this philosophical baggage that Cole witnessed the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Everywhere the conflict shattered the traditional system of policy-making, multiplying the centres of powers and diverting decision-making from the normal channels of party and parliamentary competition into direct bargaining by organized interests and the state. In Britain, since the famous Treasury Agreement of March 1915, which secured the cooperation of organized labour to the war effort, the wartime corporatist edifice grew rapidly. Especially after 1916 and the appointment of Lloyd George as Prime Minister, several new ministries and technical committees were created, incorporating representatives of business and labour, as well as scholars and experts (Burk 1982; Cronin 1991, 58–81). As the war progressed, therefore, Cole observed the emergence of a system of compulsory cooperation imposed by Lloyd George's war cabinet on certain key areas of the economy. In the context of this wartime patriotic alliance, although Cole feared an institutional development where trade union representatives were co-opted by the government, he also praised the increasing public recognition of the role of economic groups and associate life.

As a consequence, since the war period Cole started to deepen his guild socialist proposals, imagining a complex institutional system where economic groups, whose behaviours and actions were democratically controlled by its members, had to fulfil the political role of expressing the needs and concerns of specific socio–economic sections of the national

community. Specifically in the works published between 1917 and 1920, Cole endorsed a political economic model ensuring, on the one hand, the individual freedom of choice and expressions—evident in the continuously restated democratic control of the guilds by their members—and facilitating, on the other hand, the integration of the parts in the whole.

Forging a distinctive socialist tradition of pluralism, Cole and his guild socialist colleagues, somehow paradoxically, provided a hyper-individualistic account of the society stressing, as R.H. Tawney put it, the infinite diversities of individuals (Tawney 1931, 208) and their freedom to continuously re-order their associational priorities. However, what stands out for its importance is that individuals were not left isolated in their liberty; they were not imagined as atoms living in a void. Quite the opposite, individuals were understood as strongly interconnected throughout a highly organized society composed by scope-oriented socio–economic groups operating under the general principles of interdependence, complementary, cooperation and coordination.

As different as they might be, the British pluralist traditions of early twentieth century embodied by Maitland, Figgis and Cole betray a common attitude to crucial problems of economic governance, authority and sovereignty. All the pluralist writers, in fact, directed their protests towards the idea of state and central government as the sole authoritative centres, denouncing the inefficiency of liberal democracy to accurately represent a modern industrial society structurally composed of socio–economic associations. On the political economic side, this rationale was hinged on a lively British and European tradition of debating economic democracy, co-partnership, cooperative movement and profit sharing as alternatives both to unregulated capitalism and to nationalization and central planning. Although there was a certain degree of ambiguity in defining what economic democracy means (Poole et al. 2001; Rousselière 2009), in Britain this kind of proposals stretches back to the nineteenth century and relates to the works of John Stuart Mill—on this matter deeply influenced by Fourier, Saint Simon and Owen—and then Henry Fawcett, John E. Cairnes and Alfred Marshall, but also of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, although the Webbs supported a different, consumer-citizen and state-centred perspective (Claeys 1987; Goodway 2016; Persky 2016). As a matter of fact, if the Webbs suggested that the only purpose of trade unions was to fight the employers within a wider socialist-collectivist state context, for Cole labour organizations had to be considered the harbinger of a completely different economic and political

order based on productive industrial organisms (Wright 1979, 29). More focused on the productive side of the economic problem, Cole identified the cure to the liberal state maladies in giving an active political role to the same organizations that were threatening its existence.

Notwithstanding, although the undeniable theoretical richness of the pluralist thinking and Cole's writing prolificacy between 1914 and 1921, a void concerning concrete political proposals persisted. As Cole admitted in 1915, "it remains […] the philosopher's task to say where sovereignty should lie, and the business of the practical man to find the requisite machinery" (Cole 1914–1915, 157). In the next paragraph, we will see how during the war these "practical men" took the baton and started to investigate into concrete institutional solutions to the issues arose by pluralism, applying its teachings to the problems of state, economic groups, industrial relations and post-war reconstruction.

3   PLURALISM AND POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

Already in the first years of the war, contemporary observers recognized the conflict as a historical turning point that would lead to a post-war scenario completely different from all that was known. Nonetheless, the actual nature of this changing, the peculiarity of the new scenario and the solutions proposed to deal with the post-war challenges, did not meet unanimous agreement. One thing was clear: as recalled by a group of young conservatives in retrospect, the conflict "shattered preconceived economic notions, removed irremovable barriers, and created new and undreamt of solutions" (Boothby et al. 1927, 35). Debates and disputes were indeed frequent. Intellectuals and politicians dedicated a great amount of thinking to discuss what kind of answers had to be provided in order to solve the political, economic and social rebus that would emerge from the rubble of the conflict. In this sense, the war in the trenches was mirrored at home by a parallel, bloodless, battle of ideas—"a professors' war," to use the words of Delisle Burns (Delisle Burns 1915, 91)—in which the opponents were arguing on how post-war British and international society had to be imagined and reshaped (Cline 1982).

