

# Surfing History's Waves: On the Resilience of the International Labour Organisation as an International Institution

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## Abstract

This paper explores six factors which, when taken together, explain not only the survival of the ILO since its creation in 1919, but also its capacity to maintain relevance and legitimacy, despite often adverse circumstances in which it has operated. Whilst focusing primarily on the post-1980 period, it identifies strands of organisation and strategic positioning, which have been central to ILO thinking since 1919.

## Introduction

Cyclonic weather patterns often produce great swells, which, when they arrive on suitably configured shorelines, give rise to highly challenging, but for the expert surfer, exhilarating opportunities to test themselves against the sea's elemental power. The surfer battles the swell, chooses the wave to ride, and, applying knowledge and experience, hurtles across the wave's face, constantly adjusting angle and positioning to maximise the run (and also preserve life and limb). All being well, safety is gained and the surfer returns to confront the inexorable swell in preparation for the next ride.

The metaphor of the surfer in cyclonic conditions captures well the history of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) since 1919. The ILO was borne out immediately of a geo-political cyclone (the First World War) and, over a longer term, a similar sea-change created by the growth of militant working class opposition to the capitalist system. The subsequent history of the ILO has been marked by cyclonic shifts – the collapse of the League of Nations, the Second World War, the post-war accommodation, the Cold War, the neo-liberal revolution, and the rise of globalisation, to name but the most obvious. In each case, the ILO has battled through the cyclone, found a wave, and ridden the storm. Today, perhaps against the odds and to the surprise of some, the ILO, commanding resources, knowledge and skill, has not merely survived multiple cyclones, but prospered to the extent that, in 2011, its status and position in the global order is as strong, if not stronger, than has ever been the case.

Based on our previous research (Hughes and Haworth 2011a and 2011b), this paper outlines six dimensions of that historical success, which, when combined, underpin the current status of the ILO. In brief, the dimensions are:

- The founding strategy of autonomy, relevance and presence
- The importance of leadership
- Understanding the political-economy of the context
- Strategic principles
- Organisational adaptation
- External engagement

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The paper assesses each dimension in turn, focusing particularly on the contemporary period (that is, since the 1980s).

## **The ILO in brief**

The ILO was created in 1919 as an outcome of Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles. Launched as an institution within the League of Nations system, its origins lay in international debates begun in nineteenth century about labour standards. Those debates had three important dimensions. The first was a humanitarian concern about working conditions. The second was a primarily economic concern about the implications of “unfair” labour standards for trade (an early version of the “race to the bottom” argument). The third addressed the rise of working class militancy, particularly under socialist and communist direction, and the threat to Capital created by that militancy. The ILO and its unique tripartite model was the outcome of those discussions. It was to be an organisation charged with the development and implementation of international labour standards, which would address humanitarian, economic and political challenges posed by workers and their working conditions.

Traditionally, the ILO’s core activities have been to develop, implement and monitor conventions and recommendations relating to all manner of working conditions. There is also a strong commitment to technical capacity building in labour standards, employment relations and many other dimensions of labour market performance. The institutional heart of the standards-setting process is the International Labour Office, located in Geneva. It currently employs about 2500 staff and in 2008/9 enjoyed a revenue of US\$ 565 million. A network of regional and local offices provides “global reach”. 182 countries are members. As noted above, a unique feature of the ILO is its tripartite nature. The Governing Body, the International Labour Conference and many of the Other ILO bodies include government, employer and trade union members<sup>1</sup>.

As we shall see, the ILO uniquely survived the demise of the League of Nations and the Second World War to become an institution within the United Nations system. Moreover, despite a sometimes lacklustre performance in the post-war period; since the 1980s, it has enjoyed an extended period of renovation and influence.

