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# *Analysis of the ILO notion of Work related to that of Cooperatives*

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## Introduction

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From its very start, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has embraced cooperatives and the cooperative movement with strong interest. Since 1920, immediately after its foundation, the ILO received an explicit mandate to work on cooperatives and has had a unit dedicated to cooperatives, currently called 'Cooperative Unit', situated within the Enterprise Department.

The ILO has been the only United Nations' organization to issue a global normative instrument on cooperatives, the ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation 193 of 2002<sup>1</sup>, and has always had a cooperative programme, which continues to this date: *"Today, the Sustainable Enterprise Programme works with ILO constituents (governments, trade unions and employers' organizations) and representatives of cooperative organizations of all types and sizes to help cooperatives create and sustain employment and contribute to promoting decent work and social justice"*.<sup>2</sup> Its history makes it a unique place to analyse how the concepts of cooperative and work interrelate in the international sphere and understand better what focus there has been on cooperatives and work.

In 2019, the ILO will celebrate a hundred years of existence, a great achievement in a century of rapid pace of change and many times of turmoil. Such feat shows a strong capacity of adaptation to the changing context as well as in dealing with key areas of interest to the world of work. Probably, its unique tripartite structure, by gathering in its annual sessions of the International Labour Conference (ILC) the representatives of governments, employers and trade unions, has been decisive in its ability to adapt and be relevant. The ILO is unique among the United Nations (UN) organizations with its *tripartism* and it is the longest lasting international organisation. Its worldwide presence with many offices and worldwide expert bodies also makes the ILO an important site to grasp both the potential of cooperatives and the challenges they face.

The key question is to observe the evolution in the interplay between the concepts of work and of cooperative at the ILO. The relationship between work and cooperatives is never straightforward or exhaustive, but it is possible to situate it in ILO documents, placing it against contextual theories and debates. Moreover, the ILO has no mandate to work on the concept of enterprise as it does on issues of labour in the broadest sense.

Why is it important to undertake a conceptual analysis when we talk about work and cooperatives? Concepts are formed in two ways: on the one hand by agreeing to the defining properties of the concept, and, on the other hand, by agreeing to the typical characteristics of parts or members in a prototype model of the concept (Rosch

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R193](http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R193)

<sup>2</sup> Source [http://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS\\_175504/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_175504/lang--en/index.htm)

1993). Concepts may be combined to express new notions as well as to develop language (as in Wisniewski's alignment concept, 2000). By identifying a large number of associations and refinements between sub-categories and major concepts, differences and patterns in relationships can emerge.

Concepts are used for different purposes:

1. To generalize patterns and relationships,
2. To make associations and sustain judgments,
3. To maintain a long term memory and thus create a sense of history, and
4. To guide action and policy.

But the argument here is that, in international organizations such as the ILO, concepts are rooted in epistemic communities, "networks of knowledge-based experts" in Haas terms, that articulate "*cause-and-effect relationships of complex problems, helping states identify their interests, framing the issues for collective debate, proposing specific policies, and identifying salient points for negotiation*" (Haas 1992, page 2). Indeed, the ILO's relationship with the cooperative movement is stated in the article 12 of the ILO Constitution. The ILO will work "*with public international organizations having specialized responsibilities in related fields*", and will consult "*as it may think desirable with recognized non-governmental international organizations, including international organizations of employers, workers, agriculturists and cooperators*" who will "*participate without vote in its deliberations*".

The ILO has been a leading institution with impact on legal frameworks. From 1920, the International Labour Office (Office) assisted member States of the ILO to improve their cooperative law. In 1966, the ILO Recommendation on cooperatives was only for developing countries but the 2002 one covers the whole world. This global view entails a normative approach. Hagen Henry<sup>3</sup>, who wrote about legal guidelines on cooperatives and is a former Head of the ILO Cooperative Unit, speaks of the building of an international legal corpus that was nonexistent 10 years ago. In view of the emergence of an international corpus on cooperatives in which the ILO has had an important role, it is appropriate to analyse the concept of **work** in relation to that of **cooperatives** as expressed in key ILO texts.

The analysis will focus on three major moments:

- a) First years of ILO from 1919 to the 1930s.
- b) Post World War I period until the late 1980s.
- c) Start of the 21st century until 2015.

These three periods coincide with the creation of the ILO and the two major ILO documents focusing on cooperatives: a) the first years of existence of the ILO at the end of the World War I and the role of the first ILO Director Albert Thomas, who was a '*cooperativist*', b) the 1966 ILO Recommendation No 127 in the period post World War II, and c) the 2002 ILO Recommendation No 193 in the current period of globalisation and financial-economic crises.

## Methodology

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The methodological framework is based on grounded theory and a constructivist approach aimed at observing interactive normative conceptualisations of both cooperatives and work along the ILO history. This study is not a management or bureaucratic politics study but a study grounded on ILO documents. The analysis will trace normative elements, which refer to what ought to be or what should be done in order to obtain valuable outcomes as desired by the drafter or leading voice.

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<sup>3</sup> See Hagen Henry's Guidelines for Cooperative Legislation, various editions, ILO

Grounded theory provides the theoretical approach as a research method that seeks to develop theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

The author visited and researched Databases and Archives, in particular those of the ILO, guided by valuable support from ILO officials. Other long-time working ILO officials, including two Head of the Cooperative Unit, dedicated to cooperatives, were also very valuable in their interviews and exchange of documents.

Concept Analysis is a theory of data analysis which identifies conceptual structures with a capability of producing visualizations of the inherent structures among data. To understand the key concepts, these must be explored as discrete concepts and also as they appear naturally in whatever approach may have been established by the institution. At this stage, this paper discusses the main insights semerging from the data and texts themselves.

Normative elements may entail a prescription or a recommendation. In the case of standards, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in its Directives Part 2 differentiates between normative and informative, and between general normative and technical normative elements. The normative element describes the scope of the document or sets out provisions, provisions that may include recommendations, requirements and statements (permissions, possibilities and capabilities).

There is a difference in the ILO text hierarchy between the ILO texts produced through negotiations during ILC sessions and other ILO texts stemming from the ILO Office and, in particular, there are no similar texts for the first period under analysis. The author has therefore visited the 'Albert Thomas' ILO Archives that gathers all documentation related to the first ILO Director. Since the ILO Directors have had a significant imprint on the organization, texts and letters by Albert Thomas or between Albert Thomas and representatives of cooperatives, reveal important clues and a coherent discourse.