If this "professors' war" took place primarily within the traditional academic boundaries, taking the shape of conferences, debates and symposiums, the discussions were not caged within the walls of prestigious colleges at Oxford or Cambridge, but soon invaded other areas of the civil society. Trade unions, industrial federations and other economic

associations, in fact, financed and promoted meetings for debating post-war problems, also at the international level (Tosstorff 2005). Moreover, the theoretical skirmish penetrated several government departments, signalling the emergence of the figure of the intellectual-civil servant, who was becoming the main channel of communications between the academic world and the governmental arena. These highly educated civil servants formed a new class of knowledge-based experts that occupied a middle area suspended between state and society, fulfilling crucial positions in key ministries and committees. Connecting universities, enterprises, trade unions, industrial federations, lobbying groups and public administration, these new technocrats started to play a fundamental role, which would reveal all its relevance as the twentieth century progressed (Maier 1987; Clavin 2013; Kohlrausch and Trischler 2014; Kaiser and Schot 2014; Martin 2016).

This said, it is important to underline that almost all the belligerent countries developed new and similar institutional solutions to meet the demands of war between 1914 and 1918. These innovations seriously challenged the functioning of the old-fashioned structure of the liberal state. Overall, the technological and economic demands of the conflict led to establish a new typology of relations between the industrial and military apparatus. When it became clear that the final outcome of the war would have been the resultant of the comprehensive efficiency of the industrial-military national chain, governments started to erect an institutional mechanism of decision-making in key productive sectors involving the representatives of the socio–economic organized forces of the society. In order to efficiently and rapidly allocating resources and raw materials in a coordinated national effort, an unprecedented wartime alliance was forged between governments, employers and workpeople. In Britain, the Treasury Agreement of 1915—a voluntary deal through which trade unions and employers' federations decided to suspend restrictive practices and to settle disputes by arbitration, not by strikes—represented perhaps the most symbolic moment. Among its numerous effects, this cooperative effort was crucial in generating a spirit of national inter-class cooperation that produced non-secondary theoretical consequences. In the last three years of war, in fact, a great amount of time was precisely dedicated to discuss the option of continuing the wartime tripartite employers–workers–government cooperation in times of peace. In this sense, the war became a powerful example in class collaboration and economic codetermination.

Overall, war economy gave the world a screenplay for a new approach to the resolution of social conflict based on the dialogue between highly empowered economic groups on both sides of industry (workers and employers), and between them and the State. In this respect, unfolding the movement of ideas and projects circulating between the pluralist tradition and those units of the British civil service more committed to drafting post-war schemes means disentangling a complex series of networks, individuals and institutional organisms that, between 1916 and 1919, were working on the ideas of industrial harmony, class cooperation and social dialogue, laying the ideological foundations for the creation of a new variety of capitalism and, more specifically, of one of its post-war element, i.e. the ILO.

Among the individuals committed to elaborate a tripartite post-war reconstruction plan, a key role was played by Arthur Greenwood, who was fundamental in channelling a pluralist approach into the ministerial spheres, specifically in the Reconstruction Committee and in the Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Labour.

Born in Leeds in 1880, in the 1920s Greenwood became one of the second-generation Labour Party's leaders, even though he always remained more of a back-room intellectual than a politician (Pimlott 1977, 26). Before the party adopted a new constitution in 1918, Labour was far from a coherent national political organization. It amounted more to an agglomeration of linked but distinct sections, societies, local groups and trade unions. Within this fragmented organization, each part brought its own traditions and cultures, its own political priorities and blueprints (Pugh 2002; Worley 2005). Therefore, for a long time, Labour encapsulated a countless variety of socialisms, for the most part non-Marxist (McKibbin 1984), conformed to a rather abstract set of values, assumptions and ethical references, such as the notions of social justice, equality and improvement. Other than that, however, there were numerous and very different concrete political proposals. Within this context, Greenwood was part of the (dominant) non-collectivist, non-Marxist and moderate trade unionist section of the Labour party. Lecturer of Economics at the University of Leeds, he was close to the Workers' Educational Association, where he met Alfred Zimmern—a historian and political scientist of Oxford, who lately contributed to the foundation of the League of Nations and UNESCO. Zimmern eventually introduced Greenwood to the socialist pluralist tradition and to the thought of G.D.H. Cole. Both Zimmern and Greenwood were also connected to the

early activities of guild socialism in Oxford and London, directly participating to the foundation of the National Guild League in 1915 (Stitt 2006, 64).

In July 1916, Greenwood was invited to participate in a conference organized at the Ruskin College of Oxford on *The Reorganisation of Industry*. In his paper—titled *How Readjustment could be Facilitated after the War*—Greenwood's intimate affinity with socialist pluralism clearly emerged. His main intent was to apply Cole's ideas to the "sombre and less spectacular problems of reconstruction" (Greenwood 1916, 18). Greenwood believed that the issue had to be discussed with "a greater degree of open-mindedness than has hitherto been shown" (Greenwood 1916, 19). Understanding the global conflict as a sort of forerunner of the future on many different levels, Greenwood emphasized the extraordinary intensity and duration of the war effort that led to an unprecedented mobilization of economic and industrial resources. Consequentially, state authority grew massively and the British government became involved in almost every economic area, taking control of transport, coal, armaments, iron and engineering industries to the extent that by the end of the war the ministry of munitions had become the largest employer in the nation. At the same time, Greenwood highlighted, new forms of workers–employers–government relations were being experimented. In this respect, he described how the Treasury Agreement of 1915, which banned strikes and other forms of restrictive practices and aggressive industrial relations, was a landmark moment in facilitating the subsequent creation of joint trade councils. Here, representatives of both sides of the industrial world were attached to government departments as semi-public agencies of industrial controls with a certain amount of self-government powers in their respective sectors.