## **The Founding Strategy: autonomy, relevance and presence**

The first two Directors General – Albert Thomas and his successor Harold Butler – combined idealism and cool pragmatism in their early positioning of the ILO. Idealism was manifest in Thomas’ belief that workers in a post First World War world wanted stability in daily life and security against any renewed threat of war. Hence, he saw the role of the ILO as reducing tension, not only in nations, but between nations. However, such an ambitious role required the ILO to move beyond a narrow agenda of labour standards into a broader agenda addressing the political, economic and moral order of the post First World War world. Equally, an ambitious agenda was also needed to give the ILO strong international mandate, unlikely to be offered by a narrow focus on labour standards. Thomas recognised that the ILO risked isolation and oblivion if it did not build a stronger, broader international presence. In modern parlance, Thomas understood that the survival and impact of the ILO depended on it becoming “a player” in International Relations.

The inter-war strategy of the ILO can be reduced to *three essential propositions*: autonomy from the mortally-wounded League of Nations (and a concomitant identity as an independent agency); relevance to countries facing the impact of the inter-war crisis (in and beyond the developed economies); presence in

countries and regions beyond the metropole, such that the status and purpose of the ILO was globally recognised.

**Autonomy** from the League of Nations was a hard fought battle. Early on, Thomas and then Butler realised that the League was ineffectual in its response to deteriorating political circumstances in Europe, China, and to the impact of the global economic crisis. Their answer was to develop direct channels between the ILO and the tripartite partners in countries outside the League's mechanisms. Such links defined the ILO's autonomy from the League, an autonomy subsequently highlighted by US and USSR membership of the ILO in 1934. As the political situation slumped towards the Second World War and the League foundered, the ILO rode its wave of autonomy, crucially supported by the US. The role of the US in the later inter-war years was vital for the survival of the ILO, for its membership bolstered the status the organisation, whilst challenging the domination of European powers in ILO councils. Subsequently, it was the US' engagement with the ILO that provided an essential pathway to the integration of the ILO into the UN system, and supported the post-Second World War agenda for the ILO encapsulated in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia.

**Relevance** has been a goal of the ILO throughout its life. An autonomous organisation without relevance would founder as quickly as the League, as all Directors General have understood. In the inter-war years, relevance was provided by the ILO's technical role in identifying policy settings able to respond to the impacts of the global economic crisis. Subsequently, in the post-Second World War period, the regional and field networks of the ILO were developed to provide an extended level of technical support globally. Relevance remains at the heart of the contemporary ILO, as we shall see below in our discussion of the contemporary role of the ILO in the G20 discussions on the post-2008 global crisis.

Successive Directors-General have worked hard to couple relevance with **presence**. One way to establish relevance was to be present, visible and engaged in countries' policy setting. Presence required physical presence (hence the regional and field networks, and other networks at national level), intellectual presence (the provision of relevant and useful policy advice) and appropriate presence (by which we mean a presence that eschewed neo-colonial Metropole-Periphery relationships). In the contemporary period, presence has developed to include another "location" – the engagement of the ILO in the work and debates of other international institutions. As global governance develops, the ILO has actively positioned itself as a partner in discussions with, in particular, the World Bank and IMF, the WTO, and the G20.

## **The Importance of Leadership**

We have already hinted at the role of leadership in the strategic positioning of the ILO after 1919. Successive Directors-General have, to greater or lesser extent, imposed their own individual mark upon the development of the organisation. However, some have been more "activist" than others, a possibility created by the structure and nature of the ILO as an organisation. Directors-General are elected for five year terms, and have the capacity to influence significantly the Governing Body and Conference of the ILO. An activist Director General has been able to impose his mark forcefully on the ILO (all Directors-General of the ILO have been men).

The power of the Director-General derives from multiple sources. Election places an individual in a major international position, in which there is embodied an expectation of leadership and action. That position allows the Director-General, if graced with diplomatic skills, to use his roles in the organisation's councils to implement bold strategies. Directors-General are members of an elite international order of leaders in the UN system, a position which, if used astutely, can be a lever of internal power within the ILO. Directors-General can, to some extent, play off against each other member countries and their social partners, the social partners

within ILO institutions and the social partners and countries against the staff of the ILO (and vice versa). Directors-General also have significant influence over staff issues at senior levels within the ILO, providing another route for the exercise of power and direction within the organisation. Of course, any of these “routes to power” depend on the political and institutional skill of the incumbent. Power and status ineptly wielded can drive a powerful wedge between, on the one hand, the Director-General and, on the other, the staff and the social partners.

