

**‘ILO environmentalism’  
How the International Labor Organization developed its environmental  
message and policies**

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Master thesis in Modern International and Transnational History  
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## ‘ILO environmentalism’

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## **Abstract**

This thesis researches how ideas, principles and concepts stemming from the second and third wave of environmentalism influenced debates within the International Labour Organization (ILO), from the 1970s onwards. Based in the concept of ‘labor environmentalism’, the thesis study how environmental rhetoric and initiatives were merged into existing political contexts in ILO. Over time, the expressions, perceptions and actions of the ILO created its own brand of ‘ILO environmentalism’.

The starting point of the analysis is the International Labor Conference (ILC) in 1972 and the Annual Report of the Director-General *Technology for Freedom – Man in his Environment* which introduces ecological topics to the organization. At the same time as new perspectives on the working environment were brought up and explored by the ILO, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was convened in Stockholm. The event was a watershed moment for international environmentalism and had much influence on the ILO. Both the Stockholm Summit and the 1972 ILC can be viewed as expressions of what Joachim Radkau has called the ‘ecological revolution’ of 1970. The last part of the thesis is also connected to one of Radkau’s terms – the ‘historical turn’ of environmentalism around 1990.

Two organizational and practical implications of the “discovery” of environmental policy in the ILO are particularly elaborated on. In 1976, an exhaustive probe in the organization and discussions at consecutive ILCs led to the launch of the International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (PIACT). PIACT was meant to coordinate and spearhead ILO environmental efforts with an emphasis on regulation through international labor instruments, encouragement of national objectives, technical cooperation and environmental training. The second initiative discussed is the joint ILO-UNEP efforts. The collaboration started around the same time as PIACT and improved the environmental training given to ILO’s tripartite constituency.

A perspective taken up in the thesis is how the ILO dealt with the partially contradictory relationship between employment and environmental policy, which has been conceptualized as the labor-environment dichotomy. The analysis shows that while such a relationship can be found, ‘ILO environmentalism’ illustrates that labor also harbors environmental interests.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.A Ecology, labor and the ILO

This thesis researches how ideas, principles and concepts stemming from the second and third wave of environmentalism influenced debates within the International Labor Organization (ILO), from the 1970s onwards. Based in a conception of ‘labor environmentalism’ the roots and content of ILO’s environmentalism will be explored. The thesis studies ILO’s perceptions of environmental policies and labor’s role in solutions to environmental problems. Using the UN Summits in Stockholm and Rio as a framework, attention is given to the environmental policies and initiatives that emerged in the 1970s and how they evolved towards the turn of the century. Additionally, it will look to how the labor-environment dichotomy has been framed and expressed by the ILO and the wider world.

As well as being the foremost international body for labor issues and policies, the ILO is part of a system of international organizations increasingly concerned with environmental challenges. Thus, it is well suited to contribute to a historical narrative about both the internationalism and labor dimensions of modern environmentalism. In doing so, the ILO can be studied as an ‘environmental actor’, with a fluctuating and complex environmental agency. Ecological topics has not become a dominant issue within the ILO, but it is today an integral part of their messaging, vision for the future, and efforts for social justice and decent work. Through the Green Jobs Programme and the Green Initiative the ILO promotes the policies they believe to be vital to ensure a ‘just transition’ towards a green economy. When the ILO launched seven centenary initiatives to mark 100 years of ILO operations, the Green Initiative was one of them. This environmental focus is integrated in a wider effort for decent work. In Director-General Guy Ryder’s Annual Report to the 2017 International Labor Conference (ILC) he stated that it was imperative for ILO that the fight against climate change was an “...integral part of the fight for global social justice, to which the Decent Work Agenda is an essential contribution.”<sup>1</sup>

While the climate change focus is relatively novel in the ILO context, Ryder’s concern for the human environment echoes a series of similar statements made by other Director-Generals at previous ILC’s, from 1972 up until 2020. As resource depletion, pollution and environmental

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<sup>1</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings*, Report of the Director-General (Report I): Work in a Changing Climate: the Green Initiative, International Labour Conference, 106th Session 2017 (Geneva: ILO, 2017), 5.



degradation increasingly have affected the world and influenced international politics, it has also challenged the ILO to clarify its positions and find solutions that ensures the interests of its members. Environmental problems were early on considered a serious issue and protection of workers' environment was a principle priority for the ILO also after its "discovery" of environmental policy in the 1970s. However, the reorientation at the time started a development that has led environmentally sustainable work to be treated with far more urgency today than in 1970. However, some of the questions facing an organization for the betterment of workers' life's, like the ILO, remain relatively unchanged. How are we to balance the concern for quality jobs and healthy economies with the pressing need for environmental action? And is the notion of a dichotomous balancing act based on correct assumptions – or is it possible to do both? The answer to this needs to come from many places but are of particular relevance for those that seek to take part in forming the future of work. All groups involved in ILO's tripartite process, workers, employers and governments, have vested interests in it. ILO, perhaps as a consequence of the members' interests, has taken on the task of prescribing solutions to one of the defining challenges of our time – creating decent work in a sustainable economy. As people, inside and outside of the ILO, ponders a 'labor environmentalism' that manages to combine perspectives from environmentalism and the labor movement, a look back to the incipient stages of ILO environmental policy will hopefully be illuminating and offer some interesting insights. By researching the genealogy of the success, troubles and contradictions inherent in the ILO's environmental efforts, one would be better placed to understand its present challenges. For me personally, these questions have been the cause of much ponderance which has inspired me to write this thesis.

## **1.B Research questions**

- How did ecology, first in relation to the working environment and later the wider human environment, become part of ILO's message and objectives? How was it framed to create an 'ILO environmentalism' suited to the organization's overall mission?
- In what ways did ILO environmental policies and initiatives evolve between the 1972 Stockholm conference and the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, and what were their practical implications?

A key aspect of the research is to trace the effects of international environmental events and regimes in the ILO. In addition, the thesis will have an eye on changed conceptualizations and perceptions within the organization linked to work and the working, living and natural environment. Here, the labor-environment dichotomy is of particular interest.

## 1.C Organization of the paper: periodization, structure and scope

Many of the analyzes in this thesis centers around Joachim Radkau's conceptions of the 'ecological revolution' circa 1970 and the 'historic turn' of environmentalism that took place around 1990. The periodical starting point for my research is the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 and the consequential establishment of UNEP. When the International Labor Conference convened around the same time, the Director-General's report to the meeting was titled *Technology for Freedom. Man in His Environment. The ILO contribution*. The periodization ends with a discussion of the prelude to the Green Jobs Initiative established in 2008, as well as other aspects of present-day environmental action by the ILO. Ken Conca and Geoffrey D. Dabelko have argued that the United Nations international environmental meetings in Stockholm (1972), Rio de Janeiro(1992), Johannesburg (2002), Rio (2012), and Paris (2015) can "provide useful benchmarks for the evolution of global environmental politics"<sup>2</sup>, due to both the significance of the conferences and the international context they reflect. This thesis will rely on these conferences, those in 1972 and 1992 in particular, when creating its periodically framework.

The thesis is threefold in its analysis and structure, with a main narrative emphasis on the first two parts. The language in official ILO documents and its historical context will constitute the main research object throughout the following three analytical phases:

- The 1970s: The ILO and the second wave of environmentalism
- The 1980s and early 1990s: continuation and standstill
- 1990s and 2000s: Sustainability, climate change and the past in the present

Firstly, attention will be given to how and why environmental and ecological topics were introduced in the ILO. A majority of the concrete measures that were implemented during the first years dealt with issues related to the working environment. The rhetoric surrounding these issues in the ILO, be it reports, debates, or resolutions, contains a wider framework attempting to merge ecology and labor interests. The ILO's Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (PIACT) will be especially prioritized. The analysis will rely on developments in the international community to contextualize ILO's environmental efforts. In this regard, The United Nations and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Conca and Geoffrey D. Dabelko, eds., *Green Planet Blues: Critical Perspectives on Global Environmental Politics*, Sixth Edition (New York: Routledge, 2019), 5.

will be emphasized. The chapter will offer some initial conclusions on the internal processes and external influences on the ILO.

Secondly, the thesis will follow the development of environmental initiatives in the second analytical phase - the 1980s and early 1990s. Following the initial focus on the early implications of ecology's subtle entrance into the ILO domain, I will study how two major implications of it – PIACT and UNEP – was implemented and perceived. Then, the emphasis will shift towards the ways in which new sets of environmental issues became an increasingly integrated part of the ILOs messaging and activities. A central aspect of this analysis will be to explain how the ILO gradually expanded the scope of its environmental activities, as well as its perceptions of the organization's ecological responsibilities and competence. ILO's participation and reaction to the Rio Earth Summit provides insight into how new ideas and priorities were introduced to the organization.

Finally, a conclusive discussion will revolve around present concepts and perspectives that became prevalent after the discovery of global warming and the push for climate change policies. The shifting political climate and the potential new policies presented new challenges; how did the ILO adapt? The thesis will comment on when these new ideas were introduced in the ILO, as well as their relation to previous expressions of 'ILO environmentalism'. Conclusions will largely pertain to the changing nature of ecological concerns in the ILO over the period and how the organization decided to communicate these. I wish to highlight certain similarities, differences, and tendencies between and across the three periods.

## **1.D Historiography and state of the research**

Research focusing on international organizations, agencies and institutions have been conducted with a multitude of approaches and a wide range of perspectives, some of which holds particular relevance for this thesis. International history has in recent decades been the object of a 'transnational turn', causing an influx of 'new histories' focused on border-crossing currents of ideas, people and commodities.<sup>3</sup> International institutions are well suited for these perspectives, as exemplified by Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga's work on the United Nations

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<sup>3</sup> Glenda Sluga, "Editorial – the Transnational History of International Institutions," *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 2 (July 2011): 219–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022811000234>.

and Susan Pedersen's renewed history of the League of Nations.<sup>4</sup> Frey et.al puts international organizations front and center in their analysis of development policies, highlighting the organizations' role as 'policy entrepreneurs', a relevant perspective for this thesis.<sup>5</sup> Contributions like these and others can be valuable when analyzing environmental developments and decision-making in ILO.<sup>6</sup>

The ILO historiography consists of both internal and external forms of research, which Jasmien Van Daele has called "inside studies" and "outside studies". The categorization highlights the fact that the ILO have been an active contributor to increased historical insight into the organization, most recently through the ILO century Project.<sup>7</sup> A professionalization occurred in the decades following the second world war, inspired by labor history and international relations theory. Over the last three decades, there has been a diversification of ILO studies that has expanded research topics to areas such as human rights, gender, globalization, and forced labor.<sup>8</sup> Both the widening of themes in contemporary research and the ILO's patronage in the expansion of its historiography are on display in the *Globalizing Social Rights*, edited by Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux and published by the ILO.<sup>9</sup>

After some foundational work, such as that of the French *Annalistes*<sup>10</sup>, a broad interdisciplinary response to increasing concerns over environmental issues brought on breakthrough of environmental history in the 1970s. Correspondingly, a certain amount of ecology, environmental ethics, and politics has more times than not characterized environmental

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<sup>4</sup> Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, "New Histories of the United Nations," *Journal of World History* 19, no. 3 (2008): 251–74, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.0.0021>; Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 1091–1117, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.112.4.1091>.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Frey, Sönke Kunkel, and Corinna R. Unger, eds., *International Organizations and Development, 1945-1990*, Palgrave Macmillan Transnational History Series (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Other examples: Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Kenneth W. Abbott et al., eds., *International Organizations as Orchestrators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139979696>.

<sup>7</sup> Jasmien Van Daele, "The International Labour Organization (ILO) in Past and Present Research," *International Review of Social History* 53, no. 03 (December 2008): 487–95, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859008003568>.

<sup>8</sup> Van Daele, 497–98, 503–5.

<sup>9</sup> Sandrine Kott, Joëlle Droux, and International Labour Organization, eds., *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> See for instance: Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); Lucien Febvre and Lionel Bataillon, *A Geographical Introduction to History* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1974); Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: Collins, 1972).

histories. Many pioneering historians in field were American, but it has since spread globally. In 1988, Donald Worster edited *The Ends of the Earth*<sup>11</sup>, a collection of a broad range of research intended to inspire others. The 1995 publication *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*<sup>12</sup>, edited by William Cronon, challenged nature's position as a sacred and pristine unit. It offered new explanations and understandings of nature and the effects and role of human activity – they were *reinventing nature*. A prevalent feature of the field is to study on how the environment has affected *human* activity and history, often with a view to the interplay of nature and society. This thesis will take on this perspective as it looks to how the ILO has dealt with political sentiments born out of environmental changes. Bruno Latour is one of the scholars that have sought out to reframe and unite the concepts nature and society, for example in *Politics of Nature*<sup>13</sup>. Joachim Radkau has written about how human interaction with nature affects both society and nature, by connecting the physical environment with the political sphere of policies, economic interests and environmentalism.<sup>14</sup> Radkau's work is of the more politicized in the field and relevant for research into how the ideas of ecology and environmentalism gained acceptance in the ILO. Ramachandra Guha has explored the history of the environmental movement which from the 1960s drastically increased its influence and relevance.<sup>15</sup> As the main focus of environmental debates recently have shifted from ecology to climatology, new lines of inquiry has opened up and expanded the research field. A fresh topic with implications for the humanities are the Anthropocene, which breaks with traditional concepts of natural changes and temporality and transcends the biological component of human agency to become a force of nature in its own right.<sup>16</sup> This thesis is not “in contact with nature” to the same degree as much of the aforementioned research. Rather, it finds relation to nature by studying an institutions' relationship to nature. I will not focus on changes in nature *per se*, but its influence on the ILO.

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<sup>11</sup> Donald Worster, ed., *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*, 1st English ed, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Washington, D.C. : Cambridge ; New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History*, Longman World History Series (New York: Longman, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Dipesch Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (January 2009): 197–222, <https://doi.org/10.1086/596640>; Peder Anker, “Ressurs-, Miljø- Og Klimahistorie,” in *I Det Lange Løp: Festskrift Til Jan Eivind Myhre* (Oslo: Pax, 2017), 84–101.

The linkages and interdependence between labor and nature has not been massively explored and labor history's interaction with the environment has according to Gunter Peck largely been limited to urban, industrial topics.<sup>17</sup> However, there are examples of different standpoints and combination of perspectives. Richard White's "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?"<sup>18</sup>, is a value example of how the themes of nature and labor can be knitted together. White argued that most environmentalists had neglected the role of work and how it had connected humans to nature throughout history. Thus, they risked getting sidelined and leaving matters of nature and the key human activity work to actors less concerned with the natural environment. Failing to deal with work, he argued would create social divisions and harm our understanding of and the state of nature. The authorship of Stefania Barca is permeated by enquiries into the labor-environment relationship, its perceived dichotomy, and working-class environmentalism. Barca frequently addresses how organized labor faced challenges related to their own and the general environment. In one article, Barca researches working-class experiences of labor and its effects on their perceptions of environment.<sup>19</sup> It is structured around three lines of investigation into the work-environment relationship – the landscape's reflection of human labor, the workplace and community, and finally, working-class and labor environmental activism. One of Barca's inspirators, James O'Connor, has been important for the development of Marxist ecology.<sup>20</sup> The international aspects of labor environmentalism have been explored by Victor Silverman Brian Obach, who elaborates on how labor has reframed environmentalism to align it with its own principles and interests.<sup>21</sup> Nora Räthzel and David L. Uzzel have done similar research. A chapter in their edited volume by Lene Olsen and Dorit Kemter tracks ILO's environmental activities by linking them to UN processes.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, they have overlapping research interests with this thesis. There are to

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<sup>17</sup> G. Peck, "The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and Labor History," *Environmental History* 11, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 212–38, <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/11.2.212>.

<sup>18</sup> Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York, NY: Norton, 1996), 171–85.

<sup>19</sup> S. Barca, "Laboring the Earth: Transnational Reflections on the Environmental History of Work," *Environmental History* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 3–27, <https://doi.org/10.1093/envhis/emt099>.

<sup>20</sup> James O'Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*, Democracy and Ecology (New York: Guilford Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Victor Silverman, "Sustainable Alliances: The Origins of International Labor Environmentalism," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (October 2004): 118–35, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547904000201>; Victor Silverman, "'Green Unions in a Grey World': Labor Environmentalism and International Institutions," *Organization & Environment* 19, no. 2 (June 2006): 191–213, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026606288780>; Brian K. Obach, *Labor and the Environmental Movement: The Quest for Common Ground*, Urban and Industrial Environments (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Lene Olsen and Dorit Kemter, "The International Labour Organization and the Environment. The Way to a Socially Just Transition for Workers," in *Trade Unions in the Green Economy: Working for the Environment*, ed. Nora Räthzel and David L. Uzzell (New York, NY: Routledge, n.d.), 41–57.

my knowledge only a few examples of research that focuses solely on environmental topics within the ILO, with Olsen and Kemter as notable exemptions.<sup>23</sup> As the literature discussed above suggest, however, many studies encompass related themes. A reason for that may be that the ILO is not a typical or obvious choice when researching environmental thought or policy making. Likewise, many other topics, like social and human rights and democratization, would often have been the natural thematic choice for historians studying the organization. Now that environmental concerns ever more frequently occupy both the minds of historians and the agendas of ILO meetings, the topic will likely become more prevalent in historical research. In the case of the ILO and the environment, there are many potential conflicting interests, internally between the tripartite parties or externally when seeking political impact. Analyzing the competing interests at play in the formation of international environmental politics is key in building an understanding, as pointed out by Ken Conca and Geoffrey D. Dabelko:

*“Competing visions, values, and interests often lead to conflict. Actors disagree about the nature of the problem, the effectiveness or fairness of proposed solutions, and the appropriate location of responsibility. Thus, studying global environmental politics means understanding the conflicts of interest that surround environmental issues—but also asking how interests, values, and visions related to the environment are shaped.”*<sup>24</sup>

## **1.E Theory and method**

### **Key definitions and concepts**

Many if not all of the key concepts discussed in this paper are wide ranging and can be utilized in manifold ways, in our everyday speech and within academia. What’s more, their content and meaning often fluctuates, both temporarily and in terms of their contexts and meaning derived from different actors. In the following some terms prevalent in and consequential for the thesis are discussed. *Nature* holds materialistic and ideational meanings which forms both our perceptions and politics.<sup>25</sup> *The environment* and *environmental problems* have held different meanings throughout the period, due to changes in knowledge, attitudes, society and nature itself. *The human environment* is a term coined by environmentalists and later adopted by the UN and the ILO. It is relatable to our modern political understanding of the environment, illustrates an intellectual shift and is often utilized to signal the intention or object being discussed. Another term, the *natural environment*, is in the material researched here often used

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<sup>23</sup> Another exemption: I Obadia, “ILO Activities in the Area of Chemical Safety,” *Toxicology* 190, no. 1–2 (August 21, 2003): 105–15, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0300-483X\(03\)00200-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0300-483X(03)00200-2).