In so doing, if the war experience certainly set up a formidable example concerning new techniques of government, its legacy resulted more ambiguous than it could appear, especially in terms of actual socio–economic policies. As a matter of fact, basic concepts such as national efficiency, social peace, industrial cooperation and economic codetermination—all widely applied and applauded during the war—could result in very different intellectual reasoning and concrete political outcomes. In few words, wartime economic system produced a twofold theoretical heirloom. On the one hand, the state emerged highly empowered from the war, with new and unprecedented regulatory economic powers. However, on the other hand, self-governing workers-employers experimentations paved the way to a stream of thought that, retrieving the socialist pluralist

tradition, was based on the rejection of the overwhelming role of the state and looked to alternative sources of power to counter-balance and integrated the supremacy of central government.

Various narratives of the war, each showcase unique and novel forces, crucially shaped post-war reconstruction proposals concerning the institutional architecture of the country. Majoring on one element of the wartime organization or another could have led to very different set of post-war institutions. In this sense, in 1916, Greenwood argued that it was absolutely "necessary to observe the changes which have taken place during the war" (Greenwood 1916, 19) looking primarily to the problem of democratization in the economic sphere: "industry—he protested— alone of all departments of national and social activity, shows few signs of becoming democratic" (Greenwood 1916, 24). Here, the model of wartime economy stood out as a real breaking point in the history of humanity. As Greenwood phrased in a 1915 co-edited book, "the society of yesterday can never return […] because of the growth of new ideas under the stimulus of the war" (Greenwood 1915, 303). Those ideas, as well as their concrete resultant and institutional experimentations, suggested to Greenwood that a true democratic control of industry could be achieved only delegating economic decision power to a permanent mechanism of institutional cooperation between labour and capital. The instrument through which this goal could be achieved was the establishment of sectorial and national representative bodies jointly set up by trade unions, industrial associations and the government. Debating the creation of such a bodies, Greenwood argued that "if there is to be anything approaching satisfactory reconstruction, it can only be by the organised workers of this country being taken into full consultation on equal terms with the employers," thereby stressing "the importance of national joint conferences of each industry" (Greenwood 1916, 26).

It was in this respect that Greenwood's pluralist and guild socialist backgrounds became more explicit. As wartime political and socio–economic experience became a giant example in terms of harmonic national cooperation, social peace and class collaboration, in Greenwood's opinion wartime economic model represented only the first step towards the establishment of a full functioning industrial democracy based on socialist pluralist guild principles. The way of achieving such a goal was extending the war political novelty of tripartite-corporatist institutional cooperation in peacetime. Since "the reorganisation of each industry is a matter which affects the workers as much as the capitalists and the

managers," Greenwood affirmed (Greenwood 1916, 25), the wartime industrial relation system had to be interpreted as the base of a new kind of society characterized by a distribution of legislative and authoritative powers among organized economic groups. Trying to envisage the new institutional landscape, Greenwood proposed to establish a Ministry of Labour having the duty of coordinating and controlling the functioning of local, regional and national industrial councils. In this way a continuous and permanent negotiation between officially recognized organized interests and the state would be created, ensuring harmony and progress for the entire national community (Greenwood 1916, 25).

4   The Reconstruction Committee and the Whitley Report

Apart from serving as a powerful political and economic model, the war also offered a group of intellectuals and scholars the opportunity to actually undertake concrete actions to develop post-war reconstruction projects.

In March 1916, the Prime Minister Herbert H. Asquith set up the Reconstruction Committee, an organism aimed at considering problems and solutions concerning industrial and economic policy to be conducted after the end of the war (Johnson 1968; Stitt 2006). Led by Asquith's former private secretary Vaughan Nash, the Reconstruction Committee had a slow start during the spring and summer of 1916, commencing to appoint specific working sub-committees only during the fall of the same year. In this occasion, a specific Sub-Committee for the Study of the Relations between Employers and Employed was created in October 1916, chaired by the liberal politician John H. Whitley, future speaker of the House of Commons during the 1920s. Among the members of the sub-committee, there were important personalities of the academic world, such as S.J. Chapman and J.A. Hobson; two female social reformers, Susan Lawrence and Mona Wilson; and representatives of the most important industrial sectors of the wartime period, namely Sir Thomas Redcliffe-Ellis from the mining industry, Sir George Claughton from the rail industry, Sir George Carter from shipbuilding, and Allan Smith, chairman of the powerful Engineering Employers' Federation. The sub-committee, which soon became known as the Whitley Committee, eventually produced a memorandum in March 1917, known as the Whitley Report, which was made public in October of the same year.