Albert Thomas (1919-32) and Juan Somavia (1999 to date) are quintessential “activist” Directors-General. Thomas, a socialist and a French Munitions Minister during the First World War, seized the nascent ILO and, by force of personality and the wielding of great political skill, drove the strategy of autonomy, relevance and presence outlined above. Enjoying the opportunities provided by an organisation-in-creation, he imposed his own blueprint on the ILO, ably supported by his successor, Harold Butler. Thomas is the prototype of the activist Director-General. Somavia, at the time of writing in his third term as Director-General, a Chilean diplomat and the first “Third World” Director-General (and the first not made in the traditional ILO mould), has been equally activist. As we shall see below, he has used the platform provided by his predecessor, Michael Hansenne (1989-1999), to drive a powerful agenda for internal organisational change, the refocusing of ILO strategy into the “Decent Work” agenda, deeper engagement with other international institutions, all underpinned by a commitment to inclusive responses to globalisation. Others might arguably fall into the same category of “activist Director General” (such as Edward Phelan (1941-1948) and David Morse (1948-1970)).

Of course, for much of the history of the ILO, action has been needed. Directors-General have rarely enjoyed the luxury of reflective leadership. Thomas and Butler (1932-1938) were forced to weather the cyclone that destroyed the League of Nations. John Winant (1939-1941) and Phelan (1941-1948) had to preserve the ILO and reposition it in the post Second World War era. Morse had to manage the Cold War’s impact on the ILO, a job that exhausted him, and may have contributed to the early death of his successor, Wilfred Jenks (1970-1973). Francis Blanchard (1974-1989) was confronted by the global neo-liberal attack on much of the philosophy upon which the ILO is based, and his successors, Hansenne and Somavia were confronted, not only by neo-liberalism, but also the impacts of globalisation and, under Somavia, the worst global economic crisis since the inter-war years. Leadership is important in the ILO because it can be displayed, and because it has been a constant requirement of the ILO’s circumstances (Hughes and Haworth, 2009).

## **Understanding the Political Economy of the Context**

To build relevance required the ILO to understand the changing context in which it operated. That understanding, in turn, required strengths in two areas – the technical capacity to understand shifts in the global economy and their implications for labour markets and the social partners, and delivery mechanisms that turned that understanding into effective policies in member countries. We have seen already that, in the inter-war years, economic certainties were pummeled by economic crisis. Moreover, alternative solutions – fascism and communism – were emerging, rejecting the failed liberal policies of the European tradition. Harold Butler understood the implications of this clash for world peace, economic stability and the future of the ILO. And, as the Depression progressed, the standards-setting activities of the ILO diminished in importance and pace.

Butler’s response to this challenge was masterly. He identified the salvation of the ILO (and, in a broader sense, the world order) to be a reduction of the importance of European countries in the ILO, to be achieved by the US becoming a member. Once a member (after 1934), the US, fortified by Roosevelt’s New Deal as a successful alternative to Hitler and Stalin, strongly supported the ILO (whilst condemning the ineffectual League; but this was not simply a political success, consolidated in the inclusion of the ILO in the UN

system. It was also the basis for an alternative policy package for governments responding to the inter-war economic crisis, a package that the technical capacity in the ILO could develop to meet the needs of other countries. Thus, US membership provided simultaneously a political defence of the ILO and a relevant and grounded technical policy framework, which the ILO to promote.