<sup>24</sup> Conca and Dabelko, *Green Planet Blues*, 3–4.

<sup>25</sup> White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?": Work and Nature,” 183.

to mark its distinction to the *working environment*. The content and meaning of the *working environment* fluctuate, gradually taking up more aspects of the contemporary understanding of environment. I will sometimes refer to the working environment, for instance to describe past initiatives, also when the ILO still used *working conditions*. The two terms are interconnected, also after references to the environment became more frequent. Environmentalist thinking in the ILO was linked to the *ecology of the workplace* and the community, which takes a holistic, eco-system approach to workers and their surroundings, for instance when linking working and living conditions with health and local pollution.<sup>26</sup> *Ecology* is in this thesis mostly thought of as a political concept, separate from the scientific definition and closer to *political ecology*.<sup>27</sup> *Working-class environmentalism* and *labor environmentalism* are key to the thesis' conceptualization of 'ILO environmentalism'. The former considers social and political expressions of environmental sentiments among workers, while the latter encapsulates the environmental ideas and activism of organized labor. The two concepts are often attached to the material contradictions experienced by workers in these issues.<sup>28</sup> The *Labor-environment dichotomy* describes perceptions, realities and discourse associated with the relationship between the two. An interlinked concept is *job blackmail* which contains predicaments that puts considerations of employment and environment against each other, particularly those experienced by the working-class.<sup>29</sup>

### **Analytical approach**

The thesis will take the form of international, political and environmental history, and thus be based on some of the associated approaches and conventions. Donald Worster has identified three lines of enquiry – into nature itself, the effects of social and economic activity in nature, and a third in which "...perceptions, ethics, laws, myths, and other structures of meaning become part of an individual's or group's dialogue with nature".<sup>30</sup> I wish to analyze the ILO on a cultural level to study the organization's ideas and perceptions, aligned with with Worster's third line of inquiry. The thesis will historicize and contextualize ecological topics within the ILO by drawing on works on environmental issues and debates - in the global community in

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<sup>26</sup> Stefania Barca and Emanuele Leonardi, "Working-Class Ecology and Union Politics: A Conceptual Topology," *Globalizations* 15, no. 4 (June 7, 2018): 487–503, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1454672>.

<sup>27</sup> Similar to the approach taken up by Radkau, see: Joachim Radkau, *The Age of Ecology: A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), ix; Latour envisioned political ecology as a house with two collectives - nature and society, see: Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 49–90.

<sup>28</sup> Barca and Leonardi, "Working-Class Ecology and Union Politics."

<sup>29</sup> Barca, "Laboring the Earth"; Stefania Barca, "On Working-Class Environmentalism: A Historical and Transnational Overview," *A Journal for and about Social Movements* 4, no. 2 (November 2012): 61 – 80.

<sup>30</sup> Worster, *The Ends of the Earth*, 239.



general and in its international institutions. Kristin Asdal have reflected on how the *longue durée* perspective can be combined with Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory, to study the work, actions, and networks which facilitates the long-term distribution and facilitation of ideas and concepts.<sup>31</sup> Asdal uses environmental and political history as a framework, which makes it particularly relevant. However, the thesis will have a somewhat stronger focus on ideas and institutions than on individual actors.

The research questions of this thesis are shaped and informed by present debates and conditions. Accordingly, the thesis will adopt theoretical and methodical principles of a Foucauldian "history of the present", tracing the genealogical roots of labor environmentalism in the ILO.<sup>32</sup> Foucault's approach is pragmatic problem-solving through customized methodology tailor made for the phenomena it seeks to explain. David Garland elaborates on the ambitions that follow such an approach: "It aims to trace the forces that gave birth to our present-day practices and to identify the historical conditions upon which they still depend. Its point is not to think historically about the past but rather to use historical materials to rethink the present."<sup>33</sup> In this thesis, it is fruitful to work with concepts that can help explain decision-making and interests that were involved in forming ILO's environmental political language and policies. Intrinsic for such an approach is to have an active relationship to the concepts of diagnosis, conceptualization and problematization. By illuminating the history of prisons, Foucault argued, we would be better equipped to grasp perceptions of punishment in present society. My ambition here is not to reveal something totally unknown, it is rather to shed some light on present political challenges and dilemmas by highlighting historical processes where these have been present for a long time – the ILO discovery and conceptualization of environmental policy. This will hopefully provide the reader with perspectives relevant for contemporary debates around the future and transformation of labor and work.

### **Primary sources**

The main subject of my research is the political ideas, processes and activities of the ILO. As a consequence, the majority of the primary sources are produced and made available by the ILO.

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<sup>31</sup> Kristin Asdal, "Miljøhistorie Som Politikk- Og Vitenskapshistorie - Franske Forbindelseslinjer," *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 22, no. 3 (2005): 301–9.

<sup>32</sup> As elaborated on in: Michael S. Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present,'" *History and Theory* 20, no. 1 (1981): 32–46; David Garland, "What Is a 'History of the Present'? On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions," *Punishment & Society* 16, no. 4 (2014): 365–84.

<sup>33</sup> Garland, "What Is a 'History of the Present'? On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions," 373.

Selected resolutions, policy statements, meeting notes, and reports constitutes the basis for the analysis. The International Labour Conference (ILC) stands out as a source generating body, as the analysis place special emphasis on a few ILC's in the 1970s and 1990s. Preparatory notes and reports in relation with internal and external meetings are also of interest. Documents related to the co-operation between the ILO and United Nations Environment Program, for instance related to projects and meetings, is another influx of material.

## **Chapter 2: Background - Environmentalism labor and the ILO**

Three factors shaped the historical context studied in this thesis. First, the emergence of ecology as a scientific and political topic in the 1960s – the makings of modern environmentalism. Second, the international community's embrace of environmental policy. Third, that the ILO was introduced to environmental issues and started merging it with its labor priorities.

### **2.A From growing concerns to a wave of awareness**

Debates on how human activity impacts our surroundings is hardly a new phenomenon, and the first reference to ecology in the English language is from 1873.<sup>34</sup> However, as humankind's capability to exploit the earth's resources grew, discussions around how to best manage them arose. Environmentalism is often conceptualized in waves - phases in which environmentalism has surged and transformed. We are currently riding the curtails of the third, or as some have suggested entering the fourth, wave of environmentalism. Ramachandra Guha describes the first wave as an initial response to industrialization, characterized by conservationism and admiration for the *wilderness*. The second wave's starting point is by Guha set to the publication of Rachel Carson's groundbreaking *Silent Spring*, which he argues triggered numerous forms of engagement in the following years.<sup>35</sup> The well-written warning against toxic chemicals had a "dramatic and simultaneous impact on public opinion, scientific research and state policy."<sup>36</sup> Joachim Radkau recognizes the role of *Silent Spring* but argues that a more significant development was the "environmental explosion" caused by a surge of ideas and initiatives between 1966 and 1975.<sup>37</sup> Donald Worster describes a gradual development from 1945 with

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<sup>34</sup> L. White, JR., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *Classics in Environmental Studies: An Overview of Classic Texts in Environmental Studies*, ed. Nicolaas Johannes Maria Nelissen, Jan van der Straaten, and Leon Klinkers, Environmental Studies (Utrecht: International Books, 1997), 144.

<sup>35</sup> Guha, *Environmentalism*, 3–6, 69.

<sup>36</sup> Guha, 72.

<sup>37</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 89.

the coining of the phrase “age of ecology” in 1970 as its crescendo.<sup>38</sup> It is this second wave that washed in over national and international politics in the 1970s and also influenced the ILO’s rhetoric and policies. When some scholars, and this thesis, places the starting point for modern environmentalism to 1970, it seems that most do so by highlighting the significance of the concentrated efforts and increased momentum, rather than its triggering cause. Regardless of where one sets the starting point of environmentalism, it is safe to say that its ideas by 1972 had become part of the *zeitgeist*, both outside and inside the ILO.

*Silent spring*’s gloomy account of the state of nature was accompanied by publications with a similarly eerie and impactful expressions “...all had apocalyptic titles: *The Destruction of California* (Dasmann); *The Population Bomb* (Ehrlich); *The Tragedy of the Commons* (Hardin); *The Closing Circle* (Commoner).”<sup>39</sup> Renewal of dormant scientific interest and new discoveries did combined with the active advocacy of many academics cause ‘Scientific activism’ to become a characteristic trait of environmentalism in the 1970s.<sup>40</sup> Two of its proponents were Barry Commoner and David Brower whose anti-nuclear and new-left sentiments was shared by many in the emerging environmental movement.<sup>41</sup> New information about nature and the threats to the environment origin from numerous fields of study, contributed to the inclusion the environment into international and national scientific bodies. In addition to an increase in the production and distribution of knowledge, the “scientific activism” contributed to and was supplemented by a series of political and administrative developments. Paradoxically, the period in which environmental concerns ascended to political significance was also, arguable to a larger extent, characterized by industrialization and economic growth.<sup>42</sup> The Club of Rome’s influential report *Limits to Growth* was published in 1972. The group of researchers behind it came together in 1968 with an ambition to understand and predict present and future challenges for humanity.<sup>43</sup> Led by Dennis Meadows, they set out to find “the five basic factors that determine, and therefore, ultimately limit, growth on this planet - population, agricultural production, natural resources, industrial production, and pollution.”<sup>44</sup> The report concluded

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 339–41.

<sup>39</sup> Guha, *Environmentalism*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> John Robert McNeill, *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2000), 336; Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 105–6.

<sup>41</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 96–97.

<sup>42</sup> McNeill, *Something New under the Sun*, 337.

<sup>43</sup> Donella H. Meadows et al., eds., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome’s Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Meadows et al., 11–12.

that if the contemporary growth trends were left unchecked, the limit would be reached within the next century, resulting in a “rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.”<sup>45</sup> According to the authors, countering measures to restore ‘global equilibrium’ were available and could be effective if implemented imminently.<sup>46</sup> *Limits to Growth* was not only met with applause by environmentalists, and some even viewed it as counterproductive and debilitating.<sup>47</sup> The eco-philosopher Arne Næss criticized the report for promoting and being an expression of shallow rather than deep ecology.<sup>48</sup> The conclusions of the report were criticized for being overly pessimistic or even alarmist, but have nonetheless served as a starting point for a growth critical tradition in discourse and activism. Criticism of growth gained little substantial influence in established politics and those that adopted environmental policies often preferred a green technocratic approach. For the ILO, growth was tricky due to the organization’s emphasis on job security, job creation and improved quality of life. The international community and national politics might not have completely adopted the world view or outlook of the Club of Rome, but they did not remain unphased by it. *Limits to growth* contributor Jørgen Randers was in 1974 the first researcher to formulate a concept of the “ecologically sustainable society”, which were in line with portions of the influential *Our Common Future* report from 1987.<sup>49</sup>

## **2.B Political environmentalism: National and international initiatives**

Over the course of a few years environmental concerns were politicized and formalized. Numerous countries established conservation agencies and environment ministries. The Swedish government, which had established an environmental conservation agency in 1967, got their proposal for a UN conference on environmental issues adopted by the General Assembly in 1968. Rene Dubos and Barbara Ward’s *Only one Earth*<sup>50</sup> report became the main inspiration for the forthcoming Stockholm Conference. Major environmental NGOs created international networks and saw many of their ideas integrated establishment politics.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Meadows et al., 23.

<sup>46</sup> Meadows et al., 23–24.

<sup>47</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 101.

<sup>48</sup> Arne Hveem Alsvik et al., eds., *I det lange løp festskrift til Jan Eivind Myhre* (Oslo: Pax, 2017), 88.

<sup>49</sup> Alsvik et al., 89–90.

<sup>50</sup> Barbara Ward and René J. Dubos, *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet: An Unofficial Report Commissioned by the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* (United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, London: Deutsch, 1972).

<sup>51</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 81–82, 87,91; John Robert McNeill, “The Environment, Environmentalism, and International Society in the Long 1970s,” in *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, ed. Niall Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 274–76.

International organizations reorganized to better address environmental concerns, and many new, topic specific organizations were established. The rapid development has led Radkau to call it "...a real turning point, not a pseudo-event."<sup>52</sup> The newfound emphasis propelled issues that previously would have been ignored by the press and neglected by governmental agencies into the spotlight.<sup>53</sup> Some ecological 'disasters' did generate particular attention and public outcry, but there were no single event or 'disaster' that caused the 1970 turning point, rather it was born out of a "conceptual association of various risks".<sup>54</sup>

The inroads so quickly made by environmentalism into the politics and bureaucracies of certain states, were not outright mirrored at the international level, partly due to the overshadowing Cold War dynamics. Under détente, however, conditions were well suited environmental negotiations which in turn eased tensions.<sup>55</sup> There was some precedent for international environmental organizations. The International Union for the Preservation of Nature (IUCN from 1956) was established in 1948, after an initiative from the UNESCO secretary-general Julian Huxley. Among the achievements of the IUCN and its 'scientific environmentalism' was the "red list" of endangered species started in 1966.<sup>56</sup> UNESCO and other specialized agencies started up the Man and the Biosphere program in 1968, which organized "The Biosphere Conference" later that year.<sup>57</sup> For the first time the biosphere was being discussed on the international level, and the conference also produced recommendation for future action.<sup>58</sup> Within the United Nations, a conference on conservation and utilization of resources was held as early as 1948, but the environment was not yet a policy concept. A handful or two meetings focused on technology and development followed until the environment was back on the agenda 1972 Stockholm conference.<sup>59</sup> The processes that led up to that meeting was by 1968 well in motion as the United Nations General Assembly dealt with a note from the Secretary-General outlining the preparations for a future conference on the human environment<sup>60</sup> The case for such an international environmental conference was made, debated and endorsed in 1969, first

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<sup>52</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> Radkau, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Radkau, 100.

<sup>55</sup> McNeill, "The Environment, Environmentalism, and International Society in the Long 1970s," 276.

<sup>56</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 64–67.

<sup>57</sup> Anne E. Egelston, *Sustainable Development* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 60, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4878-1>.

<sup>58</sup> Lynton Keith Caldwell and Paul Stanley Weiland, *International Environmental Policy: From the Twentieth to the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd ed (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 53–54.

<sup>59</sup> Caldwell and Weiland, 51–53.

<sup>60</sup> United Nations, "The Problems of the Human Environment", item 91, General Assembly 23<sup>rd</sup> Session 1986 (New York: UN, 1968).

in the Economic and Social Council and later by the General Assembly. The preparatory work that followed was quite substantial and involved the conference's preparatory committee, NGOs, national governments, and to a certain degree, the ILO. Scientific communities displayed a great interest in informing and influencing the upcoming meeting and had some success doing so. The engagement and concern around environmental matters took a marked upswing from 1948 to 1968, but the development took off over the years leading up to 1972.<sup>61</sup> The national institutionalism of environmental politics began influencing the international community. The degree of political clout harbored by the Stockholm conference, was grounded in the political *milieu* of various nations, as well as a growing epistemic community involved in environmental work. The most concrete consequence of the Stockholm conference was the establishment of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP). But it also had significant normative effects and advanced new scientific and political ideas that colored international discussion up until the Rio Earth Summit.<sup>62</sup> One of these effects was that the environment to a greater extent was linked to *human* wellbeing. This idea was together with cultural and political change and technological and scientific innovations, key in bringing forth the 'international turn' of environmentalism.<sup>63</sup> By making the biosphere and the environment an international issue and boosting the already significant popular interest, the Stockholm conference contributed to making the human and the natural environment something that an organization such as the ILO could not ignore.

## **2.C Labor environmentalism and the ILO**

Victor Silverman operates with two main sources of labor environmentalism. First, the activity and ideas that spurred out of the occupational health and security field. Second, organized labor's social democratic ideology which was well suited for regulative measures keeping the environment in check.<sup>64</sup> There were some instances of labor environmentalism in the 1950s and 60s, and more followed in and around the 'ecological revolution'.<sup>65</sup> Many of these revolved around workers' health and safety and protection of the working environment. The theme that became the ILO's primary line of environmental advocacy from the 1970s onwards, already

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<sup>61</sup> Caldwell and Weiland, *International Environmental Policy*, 58–61.

<sup>62</sup> Caldwell and Weiland, 68, 78–79.

<sup>63</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 99; McNeill, "The Environment, Environmentalism, and International Society in the Long 1970s," 264, 271–72.

<sup>64</sup> Silverman, "Green Unions in a Grey World," 193–94.

<sup>65</sup> One example is the environmental activism of miners and miners' widows through the West Virginia Black Lung Association. See: Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 83.

had some historic precedent. Firstly, it is safe to assume that the very broad and multifaceted group ‘workers’ and their representatives were not entirely cut off from the conservationist thinking that emerged in the nineteenth century. Secondly, while many workers benefited from industrialization, they were also frequently among the most knowledgeable and vulnerable to its negative effects. In the United States labor environmentalism flourished, especially before the 1973 Oil embargo. Labor-environment cooperation took place in ad hoc groups and networks. Unions also did things independently taking up a community-based environmentalism, as illustrated by the long-standing efforts of the United Auto Workers (UAW) against air pollution.<sup>66</sup> At the heights of its powers, so to say, the relationship between American oil, chemical, atomic, steel and farm workers unions and environmental organizations played a significant role in the passage of regulation like the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Clean Water Act of 1972.<sup>67</sup> Internationally, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) were involved in the nuclear energy debate, advocating for standards for workers’ protection in the industry, which they hoped would fuel the worlds demand for energy. Pre-Chernobyl, negative discussions of nuclear energy revolved around workers’ exposure to radiation, temporarily overlooking dangers of uranium mining and disposal and storage of nuclear waste. A striking aspect of early ICFTU efforts was *where* it was done. The Housing Committee and its secretary Heinz Umrath circumvented more ‘appropriate fora’, and in doing so established links between the workers, their environment, and the community in which they lived. Paradoxically, environmental policy making slowed down as responsibility was shifted over from housing to health and safety committees.<sup>68</sup> The shift meant that the ICFTU from then on operated as the ILO had done for decades, channeling much of their environmental work through their occupational health scheme. Although the ILO have a different role and make-up than trade unions, considering governments’ and employers’ participation, it is still an organization *for* workers even if it is not made up solely of workers. Thus, the early labor environmentalism was relevant for ideas and policies that simultaneously emerged in the ILO.