During the second half of 1916, Greenwood was appointed general secretary of the Reconstruction Committee, probably under Zimmern's recommendation, who had already been working for the British civil service since 1912. The choice also coincided with a more vigorous attempt conducted by Cole and his movement to influence governmental initiatives concerning post-war reconstruction plans. In order to increase the influence exerted by guild socialism on the political scenario—"we are a tiny body of intellectuals setting out of what seems an impossible task,"[1] lamented Cole in a letter to Zimmern in April 1915—Greenwood and Zimmern became the most relevant channels through which guild socialism tried to wedge itself into the Reconstruction Committee, bending post-war reconstruction schemes, and especially the Whitley Report, towards socialist pluralist proposals.

As mentioned, the Whitley Report was firstly delivered on the 17th of March 1917 but it was publicly disclosed by the government only in October, right after the conclusion of the strikes in the engineering industries. The report was released on the 19th of October 1917, accompanied by an official letter signed by the recently appointed ministry of labour George H. Roberts. The Whitley Report was a quite simple and thin document. As some commentators pointed out, it seemed that the report was formulated as a discussion basis, more than as a technical operative document. However, it contained several points of interest. Once again the war was indicated as a crucial turning point, a period of important experiment in managing industrial mass society. The ministry himself explained this perspective in the letter coming with the publication of the report, arguing that, with regard to the political situation, "the experience of the war has shown the need for frequent consultation between the government and the chosen representatives of both employers and workmen" (Roberts 1917, 3). In this sense, the report presented a very positive judgment of the wartime industrial relations system. Indeed, the war offered "a great opportunity" (Committee on Relations Between Employers and Employed 1917, 8) and the continuation of its decision-making mechanisms into the future was more than desirable. The statement in this sense was rather explicit and left room for no doubt: "in the interest of the community—the report stated—it is vital that after the war the co-operation of all classes, established

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[1] *Letter of G.D.H. Cole to Alfred Zimmern*, April 18, 1915, in Bodleian Library Special Collection, Oxford, Zimmern Papers, Ms. Zimmern 14.

during the war, should continue, and more especially with regard to the relations between employers and employed" (Committee on Relations Between Employers and Employed 1917, 9). In this way, the wartime socio–economic and political model of continuous bargaining and inter-class cooperation became the ultimate panacea of all the problems of the capitalist society.

Overall, if the conflict was interpreted as a ground breaking event in the history of human societies, and in particular in the history of industrial relations, it simultaneously represented a sort of confirmation of the early twentieth century pluralist predictions concerning the insufficiency of the liberal state and the relevance of groups in society. More specifically, the conflict certified that central government alone was unable to improve industrial efficiency and ensure social peace; on the other hand, the war proved how a decentralized system, supported by an active embroilment of labour, capital and government, could yield positive results, both from a social and economic viewpoint. The observation of such a development strengthened a theoretical narrative of transforming and adjusting old paradigms, converting the organized interest group—generated outside the traditional juridical borders of liberal state and economy—into perma-nent sources of political power aimed at complementing the authority of the traditional elected parliament.

However, in order to avoid sparking alarmism among the entrepreneur community, the ministry's letter specified that the plan intended to limit a further expansion of state economic intervention, somehow anticipating the post-war conservative stabilization impetus. The joint industrial coun-cils proposed in the report "would be autonomous bodies, and they would, in effect, make possible a larger degree of self-government in industry than exists to-day" (Roberts 1917, 2). In this sense, the report located the technical and political skills needed to guarantee a durable and peaceful post-war industrial reconstruction "among those directly connected with the trade" (Committee on Relations Between Employers and Employed 1917, 9), thereby enhancing the social as well as the political role of an economic community organized in trade unions and employers' federations. The representatives of industry, in fact, were the only ones possessing the "intimate knowledge of the facts and circum-stances of each trade" (Committee on Relations Between Employers and Employed 1917, 9) needed in order to enact a useful economic legis-lation. In other words, the committee proposed a balancing mechanism

of distributing powers between political and technical bodies, thus establishing a multilevel and coordinated system of decision-making founded on the transformation of private economic organizations into reliable sources of power and instruments of authority.

Although certainly poor and vague, the report presented a first sketch of the post-war institutional scheme desired. The ultimate objective was "the establishment for each industry of an organisation, representative of employers and workpeople, to have as its object the regular consideration of matters affecting the progress and well-being of the trade from the point of view of all those engaged in it" (Roberts 1917, 2). To do so, the authors recommended the creation of a three-level structure for each industrial sector, whose representatives of employers and employed had to cooperate in joint councils on a national, district and workshop level. The scheme suggested the institution of a decentralized decisional machinery, where national industrial councils had to deal with matters of national importance, while the district councils had to manage district matters within the limits laid down at a national level, and finally the workshops committees had to take care of problems peculiar to a single workshop without altering the national and district framework. The proposed joint industrial council chain had to be in charge of a great number of issues affecting their respective industries, from questions of training, education and industrial research, to other key elements in the life of the workshops, such as the conditions of labour, wages, methods of negotiation and arbitrating (Committee on Relations Between Employers and Employed 1917, 10–12).