There are several challenges in this analysis. Concepts and terms expressed in the documents may not be fully defined and there may be variation in interpretation. Terminology changes and evolves over time. As mentioned above, the ILO has a hierarchy of documents and not all documents carry the same weight within the organization. The ILO works in several languages and there may be variations among them but, for restrictions of time, this work will focus only on the ILO Recommendations in English. The author has translated Albert Thomas' writing from French into English, after taking photos at the ILO Archive. Moreover, the ILO works with partners, namely other UN agencies, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, the latest to establish a 2020 Vision.<sup>4</sup> Given time constraints, this proposal leaves to a second stage the ILO work done in partnership with other agencies and academic research published in peer reviewed journals.

## 1. First period after the World War and the first years of the ILO

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### 1.1. First ILO Director Albert Thomas on work and cooperatives

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The ILO was created by the Peace Treaty of Versailles just after the end of World War I in 1919. Following a period of globalisation and liberalisation, colonisation and imperialism at the end of the 19th century, nationalism and rearmament had led to the World War I. Besides, in 1917, the Russian revolution had taken place. Europe had millions of displaced refugees, poor and disabled soldiers. Production and supply of almost everything was disrupted.

The Peace Treaty of Versailles gave two justifications to the ILO. First, the one which is most well-known, that *"peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice"* while conditions of labour were so unjust, hard and causing privation as to produce unrest. Second, there was an argument about unfair trade competition through a race to the bottom: *"Whereas also the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in*

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<sup>4</sup> The vision is to achieve a 'more participatory and sustainable cooperative enterprises with a clear identity supported by legal frameworks and secure reliable capital'.

*the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries"* (Peace Treaty of Versailles, Part XIII, Section 1).

From the start, the ILO was set as a permanent institution with a membership of nation-states (Peace Treaty of Versailles, article 387) that would work on the basis of a tripartite dialogue along corporatist interest representation (article 393) to *"deal with questions of industry and employment"* (Idem, article 397). Its main functions were based on data collection and treatment of *"all subjects relating to the international adjustment of conditions of industrial life and labour... with a view to the conclusion of international conventions"* (Idem, article 396). Thus, the ILO came to enjoy two types of power, a soft persuasive power through *tripartism* and a harder power through international conventions that are binding. During the first period, the ILO documents effectively include a huge number of conventions, special studies and building of databases.

According to the ILO Timeline by Igor Vocatch-Voldirev, ILO official at the Cooperative Unit, ICA General Secretary Henry May suggested to Albert Thomas that the ILO should have representatives of the cooperatives *"to close a gap in the ILO's constitution"* in 1919.

In March 1920, according to Albert Thomas, the first ILO Director, a unanimous decision by the ILO Council of Administration led the ILO *"to monitor the cooperative movement... a mass movement... a movement of ideas... that moves towards the goals of fairness, order and worker emancipation... The ILO... had to exploit this treasure of practical experiences that represent the cooperative movement... almost all general problems of labour concerns cooperation or involves solutions that cooperation can provide"* (Thomas, 1931b, page 290).

Albert Thomas was a French socialist reformist with direct ties to German thinkers who regarded cooperatives as one of the highest expressions of self-conscious organised labour. Cooperatives, in his view, were formed by workers (*ouvriers*) who took their destiny into their own hands, conscious of their knowledge and needs. He was himself a cooperator and he gathered extensive knowledge on the cooperative movement during his travel throughout Europe, although none of this appears in the ILO webpage on him.<sup>5</sup>

He was also an active local French politician and a historian of modern times aspiring to bring about common happiness (*le bonheur commun*) within the Republic. Both Bernstein and Thomas assessed cooperatives in utilitarian fashion as a movement towards 'happiness' and 'progress'. However, *"Bernstein's ideas themselves are not included, they are reduced to their simplest components and then reintegrated in different pitches... consumer cooperatives (were) rejected by orthodox Marxists... Bernstein, defends them after finding that social and economic developments require a change of doctrine... there can be no socialization of the means of production through cooperation without achieving democracy, and vice versa... (But) The bottom of Bernstein's argument on consumer cooperatives is abandoned, its name is used to justify a position that is not his"* (Aglan).

Among the many valuable documents gathered at the ILO Archives, three key speeches by Albert Thomas on cooperatives between 1919 and 1931 stand out during the period in which he was the first ILO Director. They have been selected due to their prominence and logic. These speeches were written in French and some extracts are translated by the author of this document into English to show the conceptualisation of work and of cooperative under Albert Thomas' mandate, signifying first and foremost his personal concerns about solutions for a world having gone through World War I and the Great Depression.

Concerning the ILO, Thomas *"opposed the original design in which the protection of labour is presented solely in terms of distribution of the wealth produced, in favour of considering... the place of work in the process of production itself"* (Maupain 2013, page 68). This further explains his interest in cooperatives as the latter were so important in the construction of the work place and of workers in the processes of production and distribution. A century later, Thomas' position could not be timelier. Let's think of transnational companies, CSR, *Uberisation*, subcontracting and traceability debates, to mention a few.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/who-we-are/ilo-director-general/former-directors-general/WCMS\\_192645/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/who-we-are/ilo-director-general/former-directors-general/WCMS_192645/lang-en/index.htm)

1. In the first speech of 1919, Albert Thomas speaks of '*Cooperation and the War factories*' (Thomas 1919), as he was Armament Minister in the French war cabinet. In the introduction to the speech, Arthur Fontaine explains the efforts of cooperatives to sustain the country. In 1914, there were 3,150 consumer cooperatives in France, in 1919 about 2500. Outside invaded regions, cooperators went from 875,000 to 1,2 million, while their sales revenue in 1918 remained intact compared to 1913. These figures refer to French consumer cooperatives only. There were thousands of cooperatives in each European country. According to Albert Thomas, "*The class struggle is a fact; it will exist until the day of full social justice. But... the concern to create and to achieve forces us to enter in touch with manufacturers, with the patrons*". Thomas was himself a cooperator as mentioned above, and War Minister. He was highly impressed by cooperatives and their members during the war. Still, he gave precedence to manufacturers in so far as industrial organisation was concerned. The State for him was the highest point of ethical realization, in line with the Illuminists and Hegel, truly believing that States had genuine interest in providing better lives to workers. He put forward the recent establishment of 8 hours' working day (page 32).

Cooperatives, following Albert Thomas, had to draw significant results from their own war efforts, starting with the moral ones, as well as with the increased social and political recognition. Before the war, cooperators were little known, he said, but "*today they are respected and have had the gift of authority over Ministers of Supplies and Under-Secretaries... Lastly, we know that cooperators are - pardon the expression- remarkable merchants (smiles). We have seen them in the councils. We have heard them. They have acquired undeniable authority.*" (page 33) Albert Thomas showed that he was constrained in what he could do to support them; he was first and foremost a politician and administrator. In 1916, he had requested funds for cooperatives' efforts to supply food to workers during the war but the Senate Commissions for Budget and for Finance refused. He had to look elsewhere since cooperatives had higher loan interests than other enterprises. Only in June 1917 could he get the first credit line in the form of repayable advances by the Ministry of Armament for cooperatives feeding workers (page 27). In addition, Thomas saw cooperatives as having characteristics from both workers and merchants but whose existence solved workers and their families' plight.