More recently, Somavia has achieved a similar degree of success in positioning the ILO as a central international agency in the development of a response to the post-2008 global crisis. When the global economy “came to a halt” in the second half of 2008, unemployment mounted rapidly, and the potential for the economic crisis to unleash global social unrest was widely recognised. The G20, in London in April, 2009, held a summit meeting on growth, stability and jobs, and called on the ILO to assess the employment impacts of the crisis, existing measures taken in response to those impacts, and other measures that might be implemented. Operating at its technical best, the ILO produced 54 country analysis in response to the G20’s call and presented its findings at the Pittsburgh G20 meeting in September 2009.

Somavia’s success in entrenching the ILO in the G20’s councils mirrors Butler’s success in the 1930s. The ILO achieved three key outcomes as an effect of its work with, and for, the G20. It confirmed the status of the ILO in such august councils, itself a significant outcome. It reinforced the status of the ILO as the pre-eminent international body in labour market, employment and social protection issues. It positioned the ILO’s technical capacity in these areas as unmatched. The ILO’s success in reaffirming its international role in the post-2008 period has been buttressed by the on-going fear of “jobless growth” as the global economy begins its rocky road to recovery. Countries echo the ILO’s concerns about “job rich growth” and its social and political benefits, providing a context in which ILO influence and technical capacity can wax. Arguably, a key ILO success in this period is its capacity to ground its rhetoric and principles in crisis responses in many countries, especially in terms of social dialogue and tripartism.

The ILO’s vehicle for employment-based growth is the Global Jobs Pact, endorsed by the International Labour Conference in June 2009. Its key tenets are:

- Guaranteeing credit flows to business, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (a necessary pre-condition for employment retention and creation)
- Retention of viable jobs by means of a reduction in work hours and the targeted use of skill development strategies (to minimise unnecessary lay-offs and labour market disruption)
- Unemployment benefits targeted expressly to support job seekers
- A strong focus on active labour market policies to reduce, first, the impact of unemployment and, second, to minimise social exclusion. Employment guarantee schemes were particularly highlighted.
- An equally strong focus on measures to support youth in the labour market
- Investment in job-rich infrastructure projects
- The development of “Green” employment strategies to reinforce employment sustainability
- The extension of social protection to vulnerable groups currently without such protection

The Pact positions the ILO’s response to the post-2008 crisis in classical ILO principles: social protection for the needy, employment-led growth, the priority to be attached to “decent work”, the importance of active labour market interventions, and a strong underpinning of social dialogue and inclusion of the social partners. The line between Butler in the 1930s and Somavia in 2008 is direct and consistent.

## **Strategic Principles**

Strategic principles and a capacity to adapt them have been at the heart of ILO success. Some principles – standards setting, tripartism, for example – are constants. Others have emerged and have been adjusted over

time. Thus, for example, the traditional focus on standards-setting was a necessary but not sufficient condition for the survival of the ILO after 1919. As noted above, Thomas understood quickly that survival required the ILO to broaden its strategic principles to include the political, economic and moral rights of individuals in a market-driven system. Similarly, the Declaration of Philadelphia proclaimed that labour is not a commodity, that freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress, that poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere, and that the war against want should be based on concerted and continuous international effort. However, it also placed Human Rights at the centre of the ILO's functions. The reason for this was simple. Director-General Phelan was seeking to place the ILO at the centre of the re-building of political democracy after the Second World War, thus, like Thomas and Butler before, guaranteeing the status and relevance of the ILO in the post-war settlement.

Strategic principles have been at the heart of reform agendas in the contemporary ILO. Particularly under Directors-General Hansenne and Somavia, the renovation and refocusing of ILO principles have been important. In 1994, Hansenne addressed the International Labour Conference about the need for the ILO to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities posed by globalisation. He was challenging the ILO to revise its strategic principles and direction in a changing world. His thinking was driven by four factors: continuing support internationally for the standards-setting role of the ILO, a parallel concern that the mechanism for standards-setting needed to be reformed, an understanding amongst the social partners that change was needed in the ILO, and a related concern that the consensus between the social partners within the ILO was breaking down, primarily as an effect of neo-liberal thinking in government and employer groups.