Although the report received a quite positive evaluation both from the government and the organizations of employers and workpeople, its actual adoption in the post-war years was rather weak, especially due to the mutated socio–economic and political scenario of the 1920s and the 1930s. Nonetheless, the Whitley Report marked an important step in the direction of affirming the institutional cooperation of workers, employers and government—a formula that would soon be known as tripartism or corporatism—as a possible solution to industrial problems and social conflict. Overall, the wartime industrial system came to represent a feasible model for governing the multiplicity of actors already acknowledged by the pre-war pluralist tradition, or at least it showed a viable way towards it. Furthermore, the Whitley Report constituted an important step in combining wartime lessons of class cooperation and pluralist thinking, emphasizing the political role of the socio–economic

organized groups within a non-monopolistic, coordinated and decentralized institutional framework. Ironically, the society of societies imagined by Figgis in 1913 and the tripartite formula proposed in the Whitley Report of 1917 would not be implemented at home, but it would be adopted as the basic working principle by a completely new international organization created in Paris in 1919 with clear anti-revolutionary intents: the International Labour Organization.

5   Tripartism and the Foundation of the International Labour Organization

The treaty of peace ending World War I established the ILO as an international organism devoted to promote fair labour conditions, sound industrial relations, effective social dialogue and international peace. The basic principle of its functioning was the cooperation between the representatives of governments, employers and workpeople in all its official organisms, i.e. the general assembly, the governing body and the international labour office. In order to understand how this mechanism of decision-making process was debated and approved, this paragraph focuses on the process through which the tripartite idea came to influence the proposals of the British delegates to the Commission on International Labour Legislation that inaugurated the ILO in 1919. More precisely, the analysis will be centred on the internal dynamics of the British civil service during the two final years of the war, focusing on key individuals serving into two crucial ministries of the time, the Ministry of Labour, created at the end of 1916, and the Ministry of Reconstruction, which evolved in 1917 from the previous Reconstruction Committee.

As we already saw, between 1916 and 1917 Arthur Greenwood played a crucial role in connecting the socialist pluralist tradition of G.D.H. Cole and the Sub-Committee for the Study of the Relations between Employers and Employed working under the Reconstruction Committee umbrella. Between 1917 and 1919, Edward Phelan—a civil servant of the ministry of labour, future director of the ILO between 1941 and 1948—performed an equally important linking function. Born in the south of Ireland in 1888, Phelan graduated in mathematics and physics at the University of Liverpool, where he moved with his family in 1895. Just before the war, he joined the civil service, where he occupied the role of researcher at the Board of Trade conducting an enquiry into the housing conditions in Britain (Van Goethem 2010). The outbreak of the conflict

led to a suspension of the enquiry, but when Lloyd George became Prime Minister in December 1916, Thomas Jones—one of Lloyd George's closer advisers—called Phelan to organize the Intelligence Division of the newly created Ministry of Labour (Lowe 1974 and 1986).

Phelan was not a theoretician or an academic. Often described as an intelligent, hardworking, capacious and practical man, during his career he developed no taste for abstract plans with no foreseeable application. At the same time he always showed a keen fascination for "the vanguard of original thought expressed in practical terms" (ILO 2009, 1). Possessing the sensibility and intuition for establishing a fruitful dialogue between state bureaucracy and high theory, between public servants, political scientists and economists, Phelan seems to fit perfectly the portrait of the "practical man" that Cole was looking for since 1915 (Cole 1914–1915, 157). In this sense, Phelan showed a remarkable aptitude for anchoring intellectual reasoning to the ground transforming abstract projects into reality. Besides, Phelan's importance in structuring the ILO is above question. In his autobiography, James T. Shotwell, an American history professor who participated at the Paris Conference and in the foundation of the ILO, affirmed that "the International Labour Organization owes more to him [Phelan] than will probably ever be widely known" (Shotwell 1961, 97). More specifically, Phelan is credited both with developing the tripartite formula in the context of the peace negotiations, and with ensuring the principle as the base functioning of the ILO.

In 1916 Phelan was assigned by the Board of Trade to the study of the British industrial capacity of producing war material with special concern to the wage rate fixing issue. As such, he regularly cooperated with other governmental departments interested in the matter, such as the Home Office, the Ministry of National Service, and the Ministry of Reconstruction. In the same period, between 1916 and 1918, as the war went on and new ministries and governmental organisms were established, a small group of civil servants started to made a practice of lunching together once a week in Westminster in order to informally discuss problems of administration and institutional architecture (ILO 2009, 97–98). Arthur Greenwood, who was then working at the Reconstruction Committee, had already met Phelan years before in Oxford at the local meetings of the Oxford Group of the Workers' Educational Association (ILO 2009, 66) and introduced him to the group. These weekly luncheons at Westminster turned out to be fundamental for Phelan's career. In fact, during

these occasions he became acquainted with Thomas Jones, Deputy Secretary to the Lloyd George's cabinet. In this capacity, at the beginning of 1917, Jones confessed to Phelan Lloyd George's plan to establish a Ministry of Labour, asking him to organize a new labour intelligence division. Phelan welcomed the idea, enthusiastically accepting the position. He considered essential that governments equip themselves with official departments aimed at studying labour issues, compiling statistics and analyzing industrial relation legislations and practices, both about Britain and abroad. Thus, in his opinion, the new Ministry of Labour "should be given the function of studying every aspect of them [labour questions] and watching developments both at home and abroad." Therefore, such a ministry should have "a labour intelligence division which would keep under review the whole subject" (ILO 2009, 98). Consequentially, in the following months Phelan, together with Charles MacMullan, was put in charge of organizing the Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Labour, which became one of the most important research sections under the control of the government, with its headquarters located at the Montagu House.

