

REVIEW

Whither the Future of the International Labour Organization?

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Maupain, Francis (2013) *The Future of the International Labour Organization in the Global Economy*, Oxford: Hart Publishing Ltd, ISBN 978-1-84946-502-1, 300 pages.

Researchers and practitioners have become accustomed to appeals for systemic reform of the UN as a means to rebalance and better address the political realities of the twenty-first century. As the oldest body in the UN system, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the prototypical case for deeper analysis into the viability of such grand-scale institutional reform. The ILO was one of the first intergovernmental organizations to set standards for relations between states and citizens. Now, with its centenary approaching in 2019, the ILO is faced with the need to modernize as a means to credibly respond to the challenges of globalization. Francis Maupain's reflections, meticulously and eloquently put forward in this English version of his book first published in French, *L'OIT À L'Épreuve de la Mondialisation Financière: Peut-On Réguler Sans Contraindre?*, serve to stimulate debate about the future course of the organization and its role in global economic and social governance. The edition is a welcome complement to a 2011 monograph by Jean-Michel Servais and an institutional primer of the same year by Hughes and Haworth, *The International Labour Organisation (ILO): Coming in From the Cold*. The value of Maupain's contribution lies in his insider's perspective into the complexities of ILO reform, teamed with his legal perspective on multilateral rules and coherence as well as on labour rights and standards. Writing from the vantage of a fellow with the International Institute of Labour Studies—an autonomous facility of the ILO, and following an illustrious career with the organization, Maupain weighs the ILO's credibility for purposeful action given the realities of the financialized global economy. His book, therefore, is not just directed at legal scholars but would be of interest to researchers and practitioners of international organization, sociology, and political economy as well. Its accessible style renders it at once a legal reference, social commentary, and marketing case study.

The core issue Maupain examines is whether the ILO has the institutional capacity to fulfil its mandate in the twenty-first century. Though critics are quick to dismiss the organization's lack of coercive power, Maupain reasons that strengthening the ILO's persuasive capabilities is not good enough for institutional reinvention. Rather, the organization needs, first and foremost, the capacity to act effectively. After discussing the history of the ILO and the challenges of the multilateral system, Maupain establishes two requirements the organization must meet to achieve a more equal footing with its sister organizations in global economic governance (such as the WTO, the OECD, and the Bretton Woods institutions): 1) a high degree of autonomy from political and technical interference; and 2) a critical mass of resources with new teams of researchers or a better sourcing of current researchers, so that its social policy models are not subordinated to economic concerns. The author argues this would help to foster an "ILO 'epistemic community' capable of influencing common thinking on social and economic policy" (121).

With such a strengthened institutional capacity, the ILO would more effectively ensure

the universal diffusion of fundamental human rights and redeploy its normative tools to promote social progress. Yet, Maupain claims the ILO should not lose sight of the tripartite constituency of its governing body, “which gives gravitas and clout to the organization’s presence and advice” (248). In the end, it is tripartism that can help the ILO rebuild a common vision for the future—one shared by workers, employers, and government.

The discussion then focuses a great deal on the institutional mandates and work of other universal economic organizations, including the WTO and the IMF, in order to show that the ILO can rely upon technical cooperation with its sister organizations to pursue its goal of social progress. Chapter eight, in particular, links the work of the ILO with that of the WTO, showing how fundamental human rights at work may be promoted multilaterally through basic trade rules, though sovereignty makes it difficult to introduce social clauses into the trade regime. Maupain proposes a solution resembling corporate social responsibility, with the ILO overseeing an international labeling system for production methods, empowering citizens to exercise their social preferences based upon informed choice. Countries of origin would supply the labels for goods and services produced within their borders. The expectation is that consumers would naturally bond together across countries in a form of transnational solidarity, given that citizens are, in most cases, workers, former workers, or employers.

The poignant commentary Maupain intersperses throughout the chapters is a real strength of the book, further drawing attention to the ILO’s role in normative justice. However, while the book is thorough in most regards, it does omit one important aspect of the ILO: its administrative tribunal. Perhaps this is due to the fact that discussion of the tribunal would not fit easily within the scope of the book; nevertheless, one could expect that analysis into the future of the ILO would make at least casual reference to the tribunal, which is mandated to hear the complaints not only of its own officials but also those of civil servants from sixty international organizations, including the WTO, Interpol, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and several UN bodies. If there is to be growing consolidation within the UN system, then the import of the tribunal can only grow, leading to an overall greater role for the ILO in global governance.

On the whole, the book functions as a discussion, but it also serves as an invaluable legal resource, given its Table of Cases and Table of International Materials. The contents are thoughtfully broken up into four parts and then meticulously subdivided to allow for ease of reference. The argument is amply supported with footnotes and an impressive bibliography. In fact, as the reader progresses through the book, he or she has the sense of advancing through the trajectory of the ILO in world affairs and knowing it is well documented for posterity.

Overall, the book is worth a read as much for Maupain’s provocative discussion as for its insight into an important but often overlooked institution of global economic governance.