Hansenne's response, articulated at the 1997 Conference, was to propose that the ILO work in two interdependent ways. The first, echoing the outcomes of the 1995 Copenhagen Social Summit, was, in effect, to specify core labour standards, which would capture key basic rights and, also, the "social rules of the game of globalisation". The second was a framework whereby the ILO "came alongside" countries as they responded to the challenges of globalisation, encouraging them to integrate a social dimension into their economic strategies. This approach, as detailed by Hansenne in his 1997 speech, at once drew heavily on traditional ILO values and practices, and yet moved the ILO into controversial new ground. The identification of "core" labour standards was seen by some to cut across traditional ILO support for all standards, whilst the "encouragement" of a social dimension in countries' responses to globalisation seemed, in the eyes of some traditionalists, to move ILO activity from the application of "hard law" labour standards to a softer, engagement-style relationship with member countries. Traditionalists were even more concerned when the new approach was associated by Hansenne with "standards overload" (the tendency for all issues to be reduced to standard-setting) and a view that standards-setting was but one dimension of ILO activity, and that other activities, perhaps more topical and unrelated to standards, were also important<sup>2</sup>.

Hansenne's reform was consolidated in the hard-fought Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, adopted unanimously by the June 1998 Conference. The final wording of the Declaration is concise and can be reduced to four key elements. First, the Declaration confirms that, by joining the ILO, and endorsing the principles set out in the ILO's constitution and the Declaration of Philadelphia, member states are bound by the principles related to four fundamental areas of rights, which are:

- a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;
- c) the effective abolition of child labour; and
- d) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Second, member states and the ILO, working together with other agencies, will support these fundamental rights:

- a) by offering technical cooperation and advisory services to promote the ratification and implementation of the fundamental conventions;
- b) by assisting those members not yet in a position to ratify some or all of these conventions in their efforts to respect, to promote and to realise the principles concerning fundamental rights which are the subject of those conventions;
- c) by helping the members in their efforts to create a climate for economic and social development.

Third, the 1998 Declaration will be promoted by means of an annual “follow-up” at member-state level in cases where one or more of the four fundamental areas have not been addressed appropriately in terms of convention ratification, and an annual “global report”, analysing one of the fundamental rights each year. Fourth, labour standards should not be used for protectionist purposes.

These principles were and remain controversial. However, here, that controversy is secondary to our interest, that is, the manner by which the ILO renews its principles as a necessary strategy in its constant search for relevance and presence in a changing world.

The capacity to adapt strategic principles is seen in equal measure in the changes introduced under Somavia after 1999, Building on Hansenne’s work, and the extended analysis undertaken by the ILO of the social impacts of globalisation (ILO, 2004), Somavia has marshaled the work of the ILO under a single banner – “Decent Work” – from which, for the 2000-2005 period, depended four strategic objectives:

- To promote and realise standards and fundamental principles and rights at work
- To create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income
- To enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all
- To strengthen tripartism and social dialogue

These examples illustrate how strong, yet adaptable, strategic principles have been both pillars of ILO practice and a staunch defence against attempts to marginalise or undermine the institution. Those principles have, since early days, been far broader than a defence of labour standards, and have appropriated to the ILO a responsibility for a broader human rights and social inclusion agenda.

## **Organisational Adaptation**

The organisational performance of the ILO has been a perennial issue for member countries and social partners as much as the institutional leadership in Geneva. We have discussed above the founding strategies of autonomy, presence and relevance, which required the elaboration of an institutional presence beyond Geneva. We will discuss in the next section how contemporary engagement with other international agencies involves innovative organisational measures. There have been three key phases of institutional development in what has, overall, been a constant search for an effective organisational model. The first was the founding period in which the essential model of social partners and tripartism was elaborated, and in which the roles of the key actors and institutions in the ILO, and the key outputs of ILO deliberations, were defined. Thomas and Butler oversaw this period, though one might argue that it extends into the period that culminates with the Declaration of Philadelphia and the insertion of the ILO into the post-Second World War UN system. The second was the long period of Morse’s leadership (1948-1970), in which the quality and scope of ILO technical assistance programmes was extended. That period also saw the creation of the International Institute for Labour Studies and the Turin-based International Training Centre<sup>3</sup>.