The Intelligence Division was headed by the Liberal politician Sir John Hope Simpson and devoted all its energies to studying matters of general policy linked with labour issues. It was organized in two sections, one led by MacMullan, which had to deal with home matters, and the other headed by Phelan, with the aim of analyzing foreign material and problems. The Intelligence Division started to produce a weekly report on labour conditions in Britain and abroad, jointly prepared by MacMullan and Phelan. The working procedure of the division was uncommon. A member of what Phelan called the "production staff"—i.e. university professors and lecturers with whom the division was in touch—was summoned in order to study a particular topic. After receiving general instructions and all the information the division possessed, the researcher was left free to conduct whatever other research might be necessary and to write a report without interference. The process was then concluded holding a final meeting with the division's officials in order to collectively discuss the conclusions reached by the investigation (ILO 2009, 101). Phelan was rather proud of this procedure. In his opinion, this method had the merit of initiating a socially profitable "system of bringing academic scholarship and administrative experience into collaboration to explore problems of social policy" (ILO 2009, 101).

By the late summer of 1918, as the war seemed to be closer to a conclusion, the entire governmental community became more preoccupied by problems that could arise in the post-war period, and more generally by the social, economic and political equilibrium that had to be re-constructed after the unprecedented and tragic experience of conflict. Phelan and the Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Labour were not an exception and, confident of their well established system of combining academic knowledge and administrative experience, they started to draft schemes to bring to the attention of the incoming peace conference, especially in regards to labour and industrial relation issues. Reflections on these matters started to occupy the pages of the Intelligence Division weekly reports, but more importantly constituted the central concerns of a memorandum redacted by Phelan and issued in October 1918, titled *Memorandum on character and status of an International Labour Commission*[2] and known as the Phelan Memorandum, which eventually received the support both of the Ministry of Labour and the Home Office.

The Phelan Memorandum of October 1918 was prepared with the help of Hector Hetherington, a former student at Oxford University and Professor of Logic and Philosophy at University College Cardiff since 1915. The document strongly stated the necessity and urgency of establishing an international labour commission in order to study, debate and advance labour legislation at a supranational level. Precise political and economic reasons underpinned the particularly special effort of the British government in endorsing such an international labour organism. After four years of war, imposed social peace and restrictions, Lloyd George could not refuse to include labour issues in the peace conference without a risk of antagonizing labour circles that were currently supporting the government, thereby producing undesirable consequences menacing the on-going social order and industrial peace. Furthermore, from a purely economic point of view, Lloyd George was perfectly aware that, once international free competition would be restored after the war, British exporting industries could only benefit from an international agency ensuring supranational standards on wages and conditions of labour,

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[2] *Memorandum on character and status of an International Labour Commission*, October 1918, in Shotwell Papers, 1.03.P01, Archives of the International Labour Organization (AILO), Geneva.

thereby reducing the impact of foreign industrial competition (Alcock 1971, 19).

In order to reach these objectives, the Phelan Memorandum recommended the implementation at a supranational level of a new mechanism capable of achieving an appropriate and effective international labour legislation. At this regard, the Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Labour embraced the view already expressed by the Whitley Report, enhancing the political and decision-making role of the socio–economic interest groups. With remarkable similarities also in relation to the phrasing, the Phelan Memorandum argued that only the industrial delegates could represent those "authoritative men of wide knowledge and experience who are in immediate contact with industry."[3] Only they could be instrumental in securing an economically appropriate and politically viable international labour legislation. In this sense, Phelan appeared to be quite aware of the necessity of a new kind of constituency. However, his more urgent problem did not seem to be whether the delegates had to be selected among the three classes of governments, employers and workpeople, rather what balance had to be established between them. Scaling up the issue, the memorandum stated that "the real question [...] is not whether representatives of all three classes should be sent—it is manifestly necessary that the knowledge and experience of all three should be available—but whether or not all should go with equal status."[4] Therefore, in October 1918 the question was not anymore whether tripartism had to be the proper response to the crisis of the liberal parliament, state and economy, but in what form tripartism should be concretely implemented: what balances had to be conceived in order to reach a new socio–political equilibrium.

In his unfinished memoirs published by the ILO in 2009, Phelan described the choice for tripartism as an obvious one, a logical solution based on the fact that in order to deal with labour matters the new organism "would have to bring together technically qualified representatives of the interests involved, namely workers, employers and government departments concerned with industrial matters" (ILO 2009, 141). Nonetheless, the technical motivation was coupled with a more political

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[3] Ivi, 2.

