

The Amsterdam International

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Geert Van Goethem

The Amsterdam International. The World of the International Federations of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913-1945

Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006, 320 p., 16,0 x 24,0 cm, hardcoverÂ

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This book charts the turbulent history of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) from its foundation in 1913, to its dissolution in 1945. Established to protect and advance the interests of workers of all countries and to further international solidarity, the IFTU from the outset was beset by difficulties. Within a year the First World War split the fledgling organisation, underlining national interests and creating resentment between some of the most powerful union interests. Although these differences were patched up after the end of hostilities, the Revolution in Russia and rise of Soviet Communism, with own aspirations to leadership of international labour, soon created new tensions within the IFTU.

Although no formal IFTU archive survives, Dr Van Goethem has drawn on a wealth of sources in France, Germany, Britain, North America and Scandinavia to reconstruct a convincing and lively account of the IFTU. Beginning with a chronological account of the IFTU, the book then provides thematic discussions regarding key themes, including the challenges offered by rival Soviet organisations, social reform programmes, the role of women, the American Federation of Labor, anti-fascist activities, the work of the IFTU during the Second World War and the co-operation of international trade unions with Allied secret service and propaganda organisations.

Despite the enduring appeal of internationalism to the trade union movement, the achievements of the IFTU were at best limited, and in 1945 it was dissolved, to be replaced by the World Federation of Trade Unions. Yet as this study makes clear these failures tell only one part of a much larger story. The history of the IFTU is intrinsically bound up with the history of the inter-war period, and the study of the former reveals a great deal about the latter.

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