However, in the recent period, Somavia has overseen a major overhaul of the ILO’s organisation, in a clear attempt to create an organisational form that can meet the challenges posed by the 1998 Declaration and the

unifying focus on Decent Work. At the heart of the new organisational model is the delivery of the key strategic objectives, outlined in the previous section, which together comprise the Decent Work agenda. Somavia has instituted reporting across the ILO against those objectives, most recently in the Strategic Policy Framework (SPF) for 2010-2015. This emphasises outcomes-base reporting, in which measurement and reporting of results are important. Reporting to the Governing Body and the Conference are similarly structured. Somavia has also restructured the delivery mechanisms for ILO activity. Thirty-nine programmes have been reorganised into the four strategic objectives, entailing significant budget and staffing realignment. A new senior management structure has been introduced.

Again, such changes are controversial (see, for example, Standing 2008). The social partners have broadly supported change. However, staff have been divided between those who accept that there was a need to modernise the institution and are comfortable with the model implemented, those who accept the need for change but are critical of its particularities, and then a third group who, like Standing (2008), take a far more critical line and suggest that organisational change under Somavia has fundamentally damaged the ILO. Again, here, we are less concerned about the weight of contending assessments and more about the period of organisational change under Somavia as reflecting a constant requirement for the ILO to adapt effectively to changing external circumstances. As was the case in previous periods in the ILO's history, the contemporary period has seen organisational coherence and performance being tested as well as being a key to the institution's survival.

## **External Engagement**

The history of the ILO has been marked by a constant positioning of its institutions and activities relative to other external agencies. The early days of the ILO were, as we have mentioned, marked by a distancing of the ILO from the League of Nations, and a concomitant building of autonomous relationships with social partners in member countries, particularly the US and others beyond Europe. The period between 1938 and 1948 was another period of positioning, this time in terms of the post-Second World War settlement, and the creation of the UN system. Under Morse, the expansion of technical assistance programmes built wider networks and relationships in developing economies. Here, however, we focus on the contemporary period, commencing with Blanchard's opening towards the international financial institutions in 1987.

By the early 1980s, the ILO was effectively sidelined by a combination of factors influencing the global economy. The US had left the ILO in 1977, creating a short period of serious budget crisis and reflection on the future of the ILO. Although the US rejoined in 1980, neo-liberal policies were in vogue, and stood against many of the precepts upon which the ILO was based. Moreover, the major Bretton Woods institutions – the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (sometimes called the IFIs, or international financial institutions) – were in the vanguard of neo-liberalism, especially in the developing countries into which the ILO had expanded with many of its technical assistance programmes. Blanchard, a highly-competent diplomat, argued that the way forward for the ILO was engagement with the IFIs, leading to the 1987 high-level meeting between the three institutions, and a call for greater co-operation between them.

Blanchard's opening towards the IFIs marked the beginning of external engagements that runs through to the contemporary link between the G20 and the ILO (discussed above) and the close relationships that exist between the ILO and the WTO, and with the World Bank. We have outlined the involvement with the G20 above. Here, we develop our argument with reference to the ILO and the IMF<sup>4</sup>.