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<sup>66</sup> Scott Dewey, “Working for the Environment: Organized Labor and the Origins of Environmentalism in the United States, 1948-1970,” *Environmental History* 3, no. 1 (January 1998): 45–54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3985426>; Barca, “Laboring the Earth,” 17–18.

<sup>67</sup> Barca, “On Working-Class Environmentalism: A Historical and Transnational Overview,” 67.

<sup>68</sup> Silverman, “Sustainable Alliances,” 121–23, 127, 133.

## 2.D Environmental topics in ILO in the 1950s and 1960s

David Morse was the ILO's Director General from 1948 to 1970 and helped navigate the organization through a transformative time with post-war reconstruction, an escalating Cold War, decolonization, and more widespread promotion of human and social rights.<sup>69</sup> Decolonization more than doubled the number of member states, contributed to a power shift within the organization, and changed its agendas. Cold War dynamics were also influential. However, towards the end of the 'Morse-era' tensions between East and West were supplemented and sometimes upstaged by emerging North-South conflict lines.<sup>70</sup> Both Wilfred Jenks and his successor Francis Blanchard, who became Director-General when Jenks passed away in 1973, had a wealth of experience from the ILO.<sup>71</sup> The duo guided ILO through times in which important ideas for the organization were challenged and they were forced to modify its modus operandi.<sup>72</sup> One principle that grew forth in these years and became influential for the ILO's rhetoric and policies related to the environment was the idea of a 'humanization of work'. A characteristic feature of the ILO's operations at the end of the 1960s, was that the technical assistance the organization previously had offered was expanded into something more comprehensive and cooperative. The new form of assistance was conceptualized as 'technical cooperation' and made closer connections to conditions in developing countries, reduced the European bias, and quickly outgrew other activities and programs.<sup>73</sup> Technical assistance was helped by the creation of the International Institute for Labour Studies(IILS) in 1960, as well as the International Centre for Advanced Technical and Vocational Training in Turin four years later. This was part of an educational focus and increased professionalism in the organization. ILO's conception and promotion of universal principles of human rights in the 1950s were more suited to technical cooperation than the previous strategy of promoting labor standards. The World Employment Programme (WEP), a central initiative in the ILO from its launch in 1969 onwards, aimed at promoting employment through technical cooperation but had more success in shifting in the development discourse.<sup>74</sup> When the ILO later decided to intensify its efforts to protect the environment, the educational and operative aspects of technical cooperation were integrated into the proposed measures.

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<sup>69</sup> Marcel van der Linden, "The International Labour Organization, 1919–2019," *Labor* 16, no. 2 (May 1, 2019): 21–23, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15476715-7323601>.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Maul, *The International Labour Organization: 100 Years of Global Social Policy* (Berlin, Germany : Geneva, Switzerland : in association with International Labour Office: DE GRUYTER Oldenbourg, 2019), 156–57.

<sup>71</sup> Maul, 216–18.

<sup>72</sup> van der Linden, "The International Labour Organization, 1919–2019," 23–27.

<sup>73</sup> Maul, *The International Labour Organization*, 159.

<sup>74</sup> Maul, 172, 176-177,188.



A recommendation on white phosphorus was the ILO's first step in dealing with toxic chemicals and was introduced as early as the organization's first year in operation.<sup>75</sup> Since then, several initiatives to improve the working conditions and safeguard the worker and the workplace environment has been taken, amongst other things dealing with radiation and dust.<sup>76</sup> In 1953 the ILC discussed the hazards of the workplace and adopted international standards on issues related to the working environment, such as protection measures, occupational disease and medical examination.<sup>77</sup> A Meeting of experts tasked with increasing the organization's knowledge and develop new polices had dangerous substances on their agenda in 1956.<sup>78</sup> Like the ICFTU, the ILO had a fairly positive and hopeful attitude towards nuclear energy and but were nonetheless wary of the harming effects of radiation.<sup>79</sup> The 1960 ILC approved a Convention concerning the protection of workers against ionizing radiation which amongst other things called for protective measures and maximum permissible limits of exposure.<sup>80</sup> The ILO and WHO cooperated on a number of issues under the header of occupational health and safety. A joint ILO-WHO Committee has studied problems and standards related to air pollution since 1969.<sup>81</sup> Research and distribution of information were viewed as crucial aspect for ILO efforts to improve working conditions. The ILO international occupational safety and health information center (CIS) was established in 1956, with the goal to collect and systematize relevant information. Together with WHO and UNEP, ILO established the related International Program on Chemical Safety(IPCS) in 1980. IPCS has conducted a lot of work on toxic pesticides and chemicals, among other things in relation to implementation of recommendations following UNCED and Agenda 21.<sup>82</sup> The work on toxic chemicals began long before the 'internationalization' of environmental concerns following the Stockholm conference, but were after it more aligned with the international framework. The main topics in which environmental concerns were discussed and taken into account in the ILO in the 1950s and 1960s, were nuclear energy, health and safety, and chemicals. Some new lines of engagement emerged in the 1970s,

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<sup>75</sup> Obadia, "ILO Activities in the Area of Chemical Safety," 105–6.

<sup>76</sup> ILO, "Environmental specifications for working places; ILO basic paper for the UN conference on the human environment; element 1 (b) (3)" (Geneva: ILO, 1971).

<sup>77</sup> ILO, *Records of Proceedings (RoP)*, International Labour Conference, 36th Session 1953 (Geneva: ILO, 1954), 408-413.

<sup>78</sup> ILO, *Report, Meeting of Experts on Dangerous Substances* (Geneva: ILO, 1956).

<sup>79</sup> ILO, "Atomic Energy and Social Policy", *International Labour Review* 72, no 1 (July, 1955): 1-20.

<sup>80</sup> ILO, *Records of Proceedings (RoP)*, International Labour Conference, 44th Session 1960 (Geneva: ILO, 1961), 655-666, 746-752.

<sup>81</sup> Caldwell and Weiland, *International Environmental Policy*, 135.

<sup>82</sup> Obadia, "ILO Activities in the Area of Chemical Safety," 107–8, 111.

as the organization sought to utilize its technical expertise and promote its interests in an international context increasingly influenced by the ‘environmental turn’.

While having a modest position within the ILO, there were some signs of a forthcoming boost of environmental discussions in the organization’s efforts to improve working conditions.<sup>83</sup> Debates on ecology and environmental topics and its relation to labor started coloring agendas on multiple levels in the early 1970s. A resolution adopted in 1970 called for a tripartite ILO delegation to the Stockholm Conference to contribute “Within its field of competence, in the work of the Preparatory Committee and in the Conference itself, particularly as regards the working environment as part of the total human environment.”<sup>84</sup> In 1971, the ILO compiled a series of papers clarifying the ILO’s perceptions and positions in relation to the environment. One of these basic papers dealt with the working environment, or *places* as it was coined in the title, outlining state of knowledge and the principle issues, policies and positions.<sup>85</sup> It described potential sources of occupational exposure to harmful elements, which included chemical or biological substances, threats from various types of physical energy, and mental and physical stress. Gases and vapors, dust, noise and vibration, ionizing and non-ionizing radiation, and industrial waste was highlighted as key hazardous areas, which the ILO believed should be subjects of quantitative studies that could help set “permissible limits”. Another focus was to work towards more comprehensive monitoring of industries and introducing less polluting equipment and methods.<sup>86</sup> The overarching themes of the paper was to showcase the relevance and value of the ILO’s previous efforts, as well as committing the organization to intensify its efforts to improve the working environment.<sup>87</sup> That same year, the International Labour Office issued a note on the work of the ILO in relation to the working environment, highlighting its international instruments on radiation and focus on air quality, as well as pointing to potential work on toxicity, noise and vibration. Positive referenced were also made to the work of the joint ILO/WHO Committee on Occupational Health and the safety information service (CIS).<sup>88</sup> Overall, the two ILO statements viewed the ILO to be very well situated to deal with the environment due to its past experience and tripartite perspective.

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<sup>83</sup> Maul, *The International Labour Organization*, 236.

<sup>84</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings (RoP)*, International Labour Conference, 54th Session 1970 (Geneva: ILO, 1971), 732.

<sup>85</sup> ILO, “Environmental specifications for working places” (Geneva: ILO, 1971).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>88</sup> ILO, “Note on the work of the ILO in relation to problems of the working environment” (Geneva: ILO, 1971).

When faced with growing environmental concerns in the public, the international community, and its membership, the ILO could point to its previous activities related to improving working conditions. Recognizing its past efforts and how they could utilize it when responding to the emergence of international environmental politics was the organization's first step towards some sort of 'ILO environmentalism'. While ILO activities did not change overnight, the rhetoric was less unwieldy and soon construed its working conditions efforts in a new light. In fact, so much so that the environment by 1972 already was the main theme for the Director-General Annual Report to the ILC – *Technology for freedom: Man in his environment, the ILO Contribution*. In 1975 the title of the address was *Making Work More Human*, and at the subsequent conference gave green light to the International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and the Environment (PIACT) was given green light.

### Chapter 3: The ILO's environmental perceptions and actions in the 1970s

The environment, as it had been conceived by the 'ecological revolution', emerged as a policy area in the ILO in the 1970s. This chapter researches the organization's intellectual and political "discovery" of environmental policies. Ideas of the limits of the planet's and communities' capacity to withstand the pressure and side effects of growth and production inspired a reorientation of ILO objectives, linking the workplace with the general environment. In the following, I will seek to provide an explanation as to why the environment became a relevant issue for the ILO and how some of its leading figures and bodies argued for positions, policies and activities designed for environmental protection. Ultimately, this intellectual and political process led to the establishment of a new program, PIACT, dedicated to the improvement of working conditions and environment.

#### **3.A The environmental perceptions of the ILO and those of its Director-General's**

What was the problem with the workplace and the human environment? Over a few years in the 1970s this question was frequently raised in the ILO. Through the Annual Report of the Director-General, each year the head of the organization is given the opportunity to set the agenda for the ILC's and by extension the organization as a whole. In the preparatory process issues can be explored and the International Labor Office can increase its competence and knowledge. Discussions within the delegations and on the conference floor provides a good measurement of the overall sentiment and attitude of the organization. The reports are often

used to introduce new topics or initiate new programs, and such was the case when the environment was reconceptualized and integrated in ILO efforts in the 1970s.

### **1972 ILC and *Technology for Freedom: Man in His Environment***

The 57th session of the ILC convened between July 7<sup>th</sup> and July 27<sup>th</sup> 1972. A mere two days before national delegations, media, and representatives from international and national IGO's and NGO's met in Stockholm for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. With its groundbreaking environmental focus, the ILC very much kept up with the international 'moment' of which it was part. Other matters were discussed and emphasized, but the organization put forth the environment as the overarching theme. Over a handful of years, the environment had developed into an issue that the ILO and other international organizations deemed as a natural fit for their agendas – a crucial, *international* matter. Director-General Wilfred Jenks' annual report to the 1972 ILC was entitled *Technology for Freedom: Man in His Environment*<sup>89</sup> It was the first major response from the ILO to the environmental challenges of the day and included a set of unprecedented world views and appeals for future action. The report was pioneering, not because workers' living or working environments had never been discussed before, but because the issues dealt with in the report were to some extent framed and organized in line with some of the ideas and principles of modern environmentalism. As the first item on the agenda, the report set the tone for the conference. Furthermore, it was the preliminary spark that set off a long and somewhat fragmented discussion about the ILO's role in regard to the protection of the human environment. It laid the groundwork for a long and somewhat fragmented discussion about the environmental ideology and responsibility of the ILO that still continues to this day.

*Technology for Freedom* is not outright critical of growth and technological innovation but does contain numerous warnings of the hazards of unchecked and unlimited development. The Director-General argued that active policies were needed to ensure that technology was being used to preserve nature, secure social and economic development, and ultimately, as the title suggests, promote freedom. The report starts out by portraying man's unprecedented capacities and power, both technologically and intellectually, and how in 1972 mankind as a whole depended on its rewards and potential pitfalls. Jenks utilized the story of the sorcerer's

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<sup>89</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings*, Report of the Director-General: *Technology for Freedom: Man in his Environment*, International Labour Conference, 57th Session 1972 (Geneva, ILO, 1972).

apprentice as an analogy for the world's ecological predicament, a situation in which the forces unleashed are unknown and difficult to control: "Civilisation is now at the mercy of the sorcerer's apprentice. The whole future of man is at stake as he conjures with the unknown, with forces which he has set loose but neither understands nor controls."<sup>90</sup> For the first time, Jenks argued, human capacity for production and technological innovation had made humankind able to sabotage its own conditions for life: "Man can now destroy life on earth; stopping short of nuclear suicide, he may make earth uninhabitable by ecological neglect. The choice rests with man himself."<sup>91</sup> To better control the technological development and yield an outcome with both economic and ecological benefits it was argued that more regulative policies were needed. However, Jenks was hesitant and cautious to suggest concrete action, and rather sought to shed some light on issues to which the organization could contemplate its possible contribution.<sup>92</sup> However, it was clear that a future solution was envisioned to continue hegemonic politics of economic growth, but not without adjustments and the introduction of environmental policies:

*We must therefore reconcile continued growth and innovation with comprehensive environment policies. We need a new conception and a new criterion of economic growth. Such a conception may require new departures in economic and social policy no less than in policies for science and technology. Environment considerations must form an essential dimension of growth.*<sup>93</sup>

Part of the report's diagnosis was that environmental problems and policies to combat them would only increase in relevance in the coming years. Thus, figuring out and defining where to place both social justice and the ILO message and contribution within the concept of 'environment consciousness', would be important. One way to accomplish this, it was suggested, was to place potential measures within a social ecology that encompassed social and economic factors.<sup>94</sup> It was emphasized that a good environmental measure should not leave the economy shattered and that, likewise, economic policies should not be at the expense of the environment. If this was not ensured, society would be left with social unrest and a "Phyrric victory".<sup>95</sup> Here, Jenks points to the potential challenges of and to employment and growth that

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<sup>90</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 1.

<sup>91</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 1.

<sup>92</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 2-6, 9-19.

<sup>93</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 10-12.

<sup>95</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 13.

could follow implementation of environmental policies. In the following decades, the social consequences of environmental measures would continue to puzzle ILO officials as they sought to find the direction and balance of ILO ‘environmentalism’. However, by and large the report considered improvements of the environment as something that would *benefit* workers.

When the report dealt with how workers were affected by a deteriorating environment, and perhaps more importantly, what the tripartite membership could do about it, one priority was emphasized more than any other – the working environment. In the report, making the working environment safer and cleaner was highlighted as the best contribution of workers and employers, and even an effective way to increase the ‘environment consciousness’ of the general population. Cleaning up the workplace would benefit the worker and its community, but it would take a wholehearted societal effort to do so: “The hazards and pollutants in man’s working and living environment can only be eliminated if the productive forces of society are fully committed to, and involved in, the search for new, less polluting, techniques of production and new waste-disposal and recycling technologies.”<sup>96</sup> Jenks further pondered whether the ILO were not ideally situated to take up the mantle and help secure a livable environment, as they harbored three vital groups for such an effort – workers, employers, and governments. By firstly signifying the environmental threats facing society and then its relevance for and dependency on the tripartite parties, Jenks made a strong argument for increased environmental effort.

### **The environment - An international issue**

Jenks writes that there was a great need to understand environmental issues as global problems with global solutions. In this regard the Director-General put his faith in the then upcoming United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm stating that it “...may well be a turning point in man’s approach to his environment, the first step in an intensive and vigorous programme of world-wide action to give man larger, broader and less egocentric views of his dependence on and place in nature.”<sup>97</sup> The urgency and optimism in the statement above is noteworthy, as is the belief in the international community’s role and ability in tackling environmental issues - the latter, of course, a little less surprising than the former, considering the author’s professional background and position. Jenks wanted the ILC, and in the coming years the ILO, to discuss and formulate answers to questions raised by environmental

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<sup>96</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 56.

<sup>97</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 10.

degradation and technological and industrial development.<sup>98</sup> Certain parts of the report went beyond occupational hazards, health, and the working environment, describing threats and possible remedies to the natural and human environment in general. Some delegates at the conference took note of this and warned against actions and policies that would go beyond what they deemed the ILO's room for maneuver and expertise. In his concluding reply to the debate of the report, Jenks established that there was solid agreement around leaving larger issues related to the earth's ecosystem to be handled by other agencies with "more direct responsibilities".<sup>99</sup> At the same time, Jenks pointed to the conference's acceptance of large parts of the environmentalist message in his report and their shared belief that the social and economic aspects of many environmental policies made them relevant for the ILO. Accordingly, he stated that "... employers and workers must claim and exercise a responsible voice in their formulation and accept and discharge a significant share of the responsibility for their execution."<sup>100</sup> *Technology for Freedom* posed a number of questions that would become linchpins of the environmental debate within the ILO over the following decades, of which some were further developed and elaborated on in 1974 and 1975.

### **The 1974 report of the Director-General and accompanying debate**

Although to a significantly lesser degree than in 1972, environmental issues colored parts of the 1974 Annual Report of the newly appointed Director-General Francis Blanchard. As he discussed the environment, Blanchard referenced one of the 'counterculture ideas' which by then had started to gain prominence in society – criticism of growth. Conventional economists' belief in growth was questioned at an increasing rate and this colored debates on a wide range of topics such as development, management of natural resources, and industrialization. Blanchard highlighted this because he thought that it impacted the ILO in two ways: "...first to the extent that it involves the working environment of which I have just spoken, and secondly, because some of the proposed remedies could have major consequences for social progress."<sup>101</sup> This statement points to a conundrum of sorts, that has characterized the ILO's environmental work. On one hand, it highlights the main reason why the ILO prioritized the issue: consideration for workers and their wellbeing at work and their surrounding communities. On

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<sup>98</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General: ILC 57 (1972), 57-58.

<sup>99</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings (RoP)*, International Labour Conference, 57th Session 1972 (Geneva: ILO, 1972), 675.

<sup>100</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 675.