2. Albert Thomas' second speech, in 1931, "*The future organisation of Work*" (Thomas 1931a) was pronounced at the Consultative Chamber of the Producer Workers' Associations, National Federation of Producer Cooperative Societies of France and Colonies, in Paris, at the height of the 1929 Great Depression. "*How! - they may ask us, can you talk of the "future organisation of work" while an incredible crisis threatens the existence of the possibility to work?*" wrote Albert Thomas. Comparing the crises of 1831 and 1931, he said, "*it was well in 1831 that the workers' world had its own idea which would traverse the entire XIX century: the thought of the Association*". As Thomas recalled, it was Buchez' idea in 1831. Buchez drew from two currents that included Saint Simon and Fourier and his articles delineated the new '*workers' association*' that should have an indivisible capital built on 25 or 20 % of net results aimed to bequeath the undertaking onto future generations, in an inter-generational approach. It would give workers equal rights and would strive to organise all workers in the trade with the goal of transforming society. More than types of firms, Albert Thomas speaks of types of workplaces. Albert Thomas, after an analysis of the XIX century, praises the benefits of the Taylor Society, the Bat'a society and the *commandite* (this concept is different from the one used nowadays) at the French National Printing-House, believing that workers' dignity and freedom would evolve in the 'Workshop' and the '*commandite*'. Thomas tells the audience that, in his knowledge, the industry captains are envisaging a more articulated organisation in the form of large enterprises' workshops or compartments in one and same site, and he ponders that hierarchy will be replaced by responsible autonomy of each workshop's team. The president of the French National Federation of Producer Cooperative Societies remarked that Thomas' ideas make them reflect upon the changes and the future, praising Vimeux and Poisson for calling workers to group themselves in order to obtain guarantees and benefits to which they are entitled. This document shows that Thomas's social reformism

granted a society divided into capitalists and workers, but that he saw the emerging Taylorism as a step forward in workers' rights and a good step towards the rationalisation of industrial production that would help overcome the common crises of overproduction or undersupply. Let's recall that salaries were uncertain and erratic, work was executed at home or in small units, pay was given by unit of production if accepted by the paymaster. Taylor would concentrate workers in one and same place, pay them for five hours in a row and let them go to work on their family fields in the afternoon. Meanwhile, as the ILO annual information shows, the concept of enterprise did not exist as such. Establishment or setting was the unit for business. Thomas was prescient of the future of work. Workers would become salaried and organized by compartments and sites.

Meanwhile, he considered cooperatives of the XIX century as workers' associations. These would provide the foundation for trade unions, but it was cooperatives that allowed workers to have a better life, to transfer pay, to cover sick days and health care, to have decent food and housing, as well as mutual funds to sustain strikes and industrial action. Thomas was confusing however industrial outsourcing or subcontracting with autonomous suppliers. The latter would be freer while the former would lose the oversight of the business to exclusively work for the *commanditaire* or paymaster following strict requirements. For Thomas, producer cooperatives were akin to working in *commandite*, believing that this was emancipatory, in a unilineal concept of evolution as 'progress' for the workers. The sale of labour *en commandite* will turn into a negative point for cooperatives at the start of XXI century, and gradually prohibited or restricted by law through hard efforts.

In terms of regulatory frameworks, the ILO carried out studies and information gathering on emigrant money transfers through cooperatives and on insurance and social welfare provided by mutuals and cooperatives, with the goal of promoting universal access to social welfare. In the XIX century, there were thousands of mutual help societies to support workers' welfare. The ILO will eventually push for nation-wide healthcare and in some countries pre-existing mutual help societies will be nationalised and merged to form the national health system.

3. The third document by Albert Thomas is the 1931 Preface to '*Dix Ans d'organisation internationale du travail*', namely 'Ten years of the ILO' (Thomas 1931b), with four well defined subtitles: Cooperation and workers, the Bureau's information endeavour, Studies on cooperation and workers, and Agriculture and consumer cooperatives. They were followed by a last subtitle 'The other forms of cooperation'. The cooperative movement was mentioned as a social movement in favour of social progress of labour because it had both ideas and results (Thomas, 1931b, page 290). The ILO had a practical interest in expertise on cooperatives and a utilitarian goal, which was to inform itself and inform workers regularly about the international cooperative movement. Thomas clarified what was of interest: which workers? Salaried, independent and semi-independent, in the rural and urban classes, of all races, of all beliefs, of all economic and historical milieus (page 290). To cover which needs? The needs of family and personal consumption, housing, professional tools and supplies, product transformation and disposal, services including energy, irrigation, accounting, credit and insurance (page 290). To observe certain additional problems: about cooperative democracy, enterprises' management, the position that cooperatives take on their own workers (not on their members but paid or salaried workers dependent on the cooperatives) (page 290). The ILO, it seems, was not interested as such in cooperatives as a type of labour or a type of enterprise, but as a means to pursue the general interest and to achieve social justice and peace. Which best cases or models did cooperatives offer? Thomas is here again prescient of XXI century debates on the '*buen vivir*', happiness and well-being. During his mandate, the ILO studied all the varied aspects of cooperatives' efforts to organize rural and urban households, to provide workers with *leisure and recreation*, culture, good health, insurance against certain risks, to promote their savings and make their emigrant money transfers back home safe, prevent usury, etc. The ILO also studied *Raiffeisen* credit cooperatives as a type or best case study for the needs of urban workers against usury and to organise life together in the 'colonies of

urban extension', namely poor neighbourhoods in cities. The ILO also studied as well workers' cooperatives in production and the movement in favour of cooperative contracts for work.

But the main focus of interest for the ILO as institution would be agricultural and consumer cooperatives. *"The consumer cooperatives and the agricultural cooperatives are, first of all, the ones to retain the attention of the ILO"* Thomas wrote, *" because of the importance of their workforce, their high degree of federalisation, of their place in they already occupy in production and distribution of commodities of great interest as producers or as consumers, the agricultural workers and the industrial ones"* (page 294-295). Only after that, Thomas mentioned other types of cooperatives: in fishing, arts and crafts, and those of small rural industries because, he explained, they group independent workers that cannot improve their condition unless they unite their weak economic forces. *"Cooperation is for these workers the main and sometimes the only form of organisation"*. (idem). We will find this interest going strong again at the start of the XXI century under the debate on the 'informal economy'. Working jointly with the International Institute of Agriculture in 1924, the ILO examined how cooperatives' sales could allow producers to organise by themselves and control the sales and disposal of their production, how consumers could independently organise to access agricultural products, and how both consumer and agricultural cooperatives were connected in continuous cooperation between producer and consumer. In addition, the ILO was interested in cooperatives of seeds, of *haras (stud states)* but also cooperatives active in the international trade of wheat and of dairy products. The ILO also compared retail pricing between private traders and that of consumer cooperative societies (page 204).