Underpinning the G20's contemporary "balanced growth" framework was a considerable body of work undertaken across a range of international agencies, including the OECD, WTO, World Bank and the ILO. That joint work became the basis of G20 decisions made in Toronto (June 2010) and Seoul (November



2010). At the heart of the balanced growth framework is a traditional ILO principle – growth and inclusion in social benefits. In one sense, the ILO was pushing at an already open door, in that the G20 leaders were committed, formally at least, to inclusive, balanced growth. However, the presence of a strongly inclusionary approach in G20 statements reflects also the relationship between the ILO and the IMF, and particularly between Somavia and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the IMF's Managing Director. Strauss-Kahn strongly supports policy settings that include simultaneously macroeconomic stability and social inclusion. His views reflect differences within the IMF between strategists and the top echelon, who broadly support Strauss-Kahn, and the country-level intervention teams, who, usually drawn into a country late in a crisis, tend to draw from their standards tool-box of structural adjustment measures (Personal communication – Authors' interviews, ILO, November 2010).

The integration of traditional ILO concerns with IMF adjustment approaches is the outcome of a number of processes. The first is the development of close personal ties at the senior leadership levels across the two institutions. It is clear that Somavia and Strauss-Kahn are able to work together in some harmony. Second, there is an institutional basis for co-operation, particularly derived from the positive outcomes of the September 2010 joint IMF and ILO conference on “the Challenges of Growth, Employment and Social Cohesion”, held in Oslo (see: [www.osloconference2010.org/conference](http://www.osloconference2010.org/conference) ).

Third, there are drivers for co-operation for both institutions. In the case of the ILO, there is the desire to ensure that jobs, social justice and inclusion are at the heart of recovery packages. For the IMF, the impetus for involvement is not just about the personal views of Strauss-Kahn. Before the 2008 crisis exploded, the IMF was in major difficulties. Its interventions were increasingly eschewed by countries, which had seen the impact of such interventions in the 1990s and were critical of them, and which had also seen the success of alternative packages, such as that applied in Malaysia in the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s. It is not stretching the point to argue that the 2008 crisis gave a new lease of life to the IMF, but it also required the IMF to reposition itself, opening up avenues in which co-operation with the ILO could prosper.

External engagement and co-operation has become a central strategic focus for the ILO. It has been present in the ILO toolbox since its creation, but, in the era of globalisation, has become an essential mechanism in building relationships with other key agencies in global governance. Under Blanchard, Hansenne and particularly, Somavia, it has been taken to new heights, facilitated by the need for action to overcome the impacts of the 2008 crisis.

## Conclusions

We commenced this discussion by invoking the image of cyclonic swells and the skill and experience needed to surf them. The ILO has been buffeted by such swells since its earliest days. Organisationally, it has had to act across the six areas discussed above in order to survive and prosper. It is much to the credit of the ILO and its leadership that it has not only survived, but prospered. Yet, even now, in a period in which the ILO is strongly placed, its position is still fragile, dependent upon its capacity to tie its technical analysis into the broader work of the international agencies at the heart of global governance. The fate of the ILO is to confront such swells constantly, and to adapt accordingly.

We have concluded our discussion on a high point. The ILO is at the “top table” of international agencies in terms of responses to the post-2008 crisis. This is, as we have argued, because of effective positioning around a traditional high competence. The social, inclusionary and employment aspects of globalisation have become more crucial as questions of sustainable political and economic stability gain greater currency. Building on the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia and its more recent repositioning in the 1990s and 2010s, the ILO can make legitimate claim to the defence of those inclusionary aspects, and if they are sustained in global agendas, that claim may well maintain the ILO in the first rank of international agencies in the future.

Such a positioning will require that traditional combination of relevance, competence, presence, and, also, leadership, which together has marked the history of the ILO since 1919.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>For a brief description of the ILO system, see Hughes and Haworth (2011b, Chapter 2)

<sup>2</sup>For a brief account of the controversy, see Hughes and Haworth (2011b, Chapter 4). It is fair to conclude that Hansenne's reform emerges from the debate in reasonably good health.

<sup>3</sup> The ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its contribution to peace through social justice in 1969, not a little due to that expansion in effective technical assistance.

<sup>4</sup> A similar argument can be made for the relationship between the World Bank and the ILO, see Hughes and Haworth 2011a.

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