<sup>101</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings (RoP)*, International Labour Conference, 59th Session 1974 Geneva: ILO, 1974), 745.

the other hand, Blanchard was well aware that many of the potential measures could have negative effects on employment and economic development. This ambiguity has proved challenging for the ILO, as different interests have been weighed against each other in the process of formulating its stances and settling on a course of action. Finding a proper balance in regard to economic and ecological concerns seems to be a recurring theme for the ILO. Speaking to the Conference in 1974, Blanchard believed that concerns over economic development, employment and poverty had to be combined with environmental conservation:

*...the international action for the struggle against poverty and the kind of general inquiry into man and work which I have mentioned should be closely linked together in a twin concern to achieve the priority objective of raising the living standards of underprivileged peoples and individuals, together with the no less important objective of protecting and conserving our environment.*<sup>102</sup>

For the Director-General, working condition was one field filled with particular potential for improvement and opportunities for ILO contributions. The response to these aspects of the report were largely positive. Many delegates supported the overall sentiment and some even criticized the report for not going further than a “reinvigoration of our action”.<sup>103</sup>

### **ILC 1975 and *Making Work More Human***

When Director-General Blanchard addressed the 1974 ILC in response to the discussion of his annual report, he emphasized the need for future action on environmental issues. His own office initiated a marquee step in that direction already at the following years ILC. The Director-General’s annual report was entitled *Making work more human: Working conditions and environment*<sup>104</sup>. It combined ideas on the humanization of work which had flourished in the organization over a handful of the previous years with the impetus placed on the working and general environment since the *Technology for Freedom* report. Blanchard’s main motivation for placing the topic on the agenda was that he wanted to sound out the ILC’s attitude towards creating a program that he envisioned to be a “vast action-oriented inquiry into human labour”.<sup>105</sup> According to some, the state of the world economy in 1975 could warrant a focus on employment or income distribution, but Blanchard argued that the ILO already had sufficient ongoing processes and efforts in place on these themes. Additionally, it was his view that a

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<sup>102</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 59 1974, 745.

<sup>103</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 59 1974, 744.

<sup>104</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings*, Report of the Director-General: Making work more human, International Labour Conference, 60th Session 1975 (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 1.

<sup>105</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 1.



focus on the environment did not have to be to the detriment of other aspects of work, and that it all was interconnected: "...the success or failure of modern societies will depend on how they solve this key problem of the inter-relationship between employment, remuneration, working conditions and environment, education, health and leisure."<sup>106</sup> The report recognized that while the conditions in which most workers operated had improved drastically, partly due to the efforts of the ILO, much was still left to be desired. Blanchard devoted a not insubstantial portion of his report to ideational discussions of what constituted work at the present and how it could and hopefully would develop in the future. He contemplated the factors influencing work and shaping people's ideas of and attitude towards work.<sup>107</sup> According to Blanchard, perceptions of work were shifting: "A real change seems to be taking place in attitudes towards work; this is seen either in the much wider range of demands relating to the improvement of the conditions in which work is organised and performed, or in a fundamental questioning of work itself."<sup>108</sup> These changed perceptions, of course, were not unilateral or impervious to varying circumstances. For instance, when writing about attitudes towards working conditions, Blanchard made a distinction between industrialized and developing areas of the world.<sup>109</sup>

A few conflicting perceptions of work and its meaning and role were outlined in the report. A traditional hegemonic view, at least in industrialized countries, was that remunerated work still held the key to self-fulfillment. By contrast, some people viewed work as a constraint or necessary evil that facilitated self-realization through activities in the workers' free time. The two views above would most likely produce divergent thoughts on societal efforts to increase job satisfaction. Blanchard wanted the ILC to be aware of and engaged with these ideas, and others in the space between them, to be better equipped to influence the future of work. The importance of reflecting on these ideas was according to the Director-General enhanced due to the predicted future demand for job creation.<sup>110</sup> *Making work more human* called for, and to a certain degree was itself, an expansion of the ILO's conceptualization of work and quality of life. The report is organized around three areas, each with its own chapter – safety and health of the worker and his environment, work time and time devoted to leisure and rest, and finally, the organization and content of work and how it could contribute to self-fulfillment and a humanization of work. As discussed above, Blanchard wanted to test the waters and get

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<sup>106</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC 60 (1975), 2.

<sup>107</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC 60 (1975), 5-11.

<sup>108</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC 60 (1975), 5.

<sup>109</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 5-6.

<sup>110</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 8-10.

feedback from the organization. It was, nonetheless, an elaboration of where he wanted the ILO to go and what actions to take. In the annual reports of 1972, 74 and 75, the Director-General's introduced a new political outlook to the organization. They placed unprecedented emphasis on the threats to the general human environment and spoke of the working environment in a new way. Correspondingly, and arguably consequentially, a reconceptualization of work that adhered to changing times and environmental "discovery" were advocated.

### **3.B The ILO's environmental action develops**

So, what kind of action was outlined? In the reports from 1974 and 1975 there were many references to "ILO action in the field". The process toward formulating the concrete actions had begun already in 1972 and over the following years involved a series of decisions affecting the organization's structure, standards, and cooperation with other agencies, as well as the themes of its events, training, and technical support to and in member states. The culmination of this process was the establishment of the Programme for Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (PIACT), which was intended to spearhead and coordinate the environmental efforts of the ILO.

#### **ILO Action: International instruments and new fields of work**

In line with the environmental focus of the Conference, the 1972 ILC passed a "Resolution concerning the Contribution of the International Labour Organization to the Protection and Enhancement of the Environment Related to work", a topic of two separate proposals from worker delegates. The resolution was given first priority, mostly out practical concerns - to accommodate the ongoing Stockholm Conference and make sure it was passed in time to reach conference before it ended. Intentions of efficiency notwithstanding, the Committee devoted much of its allocated time to discussing the resolution, so much so that it ended up being passed *after* the meeting in Stockholm was adjourned.<sup>111</sup> A number of issues proved difficult for the committee. One of them was its links and references to the Stockholm Conference, which was controversial due to Cold War dynamics. The Soviet Union had boycotted the conference due to the absence of invitations extended to certain states, most notably the German Democratic Republic. Soviet and Cuban government delegates argued that environmental action should be universal in nature and that they therefore could not support the resolutions references to Stockholm.<sup>112</sup> Like most other matters international politics environmental issues did not

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<sup>111</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 449, 667.

<sup>112</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 669-670.

escape Cold War politics. Some delegates accused western participants of dragging out discussions on the somewhat uncontroversial topic of the environment to avoid dealing with matters related to decolonization and human rights abuse in western dictatorships. Other issues that prolonged debates were of a more direct relevance for the topic. Vitajc Jakasa, an Argentinian employers' advisor and Vice-Chairman of the Resolutions Committee, emphasized how consolidated the committee had been in the work with the working environment resolution. Jakasa claimed that they could all accept it in principle and that "because of its humanitarian character, [it] does not give rise to controversy."<sup>113</sup> The employers' representatives did, however, have some concerns. Primarily, they were skeptical to the interconnected cause and effect attributed to the general and the working environment. Additionally, many employers had voiced concerns over a "too political" resolution and suggested that there were other agencies and conferences better suited and equipped to deal with environmental issues.<sup>114</sup> The causal connection that Mr. Jakasa pointed to was retained in the final resolution, establishing that ILO's efforts aimed at improving the general environment.<sup>115</sup> Mr Louet, a French workers' representative and Vice-President of the Resolutions Committee, stressed the significance of formulating the ILO's position in light of the current international political context – to seize the moment, so to speak. The ILO's role, according to Louet, was to ensure that future environmental protection did not only considered the natural environment but also encompassed the *working* and *human* environment.<sup>116</sup> Nuclear technology proved to be another challenging topic for the Committee, with conflicting opinions on testing of nuclear weapons, disarmament, and technological innovation. Eventually, the resolution urged member states to abstain from nuclear weapons testing and left other troublesome aspects of the issue unmentioned.<sup>117</sup> While some of the stated ambitions of the proposers fell through as a result of the drawn-out process, the resolution contained many notable elements and overall it received wide support. The resolution outlined what the ILO at that point recognized as threats to the environment. Furthermore, ten operative paragraphs instructed, pledged, and invited the organization, the Governing Body, member states, and employers' and workers' organizations to take action in favor of the environment. "Full support and effective action" were promised to a potential international campaign on the topic. The working environment was highlighted as the most important area of possible influence for both the ILO and workers' and employers'

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<sup>113</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 660.

<sup>114</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 660.

<sup>115</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 703.

<sup>116</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 660.

<sup>117</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 703.

organizations. However, the resolution also encouraged cooperation and consultation beyond the confines of the working environment. Finally, it was decided that the ILO were to expand its research on the topic, especially in relation to industrial activities and occupational safety, and consider potential future international regulative instruments.<sup>118</sup> Disagreements between the tripartite parties like those mentioned above were not uncommon as the organization over the following years debated its course of action, but not to an detrimental extent.

Some initial efforts were made to follow up the intentions and discussions of the 1972 ILC, as well as prepare the grounds for potential future ILO action and regulation. Meetings of experts contributed with an influx of knowledge about issues such as asbestos and control of atmospheric pollution in the working environment.<sup>119</sup> The meeting on the latter theme took a clear stance in favor of regulation through an international instrument: “The experts were of the opinion that the ILO should adopt, as soon as possible, an international instrument on the control of atmospheric pollution in the working environment. It was considered that the principles contained in the instrument should be mandatory but the means by which they were applied should be flexible.”<sup>120</sup> Another meeting of experts, this time to study noise and vibration, was decided by the Governing Body in 1974. Their report provided increased insight into the topic and how it could be regulated by and included in an international instrument.<sup>121</sup> By the time the 1974 ILC convened, noise and vibration and atmospheric pollution had started crystallizing as the main problems of the working environment. At Francis Blanchard’s first ILC as Director-General in 1974, another resolution concerning the working environment was adopted. There were many references to its 1972 predecessor attached to the resolution, in both the preparatory work and the adopted text.<sup>122</sup> One novelty in the second resolution was the exemplification of physical dangers of and to the working environment – heat, radiation, dust, atmospheric pollutants, noise, air pressure, vibration, dangerous machines, chemical substances and explosives. Adaptions in the work process and prevention of mental stress in relation to the work experience were also introduced and encouraged. The resolution also called for the Office to organize appropriate and effective research and facilitate publication of material to

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<sup>118</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 703-704.

<sup>119</sup> ILO, *Records of Proceeding*, Report VI (I): Working Environment, International Labour Conference. 61st Session 1976 (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 8, 32-35.

<sup>120</sup> ILO, Report VI (I): Working Environment, ILC 61 (1976), 32.

<sup>121</sup> ILO, Report VI (I): Working Environment, ILC 61 1976, 8, 36-39.

<sup>122</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 59 1974, 3.

substantiate the ILO's goals.<sup>123</sup> The Governing Body established that discussions of the working environment under a designated item on the agenda of the 1976 ILC would be organized around two themes - atmospheric pollution and noise and vibration.<sup>124</sup> In December, a meeting of experts on noise and vibration put forth proposals intended for a future international instrument on the working environment, as well as a code of practice on the prevention of and the action to be taken against noise and vibrations in the workplace.<sup>125</sup>

Similar action was among several things suggested and elaborated on in the annual report to the 1975 ILC. The discussions it triggered were later described as "particularly extensive", and a sign of "...widespread support for strengthened ILO action across a broad spectrum of working conditions and environment issues."<sup>126</sup> Standard setting through international instruments, a traditional 'ILO method', was by Francis Blanchard highlighted as an important line of environmental influence moving forward. In this regard, the ILO could rely on a foundation made up of preexisting labor standards upon which to base its efforts on before moving on with expansive new standards.<sup>127</sup> The 1975 "Resolution concerning Future Action of the International Labour Organization in the Field of Working Conditions and Environment", was quite extensive in scope. Even though it resembled previous resolutions many of its operational aspects were intended to initiate action in uncharted territory. It included more concrete measures and "organizational support" than previous resolutions.<sup>128</sup> The program and budgetary implications of the resolution were considered and secured and plans of a designated item on the 1976 ILC agenda were already mapped out. Thus, one could argue that the organization as a whole was better prepared for action by 1975, both organizationally and politically, for making impactful decisions on the environment. That being said, the exploratory process up to that point was viewed as valuable as the organization went from 'something needs to be done' to 'this is what the ILO can contribute with'. The resolution also included language on the links between the working and human environment, as well as to other activities to protect the human environment: "Considering that ILO action concerning working conditions

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<sup>123</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 59 1974, 811.

<sup>124</sup> ILO, *Records of Proceedings*, Report VI (II): Working Environment, International Labour Conference, 61st Session 1976 (Geneva: ILO, 1976), 1.

<sup>125</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC 60 (1975), 83-84.

<sup>126</sup> ILO, *Records of Proceedings*, International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment", ILO Governing Body 200<sup>th</sup> Session 1976 (Geneva: ILO, 1976), 1.

<sup>127</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 71-73.

<sup>128</sup> ILO, *Resolutions Adopted by the International Labour Conference at Its 60th Session* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1975), 7.

and environment should, in taking into account aspirations for a better quality of life, be closely joined with other activities relating to the protection of the human environment.”<sup>129</sup> This speaks to the ILO’s approach to and viewpoint of environmental matters: it is important for the overall well-being of workers, and therefore a priority for the ILO. ILO’s collaboration with UNEP, which was intended to revolve around education, training and economic and social studies, were also outlined.<sup>130</sup> This was a consequential decision, considering the numerous cases of co-publication of training material and guides, as well as co-organizing of events that followed.

The three resolutions adopted over the course of four years indicates that the ILO by the mid-1970s prioritized environmental issues to a higher degree than before and that it, in fact, was considered to be part of their “first and permanent mission”.<sup>131</sup> This was expressed in decisions to launch inquiries, increase budgets and review labor standards. The was born out of a need to clarify its positions and an ambition and wish to influence decisions on a topic that could improve workers life and the general environment. In some ways, the 1975 ILC was the culmination of a growing environmental impetus since 1972, inspired by the ‘environmental turn’ that influenced both the international community and the ILO. What, then, was to be done moving forward within a topic that had been quite thoroughly integrated into the ILO agenda? To summarize, the activities outlined in reports and at ILCs were mainly within three categories – research and information, technical cooperation, and standard-setting. The organization clearly viewed these venues as effective and suitable for their contribution. However, most of these activities were decided to be channeled through an international program.

### **3.C PIACT – The International Programme for Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment**

A foreshadowing of the establishment of PIACT can be found in Wilfred Jenks’ reply to the debate of his report to the 1972 ILC:

*From these twin propositions flows the natural conclusion that the most immediate responsibility of the ILO as regards environment is to make a far more effective contribution to the improvement of working environment by a far more vigorous effort in the matter than we have devoted to it hitherto. The human and economic cost of occupational hazards has been insisted on throughout the Conference. We need to take*

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<sup>129</sup> ILO, *Resolutions Adopted by the International Labour Conference at Its 60th Session* (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 7.

<sup>130</sup> ILO, *Resolutions Adopted by the International Labour Conference at Its 60th Session* (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 8.

<sup>131</sup> ILO, *Resolutions Adopted by the International Labour Conference at Its 60th Session* (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 7.

*in this whole field an initiative as vigorous as that which launched the World Employment Programme.*<sup>132</sup>

As the need and support for such a program became more and more evident, amongst other things through debates and decisions of consecutive ILCs, the organization started preparing for its launch. Through the ILC, the ILO had called for a “coherent and integrated” program to coordinate and drive its environmental efforts, which had come to include both workers’ health and surroundings and the protection of the general human environment.<sup>133</sup> In addition to rhetorical changes, the new and expanded environmental conception called for organizational restructuring. A new international program was proposed to create a “general framework of action” and support national initiatives.<sup>134</sup> There were many lines of engagement in this issue that would benefit from a more singular reference point. One example was the dissemination of information, which success relied on systematic collection of studies and reports, customization, and circulation through channels like the *Social Labour Bulletin* and the International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS).<sup>135</sup> Another reason for establishing a new program was a desire to improve impact in member states by assisting them in more systematic manner. The mobilization of ILO resources could hopefully inspire national objectives on issues like accidents and disease and similar which in turn could be the basis for the objectives included in the program.<sup>136</sup>

Arguably the most significant initial step toward an international program can be found in the final paragraph of the 1974 resolution: “Invites the Governing Body of the International Labour Office to establish a detailed programme which would enable the International Labour Conference at successive sessions, beginning in 1976, to deal with the various aspects of the working environment with a view to the adoption of appropriate standards.”<sup>137</sup> To date, this was the most concrete step taken by the ILO to shift its efforts and operation in the direction of environmental protection. Program activities were to be included into the increasingly characteristic technical cooperation activities of the ILO, with a view to impact conditions “on the ground”.<sup>138</sup> Proposed activities was to a great extent directed at the national contexts. Already before its launch the ILC had encouraged member states to set periodic goals for their

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<sup>132</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 57 1972, 674.

<sup>133</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 59 1974, 811.

<sup>134</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 68.

<sup>135</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 68-70.

<sup>136</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 68.

<sup>137</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 59 1974, 811.

<sup>138</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General, ILC60 (1975), 71-73.

efforts and contribute to research on the topic. Common for several of the measures outlined were that they substantiated the notion that the program should be set up to both work internationally and influence national conditions and policies. The program was to be part of a wider reconsideration of ILO's current activities.<sup>139</sup> This reconsideration included exhaustive probes that involved the entire organization, particularly in preparation for the 1976 ILC. To find and consolidate the purpose of the new program, two reports circulated in the organization. A 29-point questionnaire was included in the first and the feedback presented in the second.<sup>140</sup> The first report presented an overview of the current action of the ILO and other organizations, as well as law and practices within the following areas: general provisions, atmospheric pollution, noise and vibration, personal protection, determination of permissible limits, and medical supervision.<sup>141</sup> In that sense, it was an elaboration and expansion on the state of the working environment as well as a clarifying probe for the members. Furthermore, the report discussed different possibilities for international regulation. An important purpose was to suggest a definition of the working environment and the political room for maneuver in regard to it. Two kinds of provisions in the field was highlighted— general principles of prevention and specialized regulation of particular sectors or types of work.<sup>142</sup> After the probe and discussions at the 1976 ILC the ILO decided in favor of two instruments dealing with atmospheric pollution, noise and vibration, a Convention and supplementary Recommendation, to improve working conditions and environment and underline the new program. The recommendation was intended to specify intensions when necessary.<sup>143</sup> These steps were important in setting the thematic priorities for the program.

Following the process of obtaining feedback from the organization and consolidating the idea of regulative instruments, the Governing Body discussed and approved the set-up and objectives of PIACT in 1976. The five main objectives focused on encouragement of member states, promotion of international labor standards, definition of suggested national objectives, research and training for employers and workers, and evaluation of the program and national progress. In this mission PIACT utilize four tools: standard-setting, operational activities,

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<sup>139</sup> ILO, *Resolutions Adopted by the International Labour Conference at Its 60th Session* (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 7-8.