*In fine*, Thomas expressed interest in what would be the heart of the next globalisation wave: 'standardisation'. Thomas added that the ILO studied *'the original contribution that... (these) cooperatives offered to the elaboration of rational forms of distribution of products'* (page 203), looking for means to the rational organisation of the market in an orderly and conscious manner. Finally, he spoke with discernment of the *'community of cooperative principles, expressed by the unity of legislation or by the reclamation of a common legislation'*, underlining the convergence of trends and needs that reinforce their moral *links*, as well as the organic and the economic relationships among cooperative organisations of various categories (mentioning those between consumer and agricultural cooperatives).

The ILO published seven editions of its International Directory in its first ten years of existence. Whereas, in 1921, the first edition included 34 countries with 120 'central cooperative organisations' (not enterprises but federations and confederations), the 1930 edition covered 728 central organisations in 48 countries. It is this work together with the goal stated above that will give the ILO the opportunity to draft guidelines on cooperative legislation not as either enterprise or work regulation but as standards for the general and national interest in next period post World War II.

## 1.2. Cooperatives' presence at the ILO during the first period

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In the first years of existence of the ILO and as long as Albert Thomas lived, cooperatives had exactly the same representation within the ILO as workers and employers had, as shown in the ILO Organizational Yearbooks. There were many written and personal exchanges between Albert Thomas and representatives of both national cooperative movements and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). Exchanges took place mainly with Europeans both west and east, but also the USA, the Joint council of cooperative organisations in Tel Aviv, at the very start. Afterwards, exchanges included Latin America, and much later became world-wide. Yet, *"consultations never reached the status of those with the employers' and workers' organizations"* (Fazzio and Ullrich, 1996).

The ICA tried to assert cooperatives as a social movement in favour of labour interests, workers and consumers. Debates between the ICA and the International Federation of Trade Unions were immediately reported to the ILO. A meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> December 1922, for example, was archived on 1<sup>st</sup> December at the ILO. The ICA had requested a) an

'entente' and exchange of delegates, b) joint propaganda demonstrating their economic interdependence and reciprocal action, c) the promotion of 'consumers' councils' to oversee "methods of production and supply in the interest of consumers", d) a joint committee to regularly discuss not only wages and labour conditions but also "questions of Peace, war, disarmament, free trade, protection, etc." and e) "joint action to secure direct representation of both movements on international economic bodies, such as the International Labour Bureau, the economic section of the League of Nations, etc." Success was elusive.

From the beginning, we can observe a steady network of contacts and exchanges between the ILO and selected cooperative movements, with Albert Thomas at the centre. But there was a tension between being a social movement widely and largely present in the economy and society and being an epistemic community with specific expertise (letters). Albert Thomas discussed this question with cooperators. While the French and Italian tried to secure and maintain the same position of employers and workers, a letter from England to Thomas explains that there is little advocacy even from fellow cooperators (UK letter).

In the first period, in 1937, the ICA revised for the first time the "Rochdale Principles". Autonomy and democratic control remained central issues to the shared identity. Other key issues were the treatment of capital, neutrality, voluntary will and participation, and education. The ICA Special Committee of 1930-37 sought to "maintain the Co-operative Movement's autonomy vis-a-vis political parties and governments".<sup>6</sup> If the word 'autonomy' does not appear in these principles, "the Special Committee have come to the conclusion that the following seven points may be considered from the historical point of view as the essential Principles of Rochdale and the characteristics of the autonomous system founded by the Pioneers"<sup>7</sup>.

After Albert Thomas passed away in 1932, his Deputy Director Harold Butler, from the UK, succeeded him. The latter had been active in the ground work to create the ILO as well as Secretary General of the first ILO Conference. Yet, while Thomas was a visionary, Butler did not carry Thomas's position through (see Maupain 2013, page 68-69). In the case of cooperatives, they disappeared from the partners pages and sent way down in the ILO Yearly Organisational Books as a 'problem', as can be observed from 1934 onwards, to never return to their original place.

Besides, the ILO had a new member. As geopolitical tensions mounted, Butler believed that the "greatest single reinforcement that could be looked for was the entrance of the United States into the Organisation, which it did in 1934"<sup>8</sup>. The world was already turning bipolar and the only ILO study in 1932 on cooperatives was a major study on 'Russian cooperatives'.

Butler continued the work of building direct relations with countries outside Europe in order to assess their situation and provide them with technical assistance. ILO officials were sent on missions to Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. An ILO Overseas Section was to work on 'special problems' of those countries, which we read at the end of each ILO Organizational Yearbook, mainly cooperatives, the agrarian question and indigenous peoples. In January 1936, the first ILO Regional Conference took place in Chile, and during World War II, it was only feasible to work with countries in Latin America.

### 1.3. Preliminary conclusions of the First Period

What is Albert Thomas' idea of happiness and social justice about, and how did he connect that idea to cooperatives? There is corporatism in his discourse and his call for a "necessary entente" with industrialists, government and workers. In his view, the state should and could be the catalytic force to achieve economic development on the basis of rational socio-economic organisation that required first social peace as a foundation. It is in this perspective that Albert Thomas looked at cooperatives.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu/icc/orgs/ica/pubs/Other-ICA-Publications1/Report-of-the-ICA-Commission-on-Co-opera1/Part-I---Introduction--1966-1.html>

<sup>7</sup> The Present Application of the Rochdale Principles, Studies and Reports, ICA, London, 1964, 24-25

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/who-we-are/ilo-director-general/former-directors-general/WCMS\\_192709/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/who-we-are/ilo-director-general/former-directors-general/WCMS_192709/lang-en/index.htm)



As for progress, Thomas seems to naively praise the idea of technical progress and utilitarian productivism, but he was also worried about the competition stemming from the new Taylorist and Bat'a systems, and acknowledged the disastrous consequences of wars, financial crises, crises of overproduction and undersupply. He was also concerned with the Russian revolution which he did not favour.

Thomas speaks of *ouvriers* (*workers*), not of labour in abstract terms. Solidarity in values and in practice is high in his mind, if not mentioned as such, and can be traced in all the relations, connections, services and general organisation for mutual help among the people and their families and communities through cooperatives, in both rural and urban areas, that he mentions. Thomas was not concerned with nature, but he was concerned with the workers' environment to be healthy, nurturing, emancipatory, and most of all, with the inter-generational nature of the cooperative enterprise, that by having in part an indivisible capital it could outlive its members and include new ones. The concern for a sustainable enterprise is very present and, again, Thomas was well discerning. Unfortunately, after he passed away, geopolitical considerations would have stark consequences for the place of the cooperative movement within the ILO.

