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John Gilbert Winant

JOHN GILBERT WINANT'S tragic death on 3 November 1947 marked the end of a distinguished career of useful national and international service. His death is a serious loss to the International Labour Organisation whose objectives he promoted with conviction and devotion from the time of his earliest association with the Organisation to the end of his life.

Winant's association with the Organisation was a logical step in a career which had been marked by a sustained and imperative belief in economic and social justice. His concern with social questions began while he was still at Princeton University. Its immediate impetus came from the robust progressive campaigns of Theodore Roosevelt, whose declared aim was "to extend the genuine principles of democracy into our industrial and economic, as into our political, life". At that time, before the first World War, many of the battles for industrial democracy in the United States were being fought primarily in the political arena. Winant therefore entered politics in New Hampshire and in 1917, while still young in years, was elected to the State Assembly. He resigned to serve overseas in the Air Force during 1917-1918, and then, on returning to New Hampshire, was elected to the State Senate in 1921, to the Assembly in 1923, and to the Governorship in 1924. His re-election for three terms as Governor broke the one-term precedent which had ruled in New Hampshire for over one hundred years.

Throughout this period, his interest in the cause of social justice never flagged. As Governor he was instrumental in building up within the State a system of progressive social legislation. His lively interest in social policy extended, first, from the State to the New England region, where he was influential in promoting public concern with social problems, and then to the country as a whole in which, with the onset of the depression, social questions of a national character were becoming more and more acute. His concern with these problems made him the logical choice as Chairman of the National Textile Inquiry Board set up by the President of the United States in 1934 to find a fair solution to the bitter strike which had caused misery in so many workers' homes.

In the same year, 1934, the United States joined the International Labour Organisation. The deep interest which Winant took in the matters with which the I.L.O. was dealing, and his growing belief that national problems could not be dealt with in isolation from those of the world, induced him to accept the post of Assistant Director of the International Labour Office in April 1935.

In October of the same year, however, he was called back to the United States, at the request of President Roosevelt, to act as Chairman of the newly established Social Security Board. He worked tirelessly and with imagination to set in motion the vast administrative machine required to provide the elements of social security to millions of American workers and to overcome the complicated technical and political problems involved. In 1936, Winant came to Geneva as a United States Government delegate to the International Labour Conference. He served as Vice-President of the Conference. In his closing speech, he testified to his own ideals of public service when paying the following tribute to the President of the Conference and those who had helped to steer the I.L.O. through its early years:

The world rightly belongs to those who really care. A test of caring is time-spending, for time-spending is life-giving. In spite of the vicissitudes of life and the turbulent dislocations of post-war years, this group has been loyal to this Organisation, and has consistently had the faith to believe that social justice is necessary if we are to look forward to universal peace; and that we cannot hope for security without peace. They have been pioneers on the frontiers of civilisation. There is no higher statesmanship.

In the autumn of 1936, with characteristic integrity of purpose and deed, Winant resigned the Chairmanship of the Social Security Board in order to be free to defend before the American people the principles of social security which, he considered, had been unfairly attacked in the presidential campaign of that year. He then returned to Geneva as Assistant Director of the Office convinced that, through the International Labour Organisation, the social principles in which he believed could be given practical effect. In that post he took a special interest in the development of world programmes of social security; he broadened his understanding of other peoples and of their labour and social problems; and he learned to know more of the means of solving these problems through international as well as national action. He fulfilled his duties with industry and skill. He gradually made himself an integral part of the I.L.O.—a difficult task whose successful accomplishment testifies to Winant's powers of understanding and receptivity.

In 1939, Winant became Director of the International Labour Office. He accepted the post with understanding of the obligations it entailed, and also of the opportunities it offered, at that crucial period of world history. As he later said, he undertook the responsi-

bilities of Directorship because he believed that peace was the paramount issue before the peoples of the world, and that no peace could endure unless it had its roots in social justice.

Winant felt war to be near and yet he could scarcely bear to accept this as inevitable. His Director's Report to the 1939 Session of the International Labour Conference was a plea for recognition of the terrible human cost of world conflict: "War (he said) not only affords no solution to the human wants with which peoples are confronted but is the very negation of everything they seek." Yet the Report sounded a note of urgent warning of the need to preserve the principles which he cherished along with the great mass of the people of the world: "I would not say one word (he stated) which would weaken the determination of the Member countries to protect themselves against aggression and to preserve those democratic institutions which are the hope of mankind."

