

were not prepared to make concessions. So efforts to organize international conferences, even of those social-democratic parties in countries not involved in the war, had little success; nor were Troelstra's persistent manoeuvres to reconstruct the Second International. Van Dongen's analysis of the international politics of the SDAP leadership is fascinating and reveals a great deal of new information on the functioning of the ISB, the many quarrels between Troelstra and foreign social-democratic leaders, including Camille Huysmans, the secretary of the ISB, and the difficult relationship between social-democratic parties. This is of extraordinary value, especially for scholars of the international labour movement, and it certainly contributes to a better understanding of the labour movement during the First World War.

Henry Buiting

GRABHERR, STEPHAN. *Das Washingtoner Arbeitszeitübereinkommen von 1919. Versuch einer internationalen Regelung der Arbeitszeit in Europa.* [Schriften zur Europäischen Rechts- und Verfassungsgeschichte, Band 5.] Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1992. 472 pp. DM 98.00.

After the First World War a strong movement for the eight-hour working day made itself felt all over Europe. At the same time, the International Labour Organization (ILO) was founded as part of the provisions of the peace treaties which had ended the war. The ILO tried to guarantee a minimum of social legislation world-wide. Its first international conference, held in Washington in 1919, adopted a convention limiting working hours in industry to eight a day and forty-eight a week. This Washington Convention on Working Hours became the touchstone for the work of the ILO, Albert Thomas (the director of the ILO), declared. Stephan Grabherr is therefore able to analyse the effectiveness of both the Convention and the ILO in one study.

In Washington, each participating country was represented by delegates from its government, its trade unions and its employers' organizations. This tripartite structure would remain basic to the ILO. The conventions adopted by the conference, however, had to be ratified by states. In theory, therefore, an ILO conference could adopt a convention which was opposed by a majority of the governments which would have to ratify it. In practice, this problem never materialized. Workers' and employers' delegates often opposed one another, leaving the governments' delegates room to decide the questions under discussion in the way most governments wanted. In the case of the Washington Convention even this was not necessary. It was overwhelmingly adopted by all three groups. In 1919 the time seemed ripe for an international settlement of working hours.

Soon, however, dark clouds gathered. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union became members of the ILO. In practice this limited the effect of the Convention to Europe. But even European countries which had adopted the eight-hour working day hesitated to ratify the Convention.

The prime example of this attitude was Great Britain. In the first industrial nation, the eight-hour working day was already common practice in industry, without international or even national legislation to regulate working hours. Indeed, the railway workers' unions in Britain were so strong that they had won important

financial compensation for working longer hours and during weekends. They did not want to lose this in exchange for shorter hours. The only thing Britain could hope to gain by ratifying the Convention was that other nations which ratified it would have to adopt the same working hours as Britain and would therefore be less able to compete with British industry. The British government felt that the Convention was not precise enough to have this effect, however. It therefore demanded the Convention be revised to clarify points relating to, for example, the conditions under which overtime could be granted.

Other countries felt that if even Great Britain did not ratify, they could not be expected to do so either. As the economic outlook worsened, they were even less inclined to bind themselves to an international settlement of working hours. In Germany, which has a good reputation as one of the leading exponents of social legislation, the eight-hour working day had been introduced with the demobilization after the war. After 1923, however, the issue of working hours became entangled with that of reparations. The Germans declared that they would not be able to adhere to international agreements on working hours if the Allied powers forced them to pay reparations at a time when the German economy was still in ruins. Indeed, working hours in many of Germany's industries were lengthened.

In France the principle of the eight-hour working day was embodied in a very simple and flexible law which resembled the Washington Convention. It declared that working hours should not exceed forty-eight hours a week and left detailed arrangements to decrees, which were issued for individual industries and regions. Other countries suspected that this meant that the eight-hour day was not upheld in many industries and regions where unions were weak. However, the French government eventually declared itself willing to ratify the Convention, on the condition that Britain and Germany would do so too.