<sup>140</sup> ILO, Report VI (I): Working Environment, ILC 61 (1976), 27-31; ILO, Report VI(II): Working Environment, ILC 61 (1976), 1.

<sup>141</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings*, Report VI (I): Working Environment, International Labour Conference, 61st Session 1976 (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 3-9, 10-22.

<sup>142</sup> ILO, Report VI (I): Working Environment, ILC 61 (1976), 10.

<sup>143</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 61 1976, 157-159, 171; ILO, Report VI(II): Working Environment, ILC 61 (1976), 3-9, 104-107.



studies and tripartite meetings and clearing-house activities.<sup>144</sup> While environmentally beneficial efforts also previously had been made mostly within the confines of occupational health and safety, the rhetorical inclusion of the natural environment that surrounded this initiative set it apart. Furthermore, devoting a designated program to the working environment and prevention of pollution was unprecedented and the ambitious plans impressive.

### **The content of PIACT**

Naturally, the PIACT program did not appear out of thin air once it had gone through the proper channels and been adopted. In addition to the steps highlighted above, consultations and discussions involved a long list of activities, including specialist teams and technical cooperation, feedback from employers', workers' and other international organizations, and six informal regional meetings.<sup>145</sup> As these consultations and the formal decisions made it increasingly likely that an international program would be established, certain people started practical and organizational preparations. According to Rodgers et al., one actor was particularly influential for the design of the program: "PIACT was the brainchild of Jean de Givry, a long-serving French official, who had been responsible for ILO work on labour relations and social institutions since the 1950s."<sup>146</sup> In relation to the establishment of the program de Givry published an article in the *International Labour Review* – "The ILO and the Quality of Working Life – A New International Programme: PIACT"<sup>147</sup>, in which he explained the reasoning behind the setup and ambitions of the program. De Givry saw the introduction of PIACT as a result of general currents that influenced perceptions of what work was and how it could improve. The currents would not be turned by the ongoing recession and unemployment, he argued, because they were "... the outcome of two great movements: towards an improvement in the quality of life in general, and towards what is sometimes referred to as industrial democracy, i.e. greater participation by the workers in decisions directly affecting their working life."<sup>148</sup> These movements were framed by the ILO as reactions against the dehumanization that had come to characterize work and life in industrial societies. In his descriptions of the state of work de Givry reiterates and references much of the rhetoric that

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<sup>144</sup> ILO, *International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment*, GB 200 (1976), 7.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>146</sup> Gerry Rodgers et al., *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009), 100.

<sup>147</sup> Jean de Givry, "The ILO and the Quality of Working Life - A New International Programme: PIACT," *International Labour Review* 117, no. 3 (1978): 261-72.

<sup>148</sup> de Givry, 262.

can be found in the Annual Reports from 1972 and 1975. In accordance with *Making work more human*, it was hoped that PIACT would "...aid its member States in adopting measures that will help to create a more "human" working environment..."<sup>149</sup>.

In mapping out potential improvement in peoples working lives, the article emphasizes three aspects of work also highlighted in the 1975 Annual Report – life and health, rest and leisure, and self-fulfillment. PIACT was viewed as a starting point for such improvements and was supposed to support and push national governments in their efforts to set and fulfill objectives to improve working conditions and environment.<sup>150</sup> To ensure that this would happen, PIACT would seek to increase knowledge through research and training and, if needed, propose new international standards. PIACT had three main lines of action. First, encourage member States to set objectives, particularly through the promotion of labor standards. Second, to propose the adoption of new standards. Third, to provide assistance to workers, employers, governments and training institutions.<sup>151</sup> For the time being, PIACT to some degree constituted the singular output for 'ILO environmentalism', but not without interaction with other programs. Intentions were that PIACT would work in tandem with the World Employment Program and provide input throughout the organization to improve the quality of work.<sup>152</sup> An important knowledge increasing measure was organizing symposia and tripartite meetings. By 1978 this was already in effect and several national and international meetings had been held, amongst other places in Manila. Integrating the environmental agenda of PIACT with the technical cooperation activities were also underway, with efforts in Algeria, Greece, Iran, Kenya, Korea, Morocco, Pakistan and Turkey.<sup>153</sup>

PIACT combined new perceptions of environment and work with the ILOs belief in many of its traditional methods and instruments – tripartism, standard setting, technical cooperation and transfer of knowledge. The organization's willingness to prioritize resources towards a designated international program speaks to the position environmental issues had acquired, at least those concerning the workplace, within the organizational apparatus and among members. It is possible to identify some issues given higher priority and having greater impact in the

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<sup>149</sup> de Givry, 270–71.

<sup>150</sup> de Givry, 264.

<sup>151</sup> de Givry, 264.

<sup>152</sup> de Givry, 264–65.

<sup>153</sup> de Givry, 266–69. A lot of research papers and reports were produced in relation to the meetings, see for instance: ILO & Koppel B., *Choice of technology and working conditions: a social assessment framework*, National Tripartite Conference in Improving Working Conditions and Environment (Geneva: ILO, 1977).

1970s, but that does not discount the significance of the environmental shift in the ILO. After 1972, the International Labour Office, the Governing Body and multiple ILC's all involved themselves with the environment and what the ILO could do to protect it. The establishment of PIACT indicates intentions of creating an apparatus capable of improving workers environment that was based on new ideas of humanization of work and utilization of the 'ILO-toolbox'. It was no little task reaching the impact desired of PIACT, in a new area of ILO action. In retrospect, both scholars and ILO's own evaluations have suggested that PIACT were not given sufficient resources to succeed.<sup>154</sup> However, establishment of the program was not the only novel practical implication of 'ILO environmentalism' in the 1970s.

### 3.D UNEP and the ILO

The formation of PIACT spurred on the ILO's blooming relationship to UNEP, as much of the cooperative efforts from then on were channeled through the new program. After UNEP was established in 1972, they crossed paths with the ILO at a gradually increasing rate. In 1975, Maurice Strong, the Executive Director of UNEP, addressed the 1975 ILC speaking to the importance of co-operation and emphasizing that the organizations shared an "inexorable bond" through its common interests.<sup>155</sup> In a similar manner, Strong highlighted the interlinked nature of environment and development, stating that:

*"... environment cannot be seen in isolation from other factors which affect the development process. It must be seen and dealt with in relation with population, its growth, its distribution and its employment, with natural resources, their availability, their exploitation and use, and with the development and deployment of technologies, all as major and interacting elements within the larger framework of development itself. It is not in any one of these, but in the interactions amongst them that the goals of development will be achieved – or frustrated."*<sup>156</sup>

In the Executive Director's mind, it was little sense in excluding the working environment from the general environment in studies or formation of policies. Additionally, Strong praised one of

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<sup>154</sup> Rodgers et al., *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*, 100–101. ;ILO, *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of the International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (PIACT): Review of activities (1976-1981) and future orientation* (Geneva: ILO, 1981); ILO, *Record of Proceedings, Report VII (I): Evaluation of the International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment, International Labour Conference, 70th Session 1984* (Geneva: ILO, 1984).

<sup>155</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 60 (1975) (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 216.

<sup>156</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 60 1975, 216.

the key actors behind PIACT, Jean de Givry, and his address to the third session of UNEP's Governing Council.<sup>157</sup>

During discussions about the ILO-UNEP relationship in 1975, some noteworthy divisions came to the fore. Workers and some government members were positive to a holistic approach to environmental policy which entailed labeling it as a socio-economic matter, thus making general environmental policies relevant for the ILO. Other government members and employers subscribed to the view that the ILO should limit its scope to the area that best fit its expertise and held most relevancy for the organization – the working environment.<sup>158</sup> The discussions of scope here bear some resemblance to those ingrained in the process surrounding the working environment reports in 1976. Workers' groups, who in one way had most to gain from improved working conditions, advocated for including more hazards and measures into environmental policies. On the other side, employers and certain government members, who in the main were responsible for implementing new routines, standards, and technology that often times were not economically favorable, were in favor of a more limited understanding of ILO responsibility and area of work. The skepticism of the latter two groups was not necessarily exclusively based on economic and political unwillingness or disability, in fact, arguments often referenced efficiency and feasibility. These disagreements can be viewed as an expression of differing conceptions of the ILO's role, as well as the workers' environment and the protection of it. In the making of the 'labor environmentalism' of the ILO, conceptions like these were key. If discussions of ideas on workers' quality of life and the working and human environments role in that was the first step, defining what the ILO should do, could do and how to do it was the second. Responsibility for collaboration with UNEP were placed on the Working Conditions and Environment Department and its Chief of Department Jean de Givry. In 1976, the two organizations agreed on principles for their collaborative work which would be conducted within four areas: working environment, human settlements, environment and development, and education and training.<sup>159</sup> Through the links to UNEP the ILO initiated an continuous influx of environmental impulses which were maintained over the following decades. These impulses had a modest but nonetheless substantial influence on the ILO.

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<sup>157</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 60 1975, 213-216.

<sup>158</sup> ILO, *The ILO contribution to the United Nations Environment Programme, Governing Body 198th Session 1975* (Geneva: ILO, 1975), 1-2.

<sup>159</sup> ILO, *Note on ILO's Activities Relating to the Environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1977), 14-15.

### **3.E Initial conclusions – what changed in the 1970s?**

#### **Environmental “discovery” – from the UN to the ILO**

At the beginning of the 1970s, the ILO and the Office of the Director-General in particular, expressed a need for a formulation of environmental policies and a definition of the organization’s role in international efforts of environmental protection. The United Nations pushed the environment up on the international agenda when it in 1968 set the wheels in motion for an international conference on the human environment. The Stockholm Conference received wide attention, from the public, NGOs, and international agencies and organizations. For an organization like the ILO, the events in Stockholm were hard to ignore. Judging by the subsequent ILO activity in the field, it must have served as a reminder for many key actors that ILO policy and ideas had to be both updated and expanded. Formulation and discussion of the annual reports to the ILC’s were important arenas for the development and clarification of the ILO’s standpoints and role in relation to environmental problems. The reports reconceptualized work and the working and human environment, based on a mixture of traditional ILO ideas and new impulses. Gradually, this created a new way of describing and dealing with the environment – a new political language. As environmental issues were brought to the attention of the International Labour Office and the tripartite constituency, the first steps towards organizational and operational changes were made. The 1972 *Technology for freedom* report was in many ways a call for the organization as a whole to find a response to society’s growing concerns over problems facing the human environment. When *Making Work More Human* was publicized three years later, the organization had zoned in on a slightly more concrete course of action. A prevailing notion was that the most effective measure for the ILO was to focus on working conditions and environment, as it was believed that would be beneficial not only for workers and their immediate workplace but also the general environment.

The handful of years from 1972 up until the PIACT program was established in 1976, were in some ways an examination phase in which the member states, workers, employers, and ILO employees formed their response. What later materialized into the PIACT programme was conceived and discussed throughout these years. Francis Blanchard took up the mantle after Wilfred Jenks passed away and slowly began the process of turning still evolving principles and ideas into concrete organizational and political changes. In his reply to the debate of his annual report to the 1974 ILC, Director-General Blanchard reflected on how the ILO was changing and expressed that he felt change was an overarching theme for the organization at

the time. Even more important than the changes within the organization were the social and economic developments taking place outside it – in ‘the real world’. In Blanchard’s opinion, it was vital for the ILO to not become a “sleeping passenger” that sat idle by as the surrounding scenery rapidly shifted.<sup>160</sup> Whilst it is clear that he did not have solely the environment, and ILO’s relationship to it, in mind, the sentiment is well suited to describe why many in the organization welcomed the environmental initiatives that emerged in the 1970s.

### **The working environment – The main area of ‘ILO environmentalism’**

Working conditions continued to be the primary concern as the ILO built on its previous work and experiences in an effort to increase its environmental impact. However, the working environment’s relation to the general environment now took on a more prominent role in the organization’s rhetoric. At this point, ideas of conservation and protection stemming from the ‘environmental turn’ supplemented health and safety as principle reasons for action. At least in a rhetorical sense. This is evident in two ways. Firstly, from a practical standpoint, the ILO aligned its work in the field with events and agencies in the international community that focused on the general human environment. ILO’s work in relation to the Stockholm Conference and its cooperation with UNEP are examples of this. It was only natural that the underlying purpose and arguments of a pamphlet on working conditions co-produced by UNEP and the ILO would take on a more ‘environmentalist’ form than a previous counterpart involving the WHO. Secondly, increased international focus “forced” the ILO to formulate and adopt positions and produce material related to the environment within and outside the places of work. In an ideational and rhetorical perspective, the unprecedented attention given to hazardous toxins, pollution, overproduction, and potential detrimental effects of new technology by the media and activists, did not escape the minds of many within the ILO organization or membership. That being said, the ILO did not advocate any large-scale changes or a major shift in the job market. Its positions and actions were more along the lines of accident prevention and phasing out harmful substances when possible. There was still no talk of ‘green jobs’ or a ‘just transition’. The ILO headquarters was not the scene of an environmental awakening in the 1970s, but a clear organizational and political shift took place. A new issue was firmly placed on the agenda after the “discovery” of environmental policies and a new political language arose with it.

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<sup>160</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 59 1974, 741-742.

## **PIACT and environmental action**

The establishment of PIACT was the most significant development of the decade for ‘ILO environmentalism’. It happened on the back of a gradual increase in the organization’s awareness of and concern about environmental problems, as well as a thorough probe involving both expertise and constituency. This breakthrough notwithstanding, it was a tendency to narrow down focus and scope when transcending from words to action. As they were setting goals for their environmental operations, the ILO turned to what was most familiar, and which they also deemed most relevant – the workplace and its conditions and environment. In one way this is a perfectly natural aspect of most organizations, political or otherwise, that is, to concentrate and concretize when operationalizing objectives and overall ambitions. Nevertheless, the gap between the comprehensive discussions of the general environment at the ILC’s and the quite narrow focus that characterized the first ILO action to follow it up, is noteworthy. Additionally, it is fair to say that the initial focus on atmospheric pollution and noise and vibration excluded other aspects of the working environment in need of improvement. It might be a little harsh to criticize the ILO for this, as their ambition was to provide more international standardization in a field that until then had incoherent legislation focused on particular situations and threats rather than providing a fix for ‘the big picture’. The working environment was also the most natural starting point for an organization set up to improve the conditions and life of workers.

## **Chapter 4: The 1980s and early 1990s: continuation, standstill and expansion**

The international context in which ‘ILO environmentalism’ arose in the 1970s changed over the following decade. This chapter studies the developments within the environmental initiatives of the ILO with a view to continuity and change. Towards the end of the period, large-scale changes in the environmentalism of the international community impacted discourse and policies in the ILO. The ‘environmental turn’ of 1990 reinvigorated and reframed ‘ILO environmentalism’ in a way not experienced since the early 1970s.

### **4.A The changed context and new realities of the 1980s**

The 1980s and early 1990s was a tumultuous period in international politics. Crisis within the economy and the energy sector, increasing foreign debt among developing countries, neo-liberal economic policies, and the end of the Cold War, were among the things that colored the

context the ILO was operating within. ILO's principles and modus operandi did not fit in well with the new *zeitgeist* of economic liberalism, globalization, and increased separation of economic and social issues that emerged in the 1980s. During the period many governments moved towards deregulation and liberalization which reduced the ability of politicians and organized labor to influence social policy and the working lives of its population, thus dismantling the basic strategy of most ILO programs, such as PIACT, that relied on influencing the policies and regulation of member states.<sup>161</sup> Certain factors, like some of those mentioned above, were highly valued by most governments and people, and thus created a framework of boundaries for environmental policies: According to John McNeill "the prospect of economic depression or military defeat commanded attention that pollution, deforestation, or climate change could not. More jobs, higher tax revenues, and stronger militaries all appealed, with an immediate lure that cleaner air or diversified ecosystems could not match."<sup>162</sup>

Despite challenges to the ecological momentum mentioned above, the environment matured as area of political and scientific relevance which made it possible for a second peak in environmental awareness to emerge. McNeill operates with two phases of late twentieth century environmentalism. The first phase spans from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. The second phase began around 1980. However, developments were not unilateral and there were for instance some differences between rich and poor countries.<sup>163</sup> By the time the second phase reached a crescendo around 1990, environmentalism had become a much more substantial, global force in societies: "Earth Day in 1970 mobilized some 20 million Americans in demonstrations against assaults on nature. By the 1980s, anxieties about tropical deforestation, climate change, and the thinning ozone shield added a fillip (and a new focus) to environmentalism. Earth Day in 1990 attracted 200 million participants in 140 countries."<sup>164</sup>

A remarkable shift took place between 1960 and 1990 in scientific communities and programs, among politicians and governmental institutions, and in the general public, that by and large changed how people perceived nature, the human environment, and threats to it.<sup>165</sup> At the end of the 1980s, a series of serious and well publicized environmental disasters had boosted the

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<sup>161</sup> Maul, *The International Labour Organization*, 241–42; Rodgers et al., *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*, 104–5.

<sup>162</sup> McNeill, *Something New under the Sun*, 355.

<sup>163</sup> McNeill, 350–55.

<sup>164</sup> McNeill, 339.

<sup>165</sup> McNeill, 340.



concerns of the public by showcasing some horrific humanitarian and ecological consequences of mismanagement and the absence of sufficient environmental policies. Disasters in Seveso, Bhopal, Chernobyl, and in relation to the *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker, left a particular strong impression on world opinion. Furthermore, increased knowledge and awareness of ozone depletion and growing concerns over global warming fueled environmental concern.<sup>166</sup> In addition to influencing the ‘environmental discourse’, it was also noticed and noted by the wider world and the ILO.<sup>167</sup> Around 1990, international discussions of the environment increasingly evolved around its relation to development and new issues such as climate change and ozone depletion were introduced. The shift in the content and popularity of environmental issues is what Joachim Radkau has called ecology’s ‘Historic Turn of 1990’<sup>168</sup>, and it provides the context for the thesis second analytical phase.