[4] Ivi, 7.

reason, which expanded the list of the virtues of tripartism. Pre-war industrial struggles clearly demonstrated the conflicting potentialities of the modern capitalist society. In order to undermine them, therefore, political decisions had to be observed by the majority of citizens, without causing any form of social upheavals or industrial turmoil. Consequentially, the memorandum of October 1918 took particular care in explaining how only a tripartite organization would have both the technical capacity and political authority to reach this fundamental objective: "if the enactments of the Commission are to be effectively observed, a great deal will depend on their loyal acceptance by both the workpeople and the employers of every country. This is less likely to be secured unless those who are to speak for each party are the nominees of each party and of full rank in the Councils of the Commission."[5]

Overall, the similarities between the Phelan Memorandum and the results of the Whitley Report are significant, thereby suggesting a direct line of influence. Moreover, a same theoretical viewpoint—that is political pluralism generally understood—appeared to underpin both the projects, framing their thinking and proposals. In fact, both the joint industrial councils recommended by the Whitley Report and the international labour commission outlined by the Intelligence Division had as its core the notion that governments alone did not possess neither the authority nor the technical skills necessary for implementing and enacting a valuable labour legislation able to support a non-socially disrupting economic progress, guaranteeing at the same time a wide-ranging welfare and private property, social order and individual profit.

Another proof of the connections existing between the Whitley Report and the Phelan Memorandum is given by the personal relationship between Arthur Greenwood—who, as we saw, was the mastermind behind the Whitley Report, as well as the linking figure between Cole's guild socialism and the Reconstruction Committee—and Edward Phelan, the author of the Phelan Memorandum. That closeness emerged quite clearly if we look at the process of getting the memorandum approved by the governmental departments involved as described by Phelan in his memoirs. The process was quite slow at the beginning. As the war ended on the 11th of November 1918, the British government was facing a rather chaotic situation, mainly caused by the rising discontent of the

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[5] *Memorandum on character and status of an International Labour Commission*, October 2018, 7.

population due to housing conditions, unemployment, dissatisfaction and resentment of ex-soldiers. In this context, during the last days of October, Phelan was convinced that the Ministry of Labour did not properly prioritize the discussion on his memorandum. Hoping to speed up the issue, Phelan decided to resort to his personal connections, directly approaching Greenwood, who had recently been appointed Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Reconstruction, and asking him whether the matter debated in his memorandum was receiving sufficient consideration (ILO 2009, 142–43). After a couple of days, Greenwood arranged a meeting between him, Phelan and Vaughan Nash, now Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Reconstruction, in order to discuss the issues rose by memorandum. After that, the text started to rapidly circulate within the Home Office, arriving in the hands of Malcom Delavigne, who had a great experience in international labour issues having been the British delegate to international conferences on labour regulations in Bern between 1905 and 1913 (Van Daele 2005).

In this way, thanks to Greenwood's early approval and intervention, Phelan's document and ideas circulated in various departments. At the end of 1918, the text arrived on Lloyd George's desk. The Prime Minister, knowing that a general election had to be held soon after the conclusion of the war, immediately backed the idea of creating an international labour organism, mainly to avoid alienating moderate trade unionists' and labour circles' support. Eventually, the Cabinet decided to create a special labour section of the British delegation sent at the Peace Conference in Paris. The labour section was then formed by George Barnes, a trade unionist who was a Minister without portfolio in the Lloyd George Cabinet; Malcolm Delavigne of the Home Office; and finally, by Harold Butler and Edward Phelan of the Ministry of Labour. The Phelan Memorandum became the official British proposal to the Paris negotiations concerning international labour questions.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The British delegation arrived in Paris in January 1919. After several internal meetings, held between the 15th and the 25th of January, a polished version of the Phelan Memorandum was drafted. The new document—officially called the *Draft convention creating a permanent organization for the promotion of the international regulation of labour conditions*—incorporated all the basic ideas and principles of the first

memorandum, specifically stressing the importance of the tripartite constituency proposal.[6] On the 2nd of February, the draft was placed before the members of the Labour Commission of the Peace Conference, where it was debated until the 24th of March 1919. After the discussion and the final approval, the International Labour Organization was established and the results of the Labour Commission were included in the sections I and II of the Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles. Section I, composed by forty articles, was and continues to be nowadays the ILO's constitution.

The text formally realized the first pillar of the ILO, i.e. international tripartism. As we saw, the formula was an experiment in codetermination, balancing the need of representing the economic forces of the society—at the time identified in industrial federations and trade unions—with the necessity of having equally strong governmental representation. The final result was the so-called 2:1:1 formula, namely two votes for governments and one each for employers and workpeople, a scheme also proposed by Phelan (ILO 2009, 19–20). This asymmetric allocation of powers was considered necessary in order to guarantee the overall feasibility of the project, as the ILO architects realistically understood that labour legislation, although approved by an international institution, had to be concretely pursued and enacted by national governments.

Insofar as social and political practices require their participants and creators to possess a certain understanding of the world, we examined the historical roots of the tripartite practice by asking how the underlying specific understanding arose. Investigating the intellectual origins of the ILO tripartite formula, this chapter has identified three crucial and interconnected moments constituting its historical development: first of all, the British pluralist re-evaluation of the political relevance of the socio–economic group; secondly, the various wartime discussions among intellectuals, politicians and civil servants about post-war reconstruction plans; finally, the role played by the labour British delegation in Paris in shaping the philosophy of inter-class collaboration and economic codetermination, concretely mirrored in the ILO tripartite functioning.