War broke out on 1 September 1939. The International Labour Organisation entered a new and a critical phase in its history. It fell to John Winant, as Director, to mobilise the resources of the Office to meet the new conditions, shifting its activities from the long-term emphases of peacetime to those bearing upon the emergency social problems of a world at war. He recognised that the I.L.O., as (in the words of Mr. Jouhaux, the French Workers' Member of the Governing Body) "the expression of a particular civilisation whose life and continuance were dependent on the result of the present struggle", had an urgent task to perform during the war as well as in the years to come. He bent his energies to ensuring that the Organisation was equipped to carry out this task.

In 1940, the sweep of the Nazi armies over Europe, combined with the entry of Italy into the war, effectively isolated the International Labour Office from its chief sources of democratic support. Transfer of the Office centre from Geneva became a physical and moral necessity. The heaviest responsibility of decision and of material arrangement lay with Winant who, with rare foresight and courage, organised the establishment of the new working centre in Montreal. "It was my clear duty", he said, in reporting on his stewardship of the Organisation during this period, "to avoid all danger that the International Labour Organisation, the repository of the traditions of a world-wide effort at tripartite international co-operation to promote social justice, should become the tool of political forces which would have attempted to use it as a mask for policies of domination rather than as a spearhead of social and economic freedom." Both the Governing Body and the Conference have since paid a rare tribute to Winant's services as Director during this period, declaring that these services had successfully preserved the life, spirit and freedom of action of the whole Organisation.

In 1941, Winant resigned with regret from the post of Director of the International Labour Office in order to accept appointment as American Ambassador to the Court of St. James. "In the situation which confronts us today", he wrote to the Chairman of the Governing Body (then Mr. Carter Goodrich, United States), "the future of the Organisation is involved in the maintenance of the free nations. The achievement of the objectives of the Organisation depends upon the success of these nations in preserving their institutions and their way of life." For these reasons, Winant felt that his duty lay in accepting the Ambassadorship, but he added: "My confidence in the Organisation and its ability to serve mankind has been deepened in this critical period. I hope that I may continue to be useful to it."

His distinguished record as Ambassador over the four war years speaks for itself. He met the many large and small problems of Embassy life with painstaking care, working at a pace which seriously undermined his health. His main concern was to promote the friendly understanding between the peoples of these two great nations which he considered indispensable to the winning of the war and the building of a stable peace.

Winant never lost his deep interest in the International Labour Organisation. He believed that his work with it had been one of the most broadening and satisfying parts of his life. He kept in close touch with its activities throughout the war, and sought to extend the application of its standards of social policy in various ways. Often, the few spare moments which he allowed himself from his Embassy tasks were spent in work related to the I.L.O. He accepted, for example, an invitation from Mr. Bevin, then Minister of Labour and National Service, to act as Chairman of the non-profit-making Merchant Navy Club Company, set up by the Ministry of Labour and National Service to administer Merchant Navy clubs in London, Glasgow and Cardiff, with funds contributed by members of the American trade unions. Winant took a great interest in the work of these clubs. He saw in them a practical implementation of one of the provisions of the I.L.O. Recommendation on Seamen's Welfare in Ports. He renewed the links with the trade union movement which he had forged during his I.L.O. days. It is in keeping with his social philosophy and with his character that, of all the honours received by him as Ambassador, the one which pleased him most was the Gold Badge presented to him by the Trades Union Congress in 1945, and that, of the many occasions on which he was asked to speak in Great Britain, the one which he remembered with most pleasure was his talk to and with the Durham miners in 1942.

Like Roosevelt, Winant kept alive throughout the war the thought of a peace based on "social justice for all peoples everywhere". After resigning from the post of Ambassador on the conclu-

sion of hostilities, and following the death of Roosevelt, he was appointed to serve as United States representative on the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. He hoped in this way to have an opportunity to continue to work towards a just peace which would have its roots in the solution of economic and social problems through the United Nations and the specialised agencies—in particular, the I.L.O.