### **ILO perceptions of the world at the beginning of the 1980s**

Francis Blanchard remained in office as Director-General until 1989. However, continuity in leadership did not entail a stable and uneventful development stripped of any turbulence. On the back of a couple of years of escalating Cold War tensions and the perceived politization of the organization, the United States withdrew from the ILO in 1977, before returning in 1981.<sup>169</sup> The withdrawal of the biggest financial contributor affected the organization greatly. Subsequent budgets were reduced by 25 percent, which obviously had significant consequences for the existing and future plans for the organization and its programs.<sup>170</sup> Blanchard feared a halt in postwar progress due to the inability of hegemonic political and economic *milieus* to control the complex processes of growth that caused economic disruption, social tension, and environmental problems. Dismissing calls for zero-growth, Blanchard sought out a third path of economic rethinking and international cooperation to reconcile material progress.<sup>171</sup> This ambivalent attitude towards growth represented a continuation of 1970s sentiments and reflects many of the challenges and dilemmas that have characterized environmental debates since. In this sense, the ILO was part of one of the striking aspects of the history of modern ecological concerns - insufficient action in face of well documented and widely accepted environmental

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<sup>166</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 350–55.

<sup>167</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings*, Report of the Director-General (Part I): Environment and the world of work, International Labour Conference, 77th Session 1990 (Geneva: ILO, 1990), 1.

<sup>168</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, Chapter six 339-424.

<sup>169</sup> Maul, *The International Labour Organization*, 219, 221–23.

<sup>170</sup> ILO, *Medium-term plan 1982-87*, Governing Body, 212th Session 1980 (Geneva: ILO, 1980), conclusion, 1/17.

<sup>171</sup> ILO, *Medium-term plan 1982-87*, GB 212 (1980), 1/1-2, 1/8-9.

threats. It was of course not the ILO's task alone to save the environment, but as the following paragraphs suggest, their initiatives could have accomplished more.

#### **4.B 'ILO environmentalism' in practice: standards, technical cooperation and PIACT**

After environmental action was aired, examined and determined by the organization, plans and programs were operational by the late 1970s. Moving forward, it was intended that standard-setting, education and training would influence member groups both within the organization and in the various member states. Most resources would be devoted to the PIACT program and would include environmental topics in technical cooperation efforts.

##### **Technical cooperation and planning for the future**

Technical cooperation continued to be a stalwart of ILO activities as the organization entered the 1980s. In fact, an "unprecedented growth in resources for technical co-operation" was projected for the coming years. Most of the resources was expected to come from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). After the environmental focus of the previous decade and the establishment of PIACT, working conditions and the environment had become part of ILO's technical cooperation. However, the adopted environment standards from the previous decade had not had the desired consequential effect on the work so far.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, the programs were fewer than those dealing with employment, training, and industrial relations and labor administration, and there was an urgent need for an increase in available human resources: "...the future requirements in field personnel for these programmes will be particularly important in so far as the level of experience and qualifications of experts are concerned."<sup>173</sup> Four programs contributed to the environmental technical cooperation efforts under the following headers: PIACT; conditions of work and life; occupational safety, hygiene and health; and maritime labor conditions. By incorporating PIACT into this area of operations, the hopes were that the work of multi-disciplinary teams could contribute to PIACT's ambitions to compile information about environmental conditions in member states. The need for experts was particularly great in relation to occupational health, hygiene and safety.<sup>174</sup> In plans for

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<sup>172</sup> ILO, *Medium-term plan 1982-87*, GB 212 (1980), 3/3-9.

<sup>173</sup> ILO, *ILO Technical Co-operation Programme 1980/81: Main Fields of Activity, Future Programme Trends and Expected Needs in Project Personell* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 25.

<sup>174</sup> ILO, *ILO Technical Co-operation Programme 1980/81* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 25, 28.

technical cooperation presented to the Governing Body in 1980 a noteworthy precision regarding the working and living environment was made:

*While for legislative, administrative, functional and other reasons the working environment is often separated from the general environment, biologically this is an artificial separation. Action to improve the living environment of workers (in particular their housing, standards of nutrition, health and education) provides vital support for action to promote better conditions of work especially in the rural sector of developing countries.*<sup>175</sup>

The ILO acknowledged that the factors influencing the environment in a broad sense was interconnected, especially in rural areas. Therefore, technical cooperation missions primarily focused on the workplace could contribute to the improvement of the local - and therefore the general - environment.

### **Planning for the future**

At its 212<sup>th</sup> session in February-March 1980, the Governing Body had before them proposals set to strengthen the organization and its impact. It included planned action and priorities for the ILO's major programs including, of course, the program for working conditions and the environment. Integral for the promotion of "humane conditions of labor" would be the formulation of policies, the setting of specific national objectives, and evaluation of the progress. An overall sentiment was expansion and improvement – to do *more* – also reflected by the allocation of more funds to the environment and working conditions than any other technical program.<sup>176</sup> Several environmental activities were highlighted as important moving forward. In order to improve decision-making and increase workers' and employers' organizations' participation in implementation, The Office wanted to increase the knowledge base of its tripartite constituency and regional offices through a series of studies and symposia. For example, a study of economic impacts of improvements in working conditions was intended to highlight beneficial and economically viable measures.<sup>177</sup> Working conditions and environment were set to be a theme for both external cooperation and most internal programs and initiatives.<sup>178</sup> The employment and development program would for instance do interrelated work on technology and energy and integrating PIACT perspectives and priorities into other ILO efforts was a clear ambition. A point frequently emphasized was the multidisciplinary,

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<sup>175</sup> ILO, *ILO Technical Co-operation Programme 1980/81* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 27.

<sup>176</sup> ILO, *Medium-term plan 1982-87*, GB 212 (1980), 2/1, 2/20, appendix.

<sup>177</sup> ILO, *Medium-term plan 1982-87*, GB 212 (1980), 2/21-22, 25.

<sup>178</sup> ILO, *Medium-term plan 1982-87*, GB 212 (1980), 2/20-23, 2/9.

interlinked, and sweeping nature of the environmental work, which were to be translated into action by technical cooperation, standard setting and through program-wide attention. Another notion was that research and inclusion of the involved parties, would be able to reveal a set of “labor-friendly” measures acceptable for workers, employers, governments and the economy. These priorities continued a process of environmental integration into the ILO’s modes of operation.

The establishment of operations within a new area of work did not pass without encountering obstacles and setbacks. Despite its rather ambitious plans on the topic, progress in the ILO’s efforts to set international standards and influencing national policy had not been great. One 1983 working paper provided a description and diagnosis of the situation:

*Progress in improving the quality of the working environment has been slow and uneven between countries at various stages of development and, within countries, between various branches and categories of workers. This is primarily because of the absence, in many countries, of a general policy for improving the working environment, as an integral part of the national development strategy, in a context of rapid technological and structural changes.<sup>179</sup>*

In the same paper, a series of activities involving the ILO and collaborative organizations such as WHO, UNEP and IAEA were highlighted as a source of optimism.<sup>180</sup> Among these, work on information on physical properties, health effects, control measures, and methodology for toxicity testing in relation to the International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS), as well as publication of guidelines for the safe use of new energy resources and a number of individual country missions.<sup>181</sup> The organizations found common ground and basis for cooperation on issues relating to occupational safety and health, working conditions and vulnerable groups of workers. It was easier for the ILO to coordinate and complete work with other agencies than to break into national political spheres with its labor-friendly environmentalism.

#### **4.B.i PIACT – an unsustainable venture? Problems and evaluation**

As outlined at the program’s birth, PIACT was due an evaluation after the first phase of its implementation. Evaluation of a major ILO program was no small task and involved a series of meetings, reports, discussions, and probes on international, regional and national levels. In

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<sup>179</sup> ILO, *Thematic Joint Programming Meeting on the Working Environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1982), 2.

<sup>180</sup> ILO, *Thematic Joint Programming Meeting on the Working Environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1982), 5.

<sup>181</sup> ILO, *Thematic Joint Programming Meeting on the Working Environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1982), 5-6, 8-35.

February 1982, a tripartite evaluation meeting convened in Geneva to discuss a report prepared by the Office on the state of affairs of PIACT and the way forward.

### **Positive conclusions**

The report contained two main positive conclusions. Firstly, that ILO action on working conditions and the environment through PIACT had been intensified and diversified by the utilization of traditional ILO tools and collaboration with other inter-governmental organizations. This action took up two different approaches, one involving specific activities and another more comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach. Secondly, certain national policies and practices had improved over the course of the first PIACT phase. While the causality was uncertain and some states declared that PIACT had thus far had no effect on the national level, some positive development within one of the key aspirations of the program could be noted. One aspect that showed more tangible results was the ILO's encouragement of governments to set definite objectives for themselves, which had been followed up by many states and triggered other activity such as ILO missions.<sup>182</sup> In its founding document<sup>183</sup>, it was stated that PIACT should utilize a broad range of ILO means of action and coherence and effectiveness. The Office argued that they had succeeded in this regard: "Never before in the ILO's history has the International Labour Conference had items concerning occupational safety and health on its agenda for six consecutive years. Similarly, before the launching of PIACT, the field of working conditions and environment had not been allocated the same degree of priority in the distribution of technical co-operation resources of the regular budget."<sup>184</sup> In setting up a "detailed plan for a general inquiry into the protection of workers and conditions of work"<sup>185</sup>, the program had not been as successful, as funding for such a survey was cut from the 1978-79 budget. However, the Office felt that the overall activities and research of PIACT to some degree answered the call for a general inquiry, first made by Director-General Blanchard at the 1974 ILC. Several of the other objectives of the program had struggled with cancelled or postponed meetings, budgetary problems or cuts, and less than desirable responses from member states.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> ILO, *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of the International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (PIACT): Review of activities (1976-1981) and future orientation* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 93-96.

<sup>183</sup> ILO, *International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and the Environment*, GB 200 (1976)

<sup>184</sup> ILO, *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 94.

<sup>185</sup> ILO, *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 94.

<sup>186</sup> ILO, *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 94-95.

## **Problems related to PIACT**

The problems facing the program which caused some of these setbacks varied in nature and involved both the ILO and the member states. Most prominent among them was the lack or scarcity of funds, mostly due to reduced budgets after the withdrawal of the United States. Appearing shortly after the program launched, it halted the program from the get-go. A corresponding economic crisis in the UNDP reduced the capacity to take on new technical cooperation projects. Reduced budgets for 1978-79 and 1980-81 led to a cancelling and downscaling of plans, including various meetings and studies.<sup>187</sup> The economic problems had consequences for the Office and the organization in general, but it was nonetheless underscored that particular impact had fallen on the program: "... it must be pointed out that having had to face an unfavorable financial situation shortly after it was launched, PIACT was unable to show its full potential during the period..."<sup>188</sup> Another problem in the implementation of PIACT was the response it got on the national level. Affecting national policies was one of two principle goals of the program, and of course relied on a certain enthusiasm for and priority of working conditions and the environment among national decision-makers. In cases where governments were actively against such policies, the task grew even more daunting. While some countries had expressed continued support, reluctance to prioritize PIACT related policy came from both industrial and developing countries. Many developing countries prioritized job creation over the creation of regulatory policy. In the industrial world, the economic recession had muted some enthusiasm for potentially costly measures. PIACT also had some problems related to the measurement of results. This was caused by the absence of reliable statistics and suitable institutional framework in many countries. Improving the working conditions and environment in rural areas had proved particularly challenging, due to the magnitude of the task, the scope and variation of necessary measures, and difficulties in reaching workers in remote places. Similarly, traditional methods fell short in reaching and impacting the informal sector.<sup>189</sup> The main goals of PIACT were maintained, however three specific areas of improvement were highlighted to supplement the overall ambitions of the program: the special problems of vulnerable workers, better assessment of measures, and strengthening of training activities.<sup>190</sup> Beyond that, the evaluation called for flexibility, coherent and integrated national approaches,

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<sup>187</sup> ILO. *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 97.

<sup>188</sup> ILO. *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 97.

<sup>189</sup> ILO. *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 98-99.

<sup>190</sup> ILO. *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 102-103.

appropriate balance between member states' right to decide their own policies and the moral obligation that accompanied their ILO membership, and a continuation of the integration process of PIACT issues in inter-related areas of work.<sup>191</sup>

### **A second round of evaluations, 1984**

The second round of evaluation led to many of the same conclusions as the first.<sup>192</sup> While most agreed on the need for improvement and some states with concerns over working conditions and the environment had adopted or reinforced policies, all parties agreed that more was desired from PIACT. The financial problems previously mentioned caused debate over effectiveness of the broad scope and approach which, despite criticism from employers, received continued support.<sup>193</sup> Available working hours decreased over the period. While General Service work hours sank by 1 percent, PIACT hours decreased by 14 percent between 1974-75 and 1982-83. This made it difficult to assign teams to do highly desired work and limited PIACT's ability to recruit officials with new and appropriate competence.<sup>194</sup> These problems are an expression of the divergence between the available resources and will on the ILO and national level on one side, and the ambitious objectives of the program on the other. In general, the problems described in 1984 were similar to those highlighted in 1982. Problems that were already evident at the first evaluation, and could be explained by the economic troubles, had not disappeared by 1984, which seemed to lead to a lowering of expectations and calls for realism.<sup>195</sup> Disagreement between workers and employers at the 1984 ILC mostly circled around tripartite participation as well as the mandate and scope of PIACT. Most government delegates expressed concerns linked to new technology, such as stress, radiation and toxicity, and developing countries emphasized problems in rural areas and the urban informal sector.<sup>196</sup> An outcome of the evaluation was that PIACT was to be shifted in a more practical direction, focused on practical, low-cost and viable measures. These intentions and a commitment to the continuation and strengthening of PIACT were reflected in the Resolution and the set of Conclusions adopted

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<sup>191</sup> ILO, *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 103-105.

<sup>192</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings*, Report VII (I): Evaluation of the International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment, International Labour Conference, 70th Session 1984 (Geneva: ILO, 1984); ILO, *Record of Proceedings*, Report VII (II): Evaluation of the International Programme for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment: Table of ILO activities to promote and support activities aiming at the improvement of working conditions and environment, International Labour Conference, 70th Session 1984 (Geneva: ILO, 1984).

<sup>193</sup> ILO, Report VII (I): Evaluation of PIACT, ILC 70 (1984), 49-51.

<sup>194</sup> ILO, Report VII (I): Evaluation of PIACT, ILC 70 (1984), 53-55.

<sup>195</sup> ILO, Report VII (I): Evaluation of PIACT, ILC 70 (1984) 55.

<sup>196</sup> ILO, *Record of Proceedings (RoP)*, International Labour Conference, 70th Session 1984 (Geneva: ILO, 1984), 37/3-5, 37/10-14.

by the Conference.<sup>197</sup> The Resolution reiterated that the topic was the “first and permanent mission” of the ILO. A noteworthy aspect of the Conclusions was that they were in large parts actively and explicitly linked to social justice in a new way.

### **What was PIACT able to do?**

One takeaway from the evaluation of PIACT is that it in its first phase was not able to facilitate the boost to ‘ILO environmentalism’ that was envisioned when the program was planned in the 1970s. While it certainly was a presence in the organization and in some member states, PIACT did not increase efforts as significantly as intended. This is evident when taking into account the decrease in manpower, cancelled plans, and the lackluster response in and from member states. On the other hand, the rhetoric, ambitions, and topicality of working conditions and environment was kept alive, amongst other things through the comprehensive process and the prominent position of the evaluation. It is also worth noting that a majority of member states and workers’ and employers’ organizations supported the continuation of PIACT. The “economic challenge” present in the first phase and mentioned by many as a potential future pitfall was highlighted as something that could not be allowed to hamper the impact of PIACT. Director-General Blanchard underlined this point in his response to the Conference’s discussion of his Report: “Here, then are the broad lines which, over the next few years, must guide the member States and the activities of the ILO. It is a field, of course, which constitutes the very nub and substance of the ILO’s mission but one too often overlooked at a time of grave economic straits.”<sup>198</sup> Throughout the evaluation process many references were made to work and statements from the 1970s. The *Making Work More human* report especially seems to have left a lasting impression on the organization, as statements from a employers’ adviser from Venezuela at the 1984 ILC indicates: “...the Conference has been an unparalleled promoter of social justice and true democracy, the foundations upon which tripartism rests. These are basic factors for ensuring that man, who has reached the moon and stars by material means, attains a better and fairer world and as the Director-General, Mr. Francis Blanchard, said in 1975, more humane working conditions.”<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 70 (1984), 37/15-23.

<sup>198</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 70 (1984), 44/9.

<sup>199</sup> ILO, *RoP*, ILC 70 (1984), 44/2.



#### **4.B.ii: ‘ILO environmentalism’ in practice: UNEP, research and training activities**

Another way in which the environmental initiatives of the ILO was carried through into the 1980s was by building on and expanding their working relationship with UNEP. A key characteristic of the ILO-UNEP collaboration was their jointly organized training programs and meetings involving workers, employers and government representatives.

#### **ILO-UNEP activities for workers**

An example of efforts aimed at workers is the inter-regional meeting for national workers’ organizations that took place in Geneva in 1980, which also was attended by representatives from ILO, UNEP, WHO, and international trade union confederations. Two figures important for PIACT and UNEP collaboration, Jean de Givry and Harry Z. Evan, spoke at the meeting.<sup>200</sup> The trade union representatives articulated the delicate balance involved in assessing environmental and job-security interests: “... to the worker whose job was threatened by environmental controls, it was more important to have a job than to live in an unpolluted environment. Nevertheless, it was felt that the trade unions had responsibility to demand jobs which were safe, healthy and non-polluting.”<sup>201</sup> There was agreement among the participants that protection and conservation of the environment could be combined with maintained employment, but not without some challenges. For instance, it was pointed out that polluting jobs lost as a consequence of environmental regulation would not necessarily be replaced in the same communities.<sup>202</sup> This challenge is present also today in discussions of transformations of economies and working life’s, but had not been among the most prominent topics of ILO discussions in the 1970s. Trade union representatives at the meeting also commented on something that has been a topic of discussions related to the labor-environment dichotomy – the arguably exacerbated fear of the detrimental effect of environmental measures for jobs: “Examples were cited of employers making exaggerated claims on the cost of complying with environmental regulations, with the implication that this would lead to loss of competitiveness and unemployment; when the regulations were subsequently applied, none of these predictions came true.”<sup>203</sup>

The meeting brought up two ideas that since have been central to a lot of thinking around environmental policy and adaption – an “Environmental Unemployment Fund” and the

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<sup>200</sup> ILO: *Report of the Meeting of Workers’ Organisations on the environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 3.

<sup>201</sup> ILO: *Report of the Meeting of Workers’ Organisations on the environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 5.

<sup>202</sup> ILO: *Report of the Meeting of Workers’ Organisations on the environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 5.