In the post-war context, international tripartism appeared to be a powerful conceptual instrument, developed by a group of British civil

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[6] *Draft convention creating a permanent organization for the promotion of the international regulation of labour conditions*, January 26, 1919, p. 2, in Shotwell Papers, 1.07.S01, AILO, Geneva.

servants within a cultural environment dominated by the fall of the traditional liberal political explanations and socio–economic convictions, and by the emergence of the multifaceted pluralist tradition. Then, if tripartism made its first explicit appearance during the war as an emergency tool of war economy management, the idea was warmly embraced by a group of moderate socialists, public servants, and technocrats. For them, tripartism represented a perfect instrument to unleash their attack both against the old-fashioned laissez-faire capitalism of the nineteenth century, and against the collectivist socialist state brandished by the Bolsheviks in Russia, thereby triggering a narrative of a national salvific inter-class cooperation between government, employers and workpeople, to be reproduced in the post-war world. At this point, pluralism served as a strong reference benchmark used by key men within the Ministry of Reconstruction in order to draft post-war projects, such as the Whitley Report and the joint industrial councils herein proposed.

At the end of the conflict these two elements—pluralism and wartime industrial relations—provided the key principles underpinning the scheme elaborated by the Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Labour—i.e. the Phelan Memorandum—for creating an international organism specialized in labour legislation based on an original tripartite government-employers–workpeople constituency. Therefore, not only it is possible to recognize a conceptual *fil rouge* running among the three different but connected moments of the elaboration of the tripartite idea—that is between British pluralism, post-war Reconstruction Committee's project, and the Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Labour—but it is also possible to stress a profound unity of problems, solutions, and individuals involved in the entire process.

Nonetheless, if Cole's socialist pluralism was always leaning towards a quasi-libertarian approach (Goodway 2016, 28), the actual concretization of the empowerment of the economic groups in the ILO resulted instead in a technocratic and anti-revolutionary experiment. This outcome was fully consistent with a post-1918 international conservative momentum in search of new governing techniques to secure a bourgeois stability against the backdrop of a dramatically escalating social conflict (Haimson and Sapelli 1992; Wrigley 1993). Therefore, in their transportation from the British scenario to the international level at the ILO, pluralist and guild socialist ideas were blended to a wider reconstruction design, where labour representation was put at the service of a larger capitalist stabilization policy. In this sense, the war had both innovatory and conservative

outcomes. In fact, if on the one hand the conflict generated a movement towards labour empowerment, governance experimentation and institutional creativity, on the other hand the results of this imaginative effort were used in order to ensure a new form of social order functional to the post-war survival of the capitalist system.

Therefore, in 1919 the creation of a tripartite international organization for labour legislation represented a tentative answer to the social crisis of the liberal state and economy, stemming the spreading of a Bolshevik-type revolution. Regardless of its concrete results, at its outset the ILO came to represent a social liberal laboratory, mostly European—neither the United States nor Soviet Russia joined it—for experimenting a variant of capitalist international management (Hall and Soskice 2001) in which a certain amount of legislative power was delegated to the representatives of national economic organizations. In this sense, tripartism became a way of exploring a form of regulated market capitalism, grounded on a culture of coordination and codetermination between economic groups and the state, as opposed to a liberal market system subject to a philosophy of individualism and deregulation (Regini 2003).

Another element that emerges from the analysis is that the most prominent ILO interwar voice, its first director Albert Thomas, played no role in securing the ILO tripartite governance. Although profoundly involved in French wartime tripartite organizational practices (Walter-Busch 2006; Blaszkiewicz-Maison 2015) as well as in the European labour network (Aglan et al. 2008), Thomas did not participate to the Labour Commission in Paris or to the Washington first ILO conference (Maul 2019, 36). In the period 1918–1919 the entire process of creating the ILO and its tripartite structure was monopolized by British civil servants, leading us to the necessity of scaling down Thomas' influence over the creation of the ILO.

In conclusion, tripartism at the ILO came to represent, as the Belgian socialist Emile Vandervelde put it, the triumph of the British revolution over the Soviet revolution (Alcock 1971, 37), or, to use the words of James Shotwell, it provided an alternative to violent revolution, a way to "prove the workers of the world that the principles of social justice might be established under the capitalist system" (Shotwell 1933, 18). In so doing, a procedure of social concertation and codetermination was inaugurated; a procedure that would reach its apogee after World War II. As well known, in fact, the spectacular growth of the post-1945 period was hinged on an array of variants of tripartism, neo-corporatist

intermediation, codetermination and economic concertation. Despite the lexical heterogeneity of the twentieth century, a conceptual uniformity permeated the new practices of governance of a different typology of capitalism. After 1945 the key element of an ordered and non-conflicting capitalist society was indeed found in a set of institutions and informal practices grounded on the principle of tripartite codetermination, that is trade unions, employers associations and growth-minded governments cooperating in order to mobilize credit for investments and stabilizing wages in a full employment effort. At this regard, historians have long comprehended that the norms and principles underpinning the post-1945 neo-corporatist coordinated capitalist institutional framework did not appear overnight, but they were instead inherited from the past (Maier 1987; Eichengreen 2007). The formation of the ILO and the pluralist understanding of the reality of its architects were part and parcel of this wider story: a piece in the transformation of the international capitalist system along the twentieth century.

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