Winant left this post in 1946 in order to devote his energies to what he considered a more urgent task—the writing of a book, based on his Embassy experience, which would help to strengthen the understanding of the American people of the peoples of other lands, especially the people of Great Britain. In this book, *Letter from Grosvenor Square* (the first volume of which has been published), he said: One of the deeper reasons for wanting to write is the growing disillusionment of today, which not only dims and obscures the present, but is trying to cloud the past. It has seemed to me that many people do not understand the urgency of these days." He felt it his duty to clarify the past and to awaken, so far as he could, the international social conscience of his countrymen. He died on concluding the second volume reviewing his Ambassadorship.

It is difficult to convey the heavy loss which Winant's death represents for the I.L.O. It is the less easy because of the strong ties of friendship which bound him to so many of the delegates to the Conference, the members of the Governing Body, and the staff of the Office. For those who worked with him in the I.L.O., it is some satisfaction to know that, through the Organisation, they can help to ensure that his beliefs are not betrayed by events but are carried forward into the future. His beliefs were simple and fundamental. Throughout his career he believed strongly in a few things: that democracy was the way of mankind, that democracy was the true inheritance and continuing responsibility of the common people, and that it was a privilege to enlist in their ranks as a public servant. He believed that political democracy must be broadened to include economic stability and social security. In his report to the I.L.O., written when he resigned from the Directorship in 1941, he stated:

The waste of resources which has been effectively eliminated in time of war must not be allowed to return once peace has come... No opportunity to enlarge the social content of democracy must be lost. No opportunity to strengthen the fundamental social and civil rights of the great majority of citizens must be neglected. No opportunity to wipe out the want and the hopelessness of the pre-war period must be ignored. This is not only prudent national defence, it is the tradition of democratic freedom. Let us work together to make it the practice of freedom in all walks of life and in all fields of work.

Winant may have died discouraged; but he had not lost his conviction that "in the years to come, social justice must exist for all peoples everywhere". He had not lost the faith for which he had

fought, the faith "that the future lies with the cause of social justice, that the cause of democracy is the cause of social justice". He believed that the I.L.O. has an essential part to play in building the foundations for a peace based on the satisfaction of human wants. In fact, only two weeks before his death, he had a long talk with the Director-General of the Office, Edward Phelan, and displayed a keen continued interest in the work of the I.L.O. and in its future. In his resignation report in 1941, he wrote :

I have known the strength of the I.L.O., the great strength of democracy, and its weakness, the human weakness of democracy. I move into my new field of service with undiminished confidence in the ability of the Organisation to continue to serve mankind in this critical period... I leave the International Labour Organisation in your hands—those of the Governments, the employers and the workers of the free democratic countries of the world. It is your instrument for orderly social change. As you use it, it will become strong. It lives in the movement of your opinion and in your faith. It is armed with your courage and your conviction. With God's will and just cause, you will not fail.

On the day after Winant's death, the Joint Second and Third Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations paid a special tribute to his record of international service. The Director-General of the International Labour Office, in associating the I.L.O. with this tribute, said :

This is not the moment, perhaps, to attempt to evaluate the services which Mr. Winant has rendered to the great international cause for which the United Nations stands. But I had the privilege of knowing him intimately and of working with him for more than ten years, and perhaps I can therefore say with some authority two things : first of all, he had in a unique degree the quality of inspiring in those who worked with him not only confidence but a close personal affection. Every member of the staff of the International Labour Office who, like myself, worked under his direction, will feel that his passing is a great and an intimate personal loss. And secondly, I can say that no man of this generation had a deeper and a more passionate conviction that in this world the pursuit of social justice, the pursuit of the ideals for which the I.L.O. stands, the pursuit of every international measure which could lead to a higher standard of living, a greater degree of comfort and security and prosperity for the common people of this world, nobody had, as I say, a deeper and a more passionate conviction that that international effort was worth while. Nobody saw more clearly than he did that the pursuit of that international effort was something going far beyond, far wider and deeper than the political divisions which might distract the world at any particular time, and in giving of his best, in giving of his great leadership to the International Labour Organisation, he was therefore convinced that he was working for and contributing to the very foundations of international peace.