<sup>203</sup> ILO: *Report of the Meeting of Workers’ Organisations on the environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 5.

“Polluter Pays Principle”. Opinions on the latter was mixed and many felt that focus rather should be placed on avoiding pollution. Speaking on the costs of pollution, some attendees emphasized that workers should assess environmental measures in terms of their cost or benefit for the community as a whole.<sup>204</sup> This falls within Stefania Barca’s conception of community-based working-class environmentalism. In an ILO context the sentiment is reminiscent of the holistic, “humanization of work” ideas of the worker and workplace being interlinked and connected to its community. The notion that more often than not workers were among the first to groups to be affected by inadequate protection of the working or general environment, were also brought up. To counter this, public participation had to be strengthened. In fact, participants felt that absence of consultation of those affected by environmental issues was a matter social injustice. In conjunction with that view, more had to be done to create dialogue between unions and NGO’s, and other groups interested in protecting the environment. Representatives at the meeting expressed that despite occasional and understandable antagonism between unions and these groups, the long-term goals were convergent.<sup>205</sup>

### **ILO-UNEP activities for Employers**

The joint efforts aimed at employers’ organizations were largely successful and were from 1984 organized through a special program aimed at increasing awareness and training.<sup>206</sup> A series of regional meetings for employers’ organizations took place in Bangkok, Nairobi, Abidjan, and Rio de Janeiro between 1984 and 1987. Additionally, national meetings were organized from 1986 onwards.<sup>207</sup> UNEP and the ILO believed that employers were intrinsic in efforts to bring about changes for the improvement of the environment, and the regional meetings was set up to receive input on how to best achieve this.<sup>208</sup> Dissemination of educational information supplemented training events and were a fruitful area of the UNEP collaboration. The UNEP-ILO Environmental Management Programme produced numerous training materials and introduced Flexible Learning Packages (FLPs) in 1985. FLP’s were short and effective courses

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<sup>204</sup> ILO: *Report of the Meeting of Workers’ Organisations on the environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 5,7.

<sup>205</sup> ILO: *Report of the Meeting of Workers’ Organisations on the environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1980), 7-8.

<sup>206</sup> ILO, *RoP*, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 70-73.

<sup>207</sup> UNEP, *Environment and Social Policy* (Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies, 1987), 1. See also reports of some of the meetings: ILO, *ILO-UNEP Regional Meeting of Employers’ Organisations on Environment and Development in English-Speaking Africa: Report* (Geneva: ILO, 1984); ILO, *ILO-UNEP Regional Meeting of Employers’ Organisations on Environment and Development in Asia and Pacific, Bangkok, 12-16 March 1984: Report* (Geneva: ILO, 1984).

<sup>208</sup> ILO, *Employers’ Organisations and the Environment* (Geneva: ILO, 1983).

held by personnel trained by the ILO.<sup>209</sup> A five-book series on environmental management edited by Dr. R.G.A Boland of the ILO was published in the mid-1980s with the ambition to help enterprises “...meet their objectives of profit, growth and survival, while protecting the environment.”<sup>210</sup> FLP’s and the Boland series were innovative in each its ways, reaching out in new ways and merging enterprise interests with environmental protection. In 1987, UNEP and the ILO published “Environment and social policy”<sup>211</sup>, an educational manual prepared in relation with the International Internship Course on Active Labour Policy Development organized by the IILS. It merged the two organizations’ competence and is an example of successful implementation of PIACT ambitions of increased environmental training and improved outreach to and relevance for developing countries. The course was the first of that particular kind to include significant environmental components and illustrates that the collaboration made inroads into organizational influence, albeit not very rapidly. Social and economic consequences of environmental measures was an ever more frequently recurring theme in manuals like this and in the ILO in general, amongst other things related to employment effects and cost-benefit analysis. Further elaboration on such topics had been requested by the organization over the preceding years, for instance in the evaluation of PIACT, and were addressed in numerous studies. Material published and circulated as a result of the UNEP collaboration shaped and substantiated the ILO’s environmental policies and message.

### **PIACT and UNEP**

Developments within both PIACT and UNEP cooperation during this second analytical phase involved the continuation of tendencies present at the end of the first, but in many cases the trajectories envisioned in the 1970s were not met. This rings particularly true in the case of PIACT, which, despite being included in the organization’s plans - as for instance in technical cooperation efforts - did not fully become what it was intended to be. One main reason behind that was that the funds and manpower devoted to the program was insufficient from the get-go. This was underlined by the economic difficulties experienced in relation with the United States’ four-year absence. Cooperation with UNEP appears to have been more successful. This may, of course, have something to do with lesser scope, ambitions and expectations, but I would also like to highlight two other factors. First, it seems like the objectives of their cooperation were

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<sup>209</sup> ILO and UNEP, *Environmental Management Training Materials; a New Service to Managers, Companies and Training Institutions* (Geneva, ILO, 1985).

<sup>210</sup> R. G. A. Boland, ed., *Environmental Management Training. 5: Supporting Environmental Management Training Materials*, 2. impr (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1988), Preface.

<sup>211</sup> UNEP, *Environment and Social Policy* (Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies, 1987).

tangible and viable. The events and training material organized and prepared for employers, for instance, were something that the collaborators had the experience, competence, and funding to succeed with. Second, UNEP was able to contribute with funding of projects and publications. Overall, the environmental work of the ILO in the 1980s was underwhelming compared to the rhetoric that surrounded the topic in the 1970s. Ratification and support for the international instruments remained quite low and several resolutions failed to receive priority at the ILC's.<sup>212</sup> The results did not echo what had been stated in the 1975 resolution on environment – that improvement of working conditions and environment and the well-being of workers remained the first and permanent mission of the ILO. Towards the end of the 1980s, developments within international environmental politics and the UN system triggered a pivoting of ILO's ideas and message.

#### **4.C Rio on the horizon**

##### **The Brundtland Report, its effects and the ILO response**

By the continuous collaboration with UNEP following their cooperation agreement in 1977, the ILO had aligned a significant portion of its environmental work within the United Nations system. In the same manner as the Stockholm Conference influenced ILO proceedings, the United Nations system triggered an influx of environmental action in the years surrounding 1990. In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development released its report *Our common future*, also called the Brundtland Report after the commission's Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland. Despite advocating quite conventional measures, it was a groundbreaking event in environmental history, changing the international discourse on environment, as well as influencing themes like development, security, energy and economy. One of the most consequential products of the Brundtland Report was its conceptualization of “sustainable development”, today one of the cornerstones of environmental politics on all levels.<sup>213</sup> *Our Common Future* describes the term in many ways and numerous times, but offers a concise definition in its opening chapter: “Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 1.

<sup>213</sup> Ken Conca, *An Unfinished Foundation: The United Nations and Global Environmental Governance* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67–70.

<sup>214</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development, ed., *Our Common Future*, Oxford Paperbacks (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8.

In response to the Brundtland Report and a request from the General Assembly of the United Nations, the ILO Governing Body prepared a report to the General Assembly and UNEP's Governing Council. It was titled "ILO contribution to environmentally sound and sustainable development.", was dated March 1989, and contained an overview of ILO environmental efforts and possible future action.<sup>215</sup> Presenting the Office's proposal on the matter became one of the last actions of Director-General Blanchard as Michel Hansenne was elected as his replacement that same session. In the account, the ILO comes with one of its first definitions and interpretations of environmentally sound sustainable development, and largely relies on the WCED definition in doing so. The ILO viewed much of its work as already engaging with the concept of sustainable development but highlighted three aspects to which it held particular significance: "...the working environment, environmental training and the relationships between environment and employment, poverty and development."<sup>216</sup> The ILO report stated that lasting solutions for the working environment depended on improvements of the general environment and that recent accidents had made the distinctions between the two concepts increasingly unclear. Moving forwards, the ILO wanted to expand its scope to better reach workers in small enterprises, rural areas, the informal sector, and new types of jobs.<sup>217</sup> Training activities such as those conducted by the training center in Turin, the ILS and the UNEP collaboration was described as a valuable contribution to sustainability. In the future the ILO wanted to adopt a formal strategy on environmental training and expand the number and themes of its training activities.<sup>218</sup> Finally, the report addressed future action on sustainable development and how the ILO could attribute to it.<sup>219</sup> Connections between environment and its significance for employment, poverty and development was a WCED theme with particular relevance the organization. ILO supported the idea that reducing poverty and finding good solutions to boost employment and development was vital to ensuring sustainable development. Accordingly, they believed that these interlinked challenges had to be diagnosed and fixed together.<sup>220</sup> Indicative of the new development focus, the ILO's World Employment Programme published a study edited by A.S Bhalla in 1992, shortly before the upcoming Rio Earth Summit. *Environment, employment and development*<sup>221</sup> was intended to fill a gap in an

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<sup>215</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 91.

<sup>216</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 92-93.

<sup>217</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 93-95.

<sup>218</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 95-96.

<sup>219</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 96.101.

<sup>220</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 97.

<sup>221</sup> Bhalla, A.S and International Labour Organisation, *Environment, employment and development*, (Geneva: ILO, 1992).

area of research previously relatively unexplored by the employment side of the ILO and place the employment question on the policy agenda of debates on environment and development.

Growing environmental concerns in the general public, the publication of the Brundtland Report, and the intensified present and future UN action on the matter, were certainly a contributing factor in the increased ILO interest. This initial response from the ILO points to many of the activities described in this thesis when showcasing its environmental traditions and credentials. Traditional themes and methods were still deemed relevant by the ILO, but the new discourse brought up topics that were both “closer” and simultaneously further removed from it. It was closer in sense that the ILO already had comprehensive knowledge and programs related to employment, poverty, and development. Increased integration of environmental aspects into existing programs could thus be a natural step. The possible distance would in my opinion come from ILO’s inherent conflicting interests related to the increasingly exhaustive environmental regulation being discussed. To a greater extent than in the 1970s the discourse outside the ILO had moved beyond the working environment.

### **Sustainability, environment and the world of work at the 1990 ILC**

Many documents discussed in this thesis are directly linked to external calls for action. The 1990 Annual Report to the ILC, *Environment and the world of work*<sup>222</sup>, is indirectly connected to the environmental process in the UN. The ILO has described it as a “...direct response to the mounting national and international concern with environmental issues”<sup>223</sup>. Through it, Michel Hansenne hoped to increase environmental awareness, identify issues and policy areas, indicate possible priorities, and inspire discussions and input that would “...set the Office’s environment and development agenda for the next decade.”<sup>224</sup>. But the “pressure”, or inspiration, to deal with the environmental challenge in his report did not arise from the international system alone, as Hansenne expressed in his own words – it came from *all sides*:

*“The dangers facing the environment are being discussed on all sides: in every speech, in every newspaper; and the threat is a serious one. Sometimes it takes the ominous form of pollution and the depletion of natural resources. It thrives on appeasement. It*

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<sup>222</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990).

<sup>223</sup> ILO, *ILO activities for environment and the world of work*, Tripartite Advisory Meeting on Environment and the World of Work, Geneva, 2-4 November 1992 (Geneva: ILO, 1992), 3.

<sup>224</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 90, 6.

*knows no frontiers, respects no neutrality, affords no refuge. For the most pessimistic amongst us, it spells the end of the world unless we master it.*"<sup>225</sup>

In the following, Hansenne encouraged a realistic and methodological approach to environmental dangers as ILO took on a twofold mandate. The first to study implications of environmental measures on employment, income, human resources, and conditions of work and life, the second to contribute to the fight against poverty and the negative ecological effects of it.<sup>226</sup>

### **ILO's responsibility**

Hansenne believed the ILO to be both well-equipped and obliged to deal with environmental problems caused by and affecting the world of work. Aware of the peculiar position of the ILO, Hansenne posed the following rhetorical question: "...is not much of the damage to the environment created by our industrial society, by production, by labour?"<sup>227</sup>. ILO's reaction to their own and workers predicament in relation to the environment, had to involve protection of the working environment, the acquirement and spread of knowledge and information, and dialogue for consensus among the social partners. Hansenne argued that fair and realistic approach in line with cultural, social and political realities had to be taken by those deciding the allocation of the financial and social prize of environmental protection.<sup>228</sup> The ILO's environmental responsibilities were to secure social dialogue on the topic, set international standards, and through tools as technical cooperation contribute to the integration of economic and social justice into environmental policies. Hansenne referenced that environmental protection might entail moving away from what had produced prosperity and material improvement in many societies. From an ILO point of view, environmental objectives had to reflect the close connection to economic and social justice.<sup>229</sup> Evidently, new questions were raised by the ILO in relation to environmental issues in 1990, and they took an increased responsibility and widened its political scope. Because the influence of environmental politics had grown and the discourse had changed, the ILO felt more compelled to ensure that its perspectives were included in international processes rather than focusing on a classical labor issue such as the working environment. "Politicians are in a tight corner here"<sup>230</sup>, Hansenne

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<sup>225</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), iii.

<sup>226</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), iii-IV.

<sup>227</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), iii.

<sup>228</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), iii-V.

<sup>229</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), V-VI.

<sup>230</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 91

argued, with reference to voters' fortitude in the face of potential negative impacts of environmental policies. The same was true for the ILO.

### **Perceptions of nature and environmental problems**

ILO's perceptions of nature, and particularly environmental problems, were shaped by the science and discourse that circulated in the UN system, facilitated by amongst others UNEP and WCED. The new realities affected the ILO, as Hensenne points out in his 1990 report: "Unlike several decades ago, the concept of the environment has considerably evolved from a narrow focus on pollution to cover the management of environmental resources necessary for development; in other words, it now entails an integrated approach to environment and development."<sup>231</sup> In some ways, the new concept of sustainable development suited the ILO, which could quite easily link it to its core objectives because social and economic development were intrinsic to the concept. However, new concerns were linked to participation in the politics of sustainable development. Population growth, urbanization, and the pressure on natural resources, particularly in developing countries, was highlighted as problematic societal developments. In line with the times, there were two novelties among the problems highlighted, at least when considering the annual reports analyzed in this thesis, namely climate change and ozone depletion.<sup>232</sup> The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP had established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which together with numerous other factors had caused climate change to rise on the international agenda. Hensenne predicted that comprehensive measures would be introduced in the future with potentially significant consequences for the world of work. "What would be the social reaction to strategies of calling, for example for major shifts in the present energy mix away from fossil fuels, introducing major energy conservation programmes or setting up new transport systems less reliant on cars – and what effect would they have on employment and the working environment?"<sup>233</sup>

Like in previous 'environmental' Director-General reports, the working environment is thoroughly dealt with. However, in 1990 more was made out of the links between the general and the working environment. Through both day to day activities and accidents, the workplace affected the environment, thus making regulations, control and supervision of the it an effective measure of environmental protection. The report also calls for a widening of its efforts in

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<sup>231</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 3.

<sup>232</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 7-19.

<sup>233</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 17.



relation to the working environment, to better encompass the informal sector, amongst other things through PIACT.<sup>234</sup> Paradoxically, the PIACT program had faced many of the same challenges Hansenne emphasized in his analysis: "...the main difficulties in dealing with the environment are not technical, but political, economic and social. The problems lie in the lack of political will or institutional capacity; the lack of adequate financial resources or unwillingness to devote adequate financial resources to environmental objectives; and the conflicts, divisions, diversity and disparity within our societies which prevent us from reaching consensus on what to do, how to do it and how to pay for it."<sup>235</sup> While the international community provided an influx of ecological topics, the organization's analysis of problems and selection of solutions was mostly based in their own political context.

### **Employment – a new factor in environmental policies**

Like tendencies in the 1980s suggests, attention had increasingly been given to the role of employment in environmental policies. By the 1990 ILC, there was substantial greater focus on it than what had been the case in the early 1970s. Environmental measures' effect on employment was a *present* issue in the first phase discussed in this thesis, but it was not a *pressing* issue. An external explanation for this might be that the 'environment consciousness' of the 1970s was somewhat green and had not properly reached and penetrated the political sphere yet. Hansenne described the emboldened environmental sentiment in 1990: "As politicians, they will have to respond to the feelings and pressure of electorates for whom the ecology is no longer merely a fashionable conversation piece but is becoming a rallying point, a current of growing strength in their country's mainstream politics."<sup>236</sup> The internal dynamics had also changed. In the 1970s, the ILO could advocate environmental changes with fewer worries over employment and excessive negative effects for workers, because their main focus was on the working environment. Improvements of the working environment could often be made in ways that continued production and maintained employment. In the early 1990s, some of the policies under discussion by the international community involved more fundamental changes that, if implemented, would be far more transformative than the 1970s measures. In both cases, the environmental discourse had evolved and created new standards. For the ILO, that entailed a new responsibility – to ensure that workers' interests were taken into account in the formulation of environmental policy. A good opportunity to do so was fast approaching:

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<sup>234</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 59-62.

<sup>235</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 91

<sup>236</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), V.

“...the preparatory process for the proposed United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 will provide an excellent opportunity for the ILO to draw attention to the views, concerns and proposals concerning environment and the world of work made by tripartite delegations during the Conference discussion.”<sup>237</sup>

### **The Rio Earth Summit and Agenda 21**

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro 3 to 14 June 1992. The Rio Summit or Earth Summit, as it has been called, was a major international event at the time and has subsequently had ripple effects on discourse and policy related to environment and development. Ken Conca has called it at a high-water mark for global summitry and the UN’s environmental efforts. By its embrace of the new concept of “sustainable development” and a law-and-development approach the conference managed to mend the divide between North and South that had characterized the Stockholm Conference.<sup>238</sup> Over the years preceding the Rio summit, ‘sustainable development’ had grown into a paradigm within the UN: “By the early 1990s, a “grand strategy” of liberal-internationalist environmentalism had emerged, grounded primarily in international law (read: issue-specific regulatory regimes on transboundary and global-commons issues) and sustainable development (read: greening development practice through national reforms, bolstered by foreign aid and technical assistance).”<sup>239</sup>. Sustainable development provided the possibility for balancing different interests without interfering too much of the economic and political power. Another key concept for the new paradigm was “global change”, a holistic worldview with ambitions of global environmental negotiations and governance as a logical outcome. A driving force behind the Rio Summit’s impact was the unprecedented mobilization and attention around it.<sup>240</sup> The meeting in Rio produced *Agenda 21*, an exhaustive plan of action spread across over 300pages and 40 chapters. In advance of UNCED the ILO had provided input through the Preparatory Committee and working groups.<sup>241</sup> Chapter 29 “Strengthening the role of workers and their trade unions” and chapter 30 “Strengthening the role of business and industry” were of particular relevance for the ILO. Other significant outcomes from the Rio Summit includes the

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<sup>237</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 87.