Albert Thomas spelt out what would be the ILO focus during the XX century as far as cooperatives were concerned: first of all, the ILO would become one of the most important international centers of study on cooperatives (page 291). Such studies were to "*offer to the ILO itself, for the achievement of other tasks, advantages not to miss, due to the contacts that they will guarantee with the multitude of small units in the agricultural economy, the artisanal economy and the household economy*" (page 295). A changing ILO relationship with cooperatives can be observed, from a movement to a focus on building of an epistemic community.

David Mitrany, the father of functionalism, praised the "*whole activity of the ILO*" (Mitrany 1943, page 105 and 109), advocating a peaceful world organized on the basis of functional relations through a network of agencies and their activity that would integrate nations in a *ramified* and flexible manner. Transnational cooperation seeking to solve problems common to various states would bring about interdependence (Mitrany 1943). Thomas mentions that 'cooperation', namely experts or specific persons of contact in the cooperative movement, had taken part in the 1927 International Economic Conference. This will turn out to be a community of experts built with some representatives of cooperatives but also a community of knowledge internal to the institution that will assure its autonomy and specificity.

## 2. Second period after World War II

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### 2.1 An Epistemic Community for Structural Developmentalism

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The period after World War II ushered in the 'glorious decades' under Keynesian thought. The ILO became a 'sister' organisation within the newly established United Nations but maintained a key role for the nation-state under a Keynesian approach to build internal market demand through the goal of full employment, noticeable in the 1964 ILO Convention No 122 on Employment Policy. In addition, bipolar international relations amidst the Cold War lent 'social policy' a central role in two aspects: it raised social cohesion and state legitimacy on the one hand and it was a way to distinguish between two social systems: the 'liberal' and the 'communist' on the other.

This was also a period of decolonisation and nation-state building at the same time, when development cooperation came to existence. There was a belief in modernisation and developmentalism conceived as a structuralist type of development in which a dual sector economy should handle transition from a handicraft rural-based cheap labour economy to industrialised city belts (Lewis 1954 and Furtado 1964). Lewis' 1954 article established development economics as a discipline and as a policy tool with which governments would drive growth through an engineered economic transformation. Labour in rural areas was seen as unproductive, as a form of

subsistence with no capacity for capital accumulation. Manufacturing and urban industrial enterprises were modelled as rational agents, with perfect information and unlimited capital formation. Fordism has replaced Taylorism. The bulk of employment was thought to be in the city and in conventional enterprise. In addition, there were concerns about rural movements and protests, hence the interest in organising labour, which was not conscious but disarticulated.

Under ILO Director David Morse, the ILO turns towards standard-setting and technical assistance to developing countries with a focus on rural areas and the inclusion of a human rights based approach. By going beyond the Marshall Plan in Europe and its previous main focus on Europe, the ILO would be “*the institutional nexus of embedded liberalism*” in Ruggie's wording, where “*movement towards greater openness in the international economy is likely to be coupled with measures designed to cushion the domestic economy from external disruptions*” (Ruggie 1982, page 405).

According to Van Daele, Morse's move to technical development assistance, “(which saw the ILO redefine itself as an agency of international development aid)... has to be seen first and foremost in the context of the looming Cold War and the first wave of decolonization in Asia” (Van Daele et al, 2010, pages 385-386). Interestingly, the first steps of the ILO in this direction took place earlier in Latin America to set up cooperatives of producers and consumers (Van Daele et al., 2010, page 387-388). With decolonization in Asia and Africa, the ILO worked primarily with former imperial powers in their ex-colonies in the rural areas.

The ILO Director at the time, David Morse, came from the USA appointed by Truman to lead the institution from 1948 to 1970, the postwar period in which the United States had a hegemonic influence. Under his mandate, the ILO received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969, “*with the legitimacy undoubtedly bolstered in the eyes of the Allies by its move to Montreal, and the momentum the Atlantic Charter had given its reformist philosophy*” (Maupain, 2013, page 69). In 1969, Morse launched the World Employment Programme in a “*first attempt at world-wide planning in the field of human resources development and employment policy*”. Freedom of association became central and major standards were adopted covering it. “*The cold war and the process of decolonisation... Programmes were adapted to new needs, and standards were made more flexible so that they could remain universal*”.<sup>9</sup>

In 1966, the ILO adopted Recommendation No 127 on Co-operatives (Developing Countries) “*concerning the Role of Co-operatives in the Economic and Social Development of Developing Countries*” in its 50th ILC session, which would later be replaced by the ILO Recommendation 193 of 2002. In its Objectives, II.2 the establishment and growth of cooperatives was to be a two-fold instrument: development and human advancement. Indeed, the objectives mention persons and members on the one hand and national resources, national income, export revenues and national employment on the other. Groups, communities, networks or local development do not appear, while improvement in working conditions and income appear related only to landless agricultural laborers.

This instrument covered all types of cooperatives but focused on less developed and newly decolonized countries and treated cooperatives as organizations (democratically controlled organisation<sup>10</sup>), not as enterprises or commercial entities. This opened the door to the provision of technical assistance. In addition, the ILO Recommendation No 127 raised the definition of legal frameworks on cooperatives as a first priority. However, the words autonomy and independence were part of the ILO Recommendation No 127 (Administrative Aid 26; II.4 Objectives of Policy; C.20 Aid to cooperatives financial aid and D.28 Supervision).

There are four main components in ILO Recommendation No 127: a) the development of national law and the inclusion of cooperatives in national state planning and policies; b) the assistance to cooperatives in various forms including administrative, financial, supervision, administrative and education and training; c) international assistance through technical aid but also textbooks, material for drafting legislation, training, exchanges, grants, seminars and

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<sup>9</sup>[https://books.google.be/books?id=w9SrAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=haas&hl=en&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=ICA%20&f=false](https://books.google.be/books?id=w9SrAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=haas&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=ICA%20&f=false)

<sup>10</sup> See ILO Recommendation No 127, Legislation

inter-cooperative exchange of goods and services among others; and d) a long Annex with key problems of interest that actually boiled down to one: agrarian reform. The fear of revolution was not far away. Cooperatives were seen as a form of pooling resources in land, labour and equipment for national government stipulated objectives in rural areas, while *“consideration should also be given to the encouragement and development of other types of co-operative activities providing full- or part-time non-agricultural employment for members of farmers' families (for instance, crafts, home or cottage industries) adequate distribution of consumer goods, and social services which the State may not always be in a position to provide (for instance, health, education, culture, recreation or transport)”* (Annex, point 13). The latter was vague and not normative or recommended, mentioning families of farmers and small rural industries. The sentence seems to refer to community and local or regional development without saying its name but the attention remains focused on the individual farmer and the role of the State in national development, after which references to autonomy and independence lost significance.