Grabherr's book analyses the attitude towards the international settlement of working hours of France, Germany and Great Britain and the activities of the ILO. Thus the reader is confronted with the subtleties of international politics, complicated by the activities of a new and relatively autonomous participant, the ILO. For instance, on several occasions during the 1920s it was proposed that the ministers of the principal industrial countries should meet and decide on a common and binding interpretation of the obscure points in the Washington Convention. The ILO hoped to get recognition as the authority which interpreted the Convention and was therefore not enthusiastic about ministers' conferences. The workers in particular, who had much more influence within the ILO than they generally had on the policy of their government, opposed them. The director of the ILO, Albert Thomas, only wanted to accept conferences of ministers if the ILO was represented and the talks were linked to ratification.

In the end the ILO did not succeed in winning for itself a role as the interpreter of the Washington Convention. The Convention itself was not even ratified by the most important industrial countries. Does this mean that the ILO failed? Grabherr argues convincingly against this conclusion. He shows that the ILO did manage to bring to bear some pressure on governments, especially where socialist parties were in power. He shows that in Germany the ILO even exerted some influence on public opinion. Even if the Washington Convention was not ratified, the principle of the eight-hour day was eventually accepted in Europe, and Grabherr shows that the campaign for ratification and the activities of the ILO were instrumental in this.

In doing so, Grabherr offers us a wealth of detailed information on the many forces which were important in international social politics in the 1920s. He has made good use of the gold mine offered by the ILO archives, which make it possible to follow the activities of Albert Thomas and his staff from day to day. The archives of the German government have also been used extensively. This is much less true of the British and French archives. Grabherr presents us with a clear picture of British policies particularly, but mainly on the basis of the literature and the German and ILO archives. Still, one is tempted to think that the overall picture would have become even clearer if Grabherr had been able to do as much research in British and French archives as he has done in German archives. The same point applies to the international organizations of workers, and – to a lesser extent – employers and to other states. Belgium was represented at the ministers' conferences and did ratify the Convention, as did Czechoslovakia. In Italy the fascist government, whose relations with the ILO were already rather strained, raised the maximum length of the working day to nine hours in 1926. To be complete, a history of the Washington Convention would have to incorporate the vision of these and other parties, too, and inform us about the actual development of working hours in more countries. However, it is hardly fair to list all the points which remain to be elucidated, since Grabherr has thrown so much new light on the history of the Washington Convention.

Lex Heerma van Voss

HOMBURG, HEIDRUN. *Rationalisierung und Industriearbeit. Arbeitsmarkt – Management – Arbeiterschaft im Siemens-Konzern Berlin 1900–1939. Mit einem Geleitwort von Peter-Christian Witt.* [Schriften der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin, Band 1.] Haude & Spener, Berlin 1991. xxiii, 806 pp. DM 148.00.

This book provides an exceedingly wide-ranging and detailed study of the processes of industrial rationalization in the Berlin engineering industry. Homburg concentrates on the Berlin plants of the Siemens concern, and in particular the electric motors plant. This plays a “central role” (p. 428) in the technical and organizational rationalization efforts by a firm which itself was a leading exponent of the German rationalization movement. She considers rationalization in terms of the concern's “labour-market strategy” (p. 12) and embeds her study in a regional and labour-market context by describing the geographical and social structure of the Berlin labour market in the first part (pp. 27–144) and its interest groups in the second part (pp. 147–252). The broad scope of the four early chapters seems not entirely justified in the sense that the developments outlined there are only occasionally related to the technical and staffing developments at Siemens analysed in the second part.

The emphasis in most of the ten chapters is on the 1920s. When source material and statistical information are available, the author at times also comments on the inter-war period as a whole. She does not systematically include the political upheaval of 1933 in her analysis of technical and staffing trends. This is all the more surprising since she notes in her conclusions that after a rather “experimental” phase during the 1920s (p. 526) the rationalization of the production