<sup>238</sup> Conca, *An Unfinished Foundation*, 9.

<sup>239</sup> Conca, 34.

<sup>240</sup> Conca, 65, 73.

<sup>241</sup> ILO, *ILO activities for environment and the world of work* (Geneva: ILO, 1992), 16.; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “*Agenda 21*, United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992”, Accessed 12.04.2020 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>

principles of its adopted Declaration and statements on forests, as well as the highly consequential establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

### **ILO's initial reaction**

As suggested by the 1990 resolution concerning environment and the world of work, a tripartite conference was held in the wake of the Rio Earth Summit, in Geneva in November 1992. It was ILO's first proper reaction to the summit, explored how the ILO could give effect to conclusions of the Rio summit, and indicative for the organization's future action. In line with ILO's ambition of interdepartmental environmental efforts, the meeting dealt with all mainstream programs. However, the links between the working and general environment, and aspects of employment and sustainable livelihoods, received particular attention.<sup>242</sup> The meeting's background paper is based on the same principles as were accounted for in the 1990 annual report in relation to sustainable development, poverty, and employment. Inspired by ILO's mandate to protect workers and its principle idea of poverty as a threat to prosperity everywhere, the ultimate goal for 'ILO environmentalism' was set: "In general terms, the challenge relates to the promotion of the creation of safe, remunerative, environmentally sound and sustainable employment."<sup>243</sup> If such a thing were to be obtained, the ILO believed that its own efforts, competence and structure would be essential. After the Rio Summit four priorities were outlined for the efforts of the ILO: strengthening of the tripartite constituents; increased cooperation with UNEP and other UN agencies; technical cooperation; and integration of environment and sustainable development into ILO's mainstream programs.<sup>244</sup>

The tripartite meeting discussed implications of activities proposed in Agenda 21, especially the aspects of particular relevance for the ILO. One obviously relevant aspect was that Agenda 21 encouraged ratification several ILO conventions: No. 115, Radiation Protection, 1960; No.136, Benzene, 1971; No. 139, Occupational Cancer, 1974; No.149, Nursing Personnel, 1977; No. 155, Occupational Safety and Health, 1981; No. 162, Asbestos, 1986; No. 170, Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work, 1990. Of topics linked to specific challenges the meeting discussed employment and poverty alleviation, toxic chemicals, the role of women, and support for indigenous and tribal peoples. Additionally, the chapters dealing with the

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<sup>242</sup> ILO, *ILO activities for environment and the world of work* (Geneva: ILO, 1992), 1-2.

<sup>243</sup> ILO, *ILO activities for environment and the world of work* (Geneva: ILO, 1992), 5.

<sup>244</sup> ILO, *ILO activities for environment and the world of work* (Geneva: ILO, 1992), 6.

strengthening of workers and workers' organizations and business and industry had obvious relevance for the ILO.<sup>245</sup> The ILO emphasized that action had to be taken in relevant sectors and with relevant measures: "...the ILO should remain within its scope of competence and avoid duplicating the efforts of other agencies, while at the same time retaining its prerogatives with respect to the workplace."<sup>246</sup> In the Governing Body a workers' representative from Canada noted that ILO's competence now went beyond purely workplace issues and that this entailed "addressing the environmental impact of social issues such as structural adjustment, poverty and demographic development."<sup>247</sup>

#### **4.D Initial conclusions**

##### **What happened to ILO's practical environmental action, PIACT and UNEP?**

The two lines of environmental action of the ILO under particular consideration in this thesis, PIACT and UNEP collaboration, was conceived and designed during the 1970s. But it was in the 1980s they were intended to be in full effect. The combined activities of the two initiatives involved the entire organization, all tripartite parties and took place in all regions. Both initiatives were continued throughout the period and to some degree represents a continuation in 'ILO environmentalism'. After the Brundtland Report and the Rio Earth Summit, the conversation and future prospects for international action changed. Sustainable development was increasingly integrated in environmental discussions, which suited the ILO well. For the two initiatives however, particularly PIACT, this must be said to be a change. The prospect for international environmental agreements and regulation shifted some of the focus away from PIACT's strategy of influencing the national contexts. A preceding break, at least with the anticipated trajectory, was the problems experienced in relation to PIACT. As highlighted by the evaluation process, PIACT implementation did not mirror the expectations and ambitions attached to it when it was established. The evaluation, situated in the middle of the period, highlighted two hampering factors. Most impactful of these were the problems related to the financial and political challenges facing the ILO. Their biggest economic contributor, the United States, were absent from the organization for four years, reducing funds by a quarter. PIACT struggled with inadequate funds, and the reductions in available working hours impacted the program particularly hard. The second factor was the less than desired response

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<sup>245</sup> ILO, *ILO activities for environment and the world of work* (Geneva: ILO, 1992),17-20.

<sup>246</sup> ILO, Minutes of the Governing Body, 254th Session, Geneva, 1989, II/9.

<sup>247</sup> ILO, Minutes of the Governing Body, 254th Session, Geneva, 1989, II/9.

from member states, which included slow adaptation of instruments and some cases of marginalization of environmental policies.

UNEP collaboration escaped the expectations that were placed on PIACT and were viewed as more of a success. There are three main reasons for that. First of all, the collaboration was smaller in scope and the objectives less exhaustive in nature and more tangible. Secondly, while involving members from the tripartite constituency and external actors, for instance at meetings, the planned activities were organized and carried out by the two organizations. That is, the implementation did not rest on outside actors, like the national legislators that accepted or discarded PIACT principles. Thirdly, UNEP was able to contribute with funds and competence into the collaborative activities, which contributed to the implementation of many projects. Overall, the two practical implications of the ILO's "discovery" of environmental policies continued into the 1980s and 90s, but PIACT broke with its expected trajectory and gradually decreased in relevance.

### **Differences and similarities between 1972 and 90/92**

Despite the 'ecological revolution' of 1970 the general interest in environmental issues was much higher around 1990. Environmental disasters, Chernobyl in particular, had boosted environmentalist sentiments worldwide and made connections to anti-war and anti-nuclear movements. After the end of the Cold War such sentiments and activism could take on a more global and straight approach without facing hindrance or interference related to East-West dynamics.<sup>248</sup> The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a significant upswing in environmental awareness beyond issues linked to nuclear energy and Chernobyl: "The nuclear chain reaction in Chernobyl set off worldwide chain reactions in environmental policy, even in countries where the disaster had not unleashed a wave of anxiety."<sup>249</sup> An emboldened global environmental movement came to the fore at the Rio Summit like never before, and together with journalists they brought the world's attention to Rio: "The 134 non-governmental organizations at Stockholm were dwarfed by the 1,400 non-governmental organizations and more than 8,000 journalists from 111 countries who attended the Rio conference."<sup>250</sup> Corresponding with a general uptick in NGO participation in international politics, environmental NGO's was included in the process in Rio and granted a substantial role moving

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<sup>248</sup> Radkau, *The Age of Ecology*, 350–53.

<sup>249</sup> Radkau, 353.

<sup>250</sup> Conca and Dabelko, *Green Planet Blues*, 91.

forward. The strong NGO presence is one of the things that separates Rio from Stockholm. The development increased the pressure on decision-makers beyond the confines of the conference, including, at least to some extent, the ILO. Pressure or influence also derived from national political contexts and from within the national and international political establishment. It was way more difficult for governments to avoid or ignore environmental politics in 1992 than it had been in 1972. While only two heads of state took part in the Stockholm Conference, over 100 member states were represented by their leader in Rio.<sup>251</sup> Public concern, the explosive growth of NGO's and the environmental pressures on states created a different context in the 1990s for the ILO to carve out its 'labor environmentalism' in.

That the 1972 working environment was annexed to the Director-General's report is indicative of the linear development in the ILO, albeit not a straight and rapid one, from the 'ecological revolution' of the 1970s to the 'historical turn' of environmentalism in the 1990s. It also illustrates the triggering effect major UN environmental events and initiatives had on the ILO. It is no coincident that the themes of the 1972 and 1990 ILC's, both held in close proximity to major international summits on the environment, were the environment and future environmental action. On the surface, ILO's message and role was fairly similar in 1992 as it had been in 1972. Following major environmental initiatives in the international community, ILO directed its attention to the topic through the ILC, international instruments, and various events and publications, like it had done previously in the 1970s. ILO's preferred means of action remained largely unchanged with a continued emphasis on international coordination and influencing national policies and practices through standard-setting, technical cooperation, and training and education. Many similarities notwithstanding, the message and role underwent some changes between 1970 and 1990, especially following the 1992 Rio Summit. One principle reason for that was the heightened position and changed nature of environmental issues in politics. The changed international context impacted the ILO, its role, and how it conducted its 'labor environmentalism' in two main ways. Firstly, the increased environmental awareness and expanded environmental agenda created pressure and an incentive for ILO action on ecological topics. Furthermore, an increase in the number of politically relevant environmental issues and their integration into other policy areas made matters related to the general well-being of the environment hard to ignore for the ILO. Secondly, the changed discourse in the UN system opened up for an 'environmental expansion' in the ILO as well. By

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<sup>251</sup> Conca, *An Unfinished Foundation*, 73; Conca and Dabelko, *Green Planet Blues*, 91–92.

shifting the conversation towards matters of development and economic implications, the ILO's perspectives on employment, transition, protection, and compensation, were more relevant in and for environmental debates. It also gave the ILO a possibility to influence the UN process and the environmental discourse in general to ensure social dialogue and protect workers against consequences deemed negative or unjust.

In addition to its new role and the practical implications of the environmental expansion, ILO's message took on new forms in the 1990s. Some of the ideas and rhetoric that surrounded the "humanization of work" discourse in the 1970s had faded by the 1990s. It is for instance not as many references to the content and quality of work in *Environment and world of work* from 1990 as in *Making work more human* from 1975. Maintaining and increasing levels of employment outweighed the content of work as a priority for the ILO. Accounting for the somewhat differing focuses of the reports, there is less of the intellectual and almost philosophical curiosity that characterized 1970s reports in the 1990 counterpart. One of the reasons for that might be that Hansenne in 1990 was influenced by concrete and impending environmental regimes and legislation. However, many of the themes introduced by the 'humanization process', such as working conditions and environment and organization of work, were still present two decades later. But often times the surviving themes would be adapted and 'translated' to suit a new context and an evolved discourse. In terms of the environmental discourse in the ILO, it is likely that what would have been deemed as 'humanized work' in the 1970s, might be called 'environmentally sound' or 'sustainable' in 1990. The ILO were inspired by some of the environmental ideas of the era and adopted a new, political language over the first phase discussed in this thesis. The ideas and language were present also in the second phase, but actions suggested by initial decisions were only partially followed through.

### **Development, employment and economic consequences of environmental policy**

In 1990 Michel Hansenne referenced the Director-General report from 1972 when he wrote about the economic and social burdens of environmental action. Hansenne pointed out that Winks like him had concerns over this and had stated that the ILO could not turn its backs on growth and innovation to save the environment.<sup>252</sup> There are undoubtedly many similarities in the message of Winks and Hansenne. However, one gets the impression that the 1990 report is slightly more concerned about safeguarding jobs. The Office drew parallels between the

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<sup>252</sup> ILO, Report of the Director-General (Part I), ILC 77 (1990), 2-3.

environment and social issues at the outset of the 1980s. The inequality caused by things like poor work organization and environmental hazards at work were deemed a “...important problem from the point of view of social justice”<sup>253</sup>. From the mid-1980s, the UN system framed environment and development as interrelated challenges which had to be analyzed and solved together. This narrative suited the ILO and made it was able to tie together environmental concerns with development, employment, and ultimately, the quest for social justice. As a consequence, ensuring that social justice and poverty reduction through employment were included in international environmental policies and instruments became one of the principle objectives of ‘ILO environmentalism’.

The Director-General reports of 1972 and 1975 were more open than its 1990 counterpart. Both in terms of what the future would hold in terms of environmental policy and in relation to ILO’s role in international environmental politics. In *Technology for freedom*, Winks likened the unchecked development of technology and economy with the tale of the sorcerer’s apprentice and his creation – dangerously out of control. In *Environment and the world of work*, the overall emphasis is placed on how best to influence, or *control* if you like, forthcoming environmental policies. Both reports warned against both the dangers of inaction and the potential negative effects of environmental measures, and the parallel is perhaps far-fetched, but the comparison is nevertheless indicative of ILO’s changed perceptions of and relation to environmental politics. However, it is important to note that this change more than anything occurred due to the altered political realities, not a deliberate shift away from growth-critical and more ‘environmentalist’ ideas. The shift in approach to environmental issues can also be viewed by considering the change in the role of the ILO as they fought for their relevance in an international community increasingly characterized by economic liberalization and globalization. In the 1990s finding a new and relevant position within the international community became an important priority for the ILO and Director-General Hansenne.<sup>254</sup> Part of this reorientation would be to address sustainable development and a new dimension of international politics, climate change, in proper balance with the ambition of employment, prosperity, and general wellbeing of workers.

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<sup>253</sup> ILO, *Tripartite Advisory Meeting on the Evaluation of PIACT* (Geneva: ILO, 1981), 100.

<sup>254</sup> Maul, *The International Labour Organization*, 241.



## Chapter 5: The ‘Future of Work’ and conclusions

### Global warming – a challenge to human modes of production. And jobs?

One of the outcomes from the Rio conference in 1992 was the establishment of UNFCCC – the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Scientific discoveries of carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse gases” and its effect on the atmosphere is elaborated on by Spencer R. Weart in his *The Discovery of global warming*<sup>255</sup>. Weart describes the process leading up to the contemporary scientific consensus and how researchers’ conclusions found its way into the world of politics. The development of climate change as an international political issue was for a long time characterized by experts seeking to incorporate their knowledge into various institutional loops to help spread information and inspire policy. To some degree, the first two decades following the “discovery of climate change” in the 1970s was a period in which debates took place within epistemic communities. As the issue gained prominence, it became something that occupied and influenced an increasingly wide group of people, organizations, and branches of governments. As Joshua P. Howe points out, the conversation had changed: “Since the late 1980s, the story has changed. In the 1990s, conversations about global warming came to include a much wider variety of experts – as well as a host of authors working outside of their expertise – and they have occurred in a multitude of new forums and in new forms of media.”<sup>256</sup>

This discovery has much in common with the developments discussed in chapter two and three, only in “delay”. The shifting political climate and potential new policies arguably constituted a greater threat to job security than what the measures to improve the working environment had been in the 1970s. The ILO was not left unaffected as climate change became a mainstay of international and national politics. Hansenne’s rhetorical question from the 1990 annual report – if not much of environmental damage was caused by labor – ringed true even more two decades later. Not in the sense that labor was the cause of all damage, but rather that it had to be part of the solution. The ILO response was to focus on sustainable employment – green jobs. In 2008, the ILO, UNEP, ITUC, and the International organization for employers (IOE),

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<sup>255</sup> Spencer R. Weart, *The Discovery of Global Warming*, Rev. and expanded ed, New Histories of Science, Technology, and Medicine (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>256</sup> Joshua P. Howe, ed., *Making Climate Change History: Primary Sources from Global Warming’s Past*, 1st edition, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Classics (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 269.

published the report “Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World”<sup>257</sup>.

The challenge of creating alternatives for job creation that considers a forthcoming transformation of the economy due to climate change are far removed from the roots of ‘ILO environmentalism’. But there are, nonetheless, some parallels. The *workplace* is still a vital area of work for the ILO, which was underlined by statement from former Director-General Juan Somavia in 2008: “Tackling climate change and protect the environment are workplace issues”<sup>258</sup>.

### **The Labor-environment dichotomy**

The labor-environment dichotomy is not easy to get to grips with, particularly since it has not been the primary research object here. The ILO has not either been directly on the ‘frontlines’ of this, as one for instance can imagine a coal miners’ trade union might be. However, some things seem evident. Possible negative effects to classical labor interests, especially employment, have been a presence in ‘ILO environmentalism’ throughout the period dealt with in this thesis. Mostly vague, sometimes more explicit. The working environment discussions revolved more around specifics of employer and government responsibility, than the role of job security in environmental contexts. But it was still pointed out by Director-Generals that environmental regulation could not be to the detriment of employment and development. In the thesis’ second phase employment concerns played a more significant role as it was integrated in the sustainable development discourse. The occasional contradictory relationship between labor and environment is not very surprising, and, on many levels, it is understandable. Would it not be more beneficial for one’s quality of life – and work – to be employed rather than lose it at the hands of environmental regulation? Another aspect worthy of pointing out is that while there is little doubt that the labor-environment has been a factor in environmental and economic debates and in labor-environmental relations, the concept’s truthfulness has been contested.<sup>259</sup> Nonetheless, the ‘problem of employment’ will continue to be key to a possible solution of our environmental problems, in that, the ILO are absolutely right.

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<sup>257</sup> UNEP, ILO, ITUC, & IOE. *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World*. Washington DC: UNEP, 2008.

<sup>258</sup> International Labour Organization, “Message by Juan Somavia, Director-General of the International Labour Office on the occasion of World Environment Day”

<sup>259</sup> At one point only 3% of job loss in the US was caused by environmental regulation. See, Barca, “On Working-Class Environmentalism: A Historical and Transnational Overview,” 69.

## **Final conclusions**

Ecological ideas were first properly introduced to the ILO in the 1970s. The annual reports *Technology for Freedom* and *Making Work More Human* illustrates how rhetoric and ideas changed to encompass new, environmental perspectives. The traditional field of working conditions were rejuvenated through newly forged connections to the human environment, as well as a reorientation of organizational structure and policy. In this effort the PIACT program was key component and in a certain way a materialization of ILO's domestication/integration of environmental ideas. While it continued into the 1990s, PIACT did not quite reach the heights it was intended to at its outset. The ILO connected sections of its environmental work to UNEP. In the 1970s and 1980s, the collaboration had particular significance for the training activities of the ILO.

The Brundtland Report shifted the environmental discourse by the popularization of sustainable development. In my opinion, there are multiple signs of how environmental processes in the UN influenced the ILO. Arguably most striking among these is the breakthrough of 'ILO environmentalism' in proximity to the Stockholm conference. Stockholm was a key inspiration for the Annual Report and Resolution from 1972, and thus in the start of a line of consecutive ILCs with environmental themes. That it saw a resurgence around the Rio Earth Summit underlines this tendency. In between the two summits, the new environmental initiatives had continued but without the same enthusiasm.

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