## 2.2. Cooperatives' presence at the ILO during the Second Period

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The ICA was granted Category A consultative status at the United Nations and thus also at the ILO. According to Rhodes, *“part of this success was due to its close work during the inter-war years with the cooperative branch of the ILO”* (Rhodes, 2012, page 289). But within the ILO, the view was different. The cooperative movement was at a disadvantage at the ILO without a formal constituency, having to lobby so many governments, trade unions and employers associations. Against the development in bilateral funding, and in spite of the *“several thousand expert missions”* (Dulfer and Laurinkari 1994, page 903) to implement ILO Recommendation No 127, *“the ILO publication ‘Cooperative Information’ ceased publication, due to budget constraints caused by the temporary withdrawal of the US from membership in the organization”* in 1978 (Vocatch-Voldirev, 2015).

The ILO also provided some opportunities for expert meetings. According to Joe Fazzio, then Head of the Co-operative Branch of the ILO, a 1968 meeting of experts analysed the impact of ILO Recommendation No 127, but there were no further meetings of experts organized by the ILO on the subject in the following 25 years. The result of the 1968 meeting was inconclusive but the framework for the ILO's cooperative development projects was established. *“Financed through various bilateral programmes with the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Switzerland and later with Germany, France and Italy as well as through the UNDP, such projects assisted the creation of co-operative authorities, training and development centres”* (Fazzio and Ullrich 1996), to which the UK and the US should be added.

Expertise was channeled through the ILO Cooperative Unit. However, this expert community did not have the capacity to integrate cooperatives as a participant actor with voice and vote at the ILO. If ILO strategy and policy frameworks were closed for discussion, bilateral funding channeled through the ICA and the ILO gave way to joint technical assistance. In the early 1970s, the ICA created its own advisory groups on development cooperation, in some cases funded by Sweden, which would work with an ILO sister group to develop training material, such as MATCOM8 (Fazzio and Ullrich, 1996; and Rhodes 2012, page 299). In 1971, upon a request of the 1968 UN General Assembly, the “UN Joint Committee for the promotion of Agricultural Cooperatives” was set up. It included agricultural workers and producers, the ICA, the ILO and FAO, with a clear focus on rural areas and in line with the 1966 ILO Recommendation No127. In 1989, this committee will be called COPAC (Committee for the promotion and advancement of cooperatives).

The epistemic community that existed since Albert Thomas was geared towards international development cooperation under the United Nations and the ILO will greatly develop its expertise during the 1970s and 1980s. But the ILO also opened up the epistemic community to new actors beyond the cooperative movement. National institutions with a view to the new cooperation field, such as the Dutch (letter) will also be a push factor for the ILO. NGOs also joined in to work on cooperatives in developing countries.

On the cooperative movement's side, the ICA 23<sup>rd</sup> Congress was convened from 5 to 8 September 1966. The discussion on principles was the central point requested by the 22<sup>nd</sup> ICA Congress and decided in the 23<sup>rd</sup> ICA Congress in Vienna as the "*statement of co-operative principles in a modern setting*". The documents of the meeting ignore the ILO work, and are more concerned with distinguishing cooperatives from other societies or enterprises, also called capital enterprises at times of important changes in management. Reservations about autonomy are said to be similar to the 1930s, but the word is not part of the principles. In the documents, the logic is not very clear, as it is either that "*Autonomy is therefore a corollary of democracy*" or vice versa, "*There is no doubt in the minds of the Commission that democracy in the management of co-operative organisations necessarily implies autonomy in the sense of independence of external control*" (author's underlining)<sup>11</sup>.

The 1966 principles do not include the words 'autonomy' or 'democratic control', with 'one person one vote' only retained for primary societies or ground units. The wording of 'cooperative societies' is used throughout except in the last principle to serve communities as well to cooperative with other cooperatives at local, national and international levels, where the wording refers to 'cooperative organisations', opening the door to the ICA international cooperation in development projects with less developed countries.

The ICA drive towards development cooperation can be traced to diverse roots including imperial strategy which, in the case of the British Empire had a few traits: autonomy from local government, the role of registrars and more importantly, providing appropriate legislation and a government unit focused on cooperatives (Rhodes, 2012, page 295). Based on the British Empire experience, in 1954, ICA Director Watkins expressed caution about the UN agencies' work, including that of the ILO, relying too much on themselves and ignoring the cooperative movement's expertise: the ICA "*welcomed UN initiatives but urged that these should be carried out in close co-operation with the ICA*" (Rhodes 2012, page 290-292, 295, 298). At the end of the 1950s, this expertise was "*heavily Euro-centric*" but took the ICA presence to regions that had been part of European Empires (Rhodes, 2012, page 293, 298). In the following decades, that process would lead to the opening of ICA regional offices in other continents.

### 2.3. Preliminary conclusions on the Second Period

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In the following decades, "*The ILO Co-operative Service concentrated its efforts on the implementation of technical co-operation projects for co-operative development. Meanwhile, the research and information activities lost their importance*" (Fazio and Ullrich, 1996). The epistemic community of expert knowledge may have been strengthened as far as technical know-how and legislation were concerned, but research and information through extended networks stemming from cooperatives movements on the ground declined, and the dynamic role and voice that an international epistemic community should have had, may have in fact weakened. The ILO missed the opportunity to be in touch and better understand the new and emerging types of cooperatives (for example, social cooperatives, workers' buyouts, energy cooperatives but also cooperatives of small and medium enterprise owners as in bakeries and hairdressers) and no statistics were produced. Dialogues and studies between trade unions and cooperatives in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, in the 1980s, do not seem to have reached the center of the institution. While in the first period, the ILO followed closely the cooperative business forms, including consortia and federations, the new forms of cooperative entrepreneurship and work are not discussed.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu/icic/orgs/ica/pubs/Other-ICA-Publications1/Report-of-the-ICA-Commission-on-Co-opera1/Part-II----Consideration-of-Co-operative2.html>

### 3. Third Period: The XXI century

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#### 3.1. Globalisation

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This period may seem similar to the first one, characterized by a globalisation process followed by peace and war concerns. Global trade is still the paramount stated goal while the consequences of increasing inequality, precariousness and commodification have multiplied long term conflicts (ILO commission on globalisation).

Yet, there is more nation-state deregulation, privatisation and disarticulation than building. Agency is seen as individualistic and the recent UN millennium development goals (MDGs) and sustainable development goals (SDGs) also show an individualistic stance. Moreover, the latter SDGs have not included 'human rights'. Post-modern approaches, random interventions and small scale theory have led to various conceptualisations of types of economy, including social and solidarity economy, informal economy, sustainable and resilient economies, the commons' economy, among others. Yet, governments are seen as key to compromise between labour and enterprise.

In 1995, the same year of the new ICA Manchester Congress, the United Nations World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen agreed on a set of commitments. With support of the WTO and the OECD, the ILO adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998<sup>12</sup>, while the Special Representative of the Secretary—General for the UN Summit, Juan Somavia, became ILO Director—General. Somavia was a good friend of then ICA President Ivano Barberini.

The ILO, after setting its new Agenda based on Decent Work and its Declaration of Fundamental Rights with a selective treatment of Fundamental Rights by focusing on four standards, finds itself confronted to a set of challenges. The end of the Cold War could have allowed for a universal approach to rights but economic and financial globalisation has set countries in competition against each other with a downward pressure on social rights and labour costs. At the same time, globalisation connects far away regions through supply and value chains, and emerging markets benefit, leading to a more multi-polar world. A variety of new actors within, across and above nation-states are becoming more institutionalised, for example in the social and solidarity economy and workers in the informal economy, with many UN institutions working with them, but also transnational companies with their own standards. New trade treaties are setting the same rules for all without taking into account countries' levels of development. In practical terms, public policy is imperiled, democratic representation is in doubt and specialised information travels through segmented but interconnected supranational units. Trade is expected to bring about development and social rights (Maupain 2013, page 70-71).

While the ILO concentrates on its Decent Work Agenda in the face of globalisation, the advent of the World Trade Organisation in 1994 and the multiplication of trade agreements with a labour clause challenge the ILO persuasive power and tripartite dialogue. Globalisation and the destructuring of the workplace with workers having different conditions and contracts for the same task and in the same place add complexity. The latest ILO *“Report on the world of work”* explains that work patterns are changing along value chains accompanied by government deregulation and technological change (ILO 2015), and that such changes lead to precariousness and inequality. The ILO 'standard employment model' may be losing ground. The ILO thus strives to further the 'transition' towards the 'standard employment model' by making effective the 'equal treatment' clause and enact equal protection of workers in the so-called non-standard forms. Active labour supply policies and social dialogue along value chains are two other favoured strategies, as well as promoting SME involvement in the chains.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/declaration/thedeclaration/lang--en/index.htm>

The ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation 193 of 2002<sup>13</sup> was a welcomed replacement of the previous one of 1966. This normative element thus entails a recommendation but also a prescription as it clarifies what a cooperative is world-wide, with technical normative elements in it. It describes the scope of the document as universal and sets out provisions in active tense (instead of passive tense). In the Annex of ILO recommendation No 193, for the first time, a UN organization acknowledges the ICA cooperative identity in full, with its 7 cooperative principles and 10 cooperative values, as adopted by the ICA in Manchester in 1995<sup>14</sup>. It is the first time that a civil society organization's definition of identity and own standards are integrated into an ILO Recommendation voted by governments, employers and trade unions.

The cooperative principles are included in the ILO Recommendation together with a long series of ILO standards, conventions and recommendations, hugely contrasting with the previous 1966 Recommendation that was not rooted at all in ILO work.

ILO Recommendation No 193 of 2002 on The Promotion of Cooperatives affirms that cooperatives are autonomous enterprises of a certain type and belonging to the private sector and civil society sphere. They have, as *“enterprises and organizations inspired by solidarity, to respond to their members' needs and the needs of society, including those of disadvantaged groups in order to achieve their social inclusion”* (ILO Recommendation No 193, I, art 5). They are acknowledged to take part in all sectors and have goals that include income generating activities, decent employment, human development, business potential, competitiveness, savings and investment, well-being, sustainable development, and the social and economic needs of the community (ILO Recommendation 193, I, art 4). For the first time, the strengthening of the cooperative movements is included as well as the need for a dialogue with trade unions and employers organizations while representing their own at the international level (IV art 17). Where would that be better than at the ILO itself?

On the one hand, there has been an evolution in the meaning of the notion of ‘cooperative’ from being considered an organization towards being an enterprise with a distinctive form, thanks to ILO Recommendation No 193. On the other hand, there has been an evolution in the treatment of the notion of ‘work’. From being considered as a management term (see Blyton and Jenkins, 2008), work is treated as a reality and an experience. The ILO typology was based on a) the labour market situation in terms of source of income and security, and b) the work situation in terms of authority and control. The new approach now integrates the various functions of work: as income, as meaning for the worker and as the production of goods and services with use-value (Goodwin, 2014). Already in the early 2000s, the UK modified its socio-economic classification integrating for the first time the category of self-employed (Rose and Pevalin, 2001, and Noon et al., 2013).

What kind of employment is cooperative employment for the ILO? Jobs are categorised at the ILO Statistics Department according to the type of explicit or implicit contract of employment of the person with other persons or organizations, the type of economic risk and the type of authority over establishments and other workers which the job incumbents have. In 2013, the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians adopted a resolution on statistics on the measurement of cooperatives, to carry out pilot studies and report for the ILC (Vocatch-Voldirev 2015).

In 2015, the ILO is working on redefining the categories according to type of work (not by type of authority or risk), including the issue of members of producer cooperatives<sup>15</sup>. Now under revision, the 1993 ILO International

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<sup>13</sup> [www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R193](http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?R193)

<sup>14</sup> *“1995 Centennial Congress of the ICA is held in Manchester, UK. A Statement on the Cooperative Identity and a cooperative declaration “Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> century” are adopted. The first Saturday of July 1995 is adopted as the UN International Cooperative Day”* (Vocatch-Voldirev, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Hunter David (6-8 May 2015) Issues to be addressed in the revision of the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93), Working Group for the Revision of the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93) Senior Statistician of the ILO Department of Statistics, Geneva, Discussion paper.

Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93) has five groups: employees, employers, own-account workers, contributing family workers and members of producers' cooperatives.

The last four, including producers' cooperatives, are considered as self-employed. Members of producers' cooperatives are defined until now by the ILO as “workers who hold a self-employment job in a cooperative producing goods and services, in which each member takes part on an equal footing with other members in determining the organization of production, sales and/or other work of the establishment, the investments and the distribution of the proceeds of the establishment amongst their members”<sup>16</sup>.

The current discussion would like to add a sixth category to workers not classifiable by status and discuss several specific issues including the one of producers' cooperatives<sup>17</sup>. It is interesting to note that in the latest ILO Key indicators of the labour market (2014), although the document reads generally ‘informal producer cooperatives’, when clarifying the concept, it reads just ‘producers’ cooperatives’.

### 3.2. Cooperatives’ presence at the ILO during the Third Period

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The ILO has had without interruption a unit dedicated to cooperatives as well as funded a significant number of studies<sup>18</sup>, some of which written by outside experts, some linked to the cooperative movement and in particular from developed countries and Africa.

In the two years of negotiation of the 2002 ILO Recommendation No 193 there were about 15 representatives of different cooperative movements who strongly worked under the three tripartite sections of the ILC to make the instrument coherent and relevant. These representatives came from Japan, Israel, Italy, Poland, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Kenya, among others. Their success has been undeniable. However, most of them were not part of the existing epistemic community and their impact was felt only once.

After the 2002 ILO Recommendation, a new era appears. In 2003, for the first time since Albert Thomas (!), an ILO Director-General was present at an ICA General Assembly. In 2004, the ILO and the ICA signed a Memorandum of Understanding to implement a “Common Cooperative Agenda” aimed at creating decent jobs and reducing poverty, followed by a 2015 Memorandum on certain priority areas: Youth employment, Informal Economy and Rural Employment, still geared to a great extent to small producers in rural areas. There is also a wider discussion within the cooperative movement on whether the ILO has a mandate or only a normative influence on enterprise. Trade unions at the ILO make renewed efforts to listen to and work with workers' cooperatives. Finally,

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<sup>16</sup> International Labour Office (2006) Key indicators of the labour market, ICSE 1993, Appendix B, page 841. Geneva., and International Labour Office (2014) 8<sup>th</sup> edition Key indicators of the labour market.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter David (6-8 May 2015) Issues to be addressed in the revision of the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93), Working Group for the Revision of the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-93) Senior Statistician of the ILO Department of Statistics, Geneva, Discussion paper.

<sup>18</sup> Among others, Birchall, Johnston. 2003. *Rediscovering the Cooperative Advantage: Poverty Reduction through self-help*. ILO, Geneva. Birchall, Johnston. 2004. *Cooperatives and the Millennium Development Goals*. ILO, Geneva. Birchall, Johnston. 2013. *Resilience in a downturn, The power of financial cooperatives*. ILO, Geneva. ILO. 2007. *Cooperatives for People-Centred Rural Development. Rural Policy Brief*. ILO, Geneva. ILO. 2008. *Promotion of Rural Employment for Poverty Reduction*. Report IV at the 97th Session of the International Labour Conference. ILO. *Providing Clean Energy and Energy Access through Cooperatives*. ILO, Geneva. Logue, J. and J. Yates. 2005. *Productivity in cooperatives and worker-owned enterprises: Ownership and participation make a difference*. ILO, Geneva. Other ILO titles include: *The cooperative way of doing business*, *Tackling informality in e-waste management: The potential of cooperative enterprises*, *Promoting cooperatives: An information guide to ILO Recommendation No. 193*, *Report: Cooperatives and the Sustainable Development Goals: A contribution to the post-2015*, *My.COOP - Managing your agricultural cooperative*, *Resilience in a Downturn: The power of financial cooperatives*, *Guidelines for cooperative legislation*, third revised edition, *A cooperative future for people with disabilities*, *Cooperating out of child labour – Harnessing the untapped potential of cooperatives ...Guidelines for cooperative legislation*, second revised edition.

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the ILO has also worked to bring cooperatives' voices into the post-2015 development agenda process together with the ICA, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), FAO and UNDESA.

At the same time, many of the new and emerging cooperative forms that have not reached the ILO through the epistemic community already established have found other channels and new representative voices have appeared, most notable through the solidarity economy but also the informal workers movement.

### 3. Conclusion: Towards the Future

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What may the future be like for Cooperatives and Work at the ILO?

Now that cooperatives are conceptualised as enterprises at the ILO, we can observe the following areas of common interest: local development, SMEs, value chains and clusters, care and an informal economy more geared to employment and income generation activity. To achieve these goals, new and additional types of cooperatives that are generating employment and building resilience have been overlooked. Expertise must be diversified so that the potential of practical knowledge arrives at the ILO.

Besides, the ILO is extending its coverage of forms of work, actually returning to Thomas's vision that included households, independent workers and families, with cooperatives as an important means for a 'good life' that included but went beyond the issue of redistribution of wealth in relation to industrialists.

Hopefully sooner than later, the ILO will have to deal with the issue that member-owners can be both owners and workers of their own cooperative enterprise, namely have control and manage their own labour. Since the ILO still divides work between dependent and independent, employed and self-employed, cooperative work has been legally and statistically treated as that of employer or of employee, varying from country to country. Yet, there is a third type of employment or work called 'cooperative work' where the two sides join in, provided member-owners have not only ownership but also control of their enterprise and labour, distinguishing it from the 'Uber type' who are dependent on the paymaster for all working conditions and pushed to enter into car acquisitions that leaves them indebted to the system (Pasquale 2015). The indicator is control: co-workers and members of cooperatives producing goods and services with control of their joint undertaking would fall into a third category.

The ILO social dialogue among its three partners (government, enterprise and trade unions representatives) continues to improve the working conditions as well as the rules of transparency and respect for workers, but TNCs are hardly bound by ILO standards and representation has lost allure. The ILO attracts the interest of small and medium enterprises while trade unions have lost a large number of affiliates.

What is the interest of the constituent parts of the ILO in cooperatives? Trade unions are more interested than ever in representing cooperative members. To some extent, they hope that cooperative organizing can be a tool to pre-register future trade union members, attracted by the provision of goods and services at lower cost. SMEs are certainly interested in cooperative clusters and input management. They can both learn from cooperatives' best practices, so as not to fall in a top-down approach. For sure, peace concerns will help cooperative retain the ILO interest.

The ILO has embarked in an ambitious restructuring, though, and reflects on whether to uphold work as the key unit (not job or employment), integrate consumers and environmental representatives, and adapt to a 'market society'. (Maupain (2013) suggests that the ILO is reflecting on positioning itself in terms of a market society, where responsible consumers would decide and where traceability along global supply chains and fair trade would provide the information to consumers.

Cooperatives can be considered as being an epistemic community. This community is auto-referential, self-defined in its own identity and standards, having expertise in their own domain and representative democratic legitimacy. Historically, however, cooperatives appear as an expression of social movements. Once well established, cooperative models and best-known cases are used by NGOs and others to advance the causes they espouse. For



that matter, cooperative expertise must rise from the ground and be truly representative of its diverse wealth of experience. On the other hand, their expertise depends on their concept being specific and unique.

If the door opens up to all types of work and categorisation by work, what can be the future of the tripartite structure of the ILO? On the side of the cooperative movement, will it want to remain an epistemic community at the ILO? Will it accept the diversification of representation of cooperatives through other movements such as consumers, informal workers and the solidarity economy? Will it become a social movement with representation at the ILO?

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