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**International Labour Standards.  
The formation and development of an  
international regime.**

**New Zealand and the International Labour Organisation 1919-  
1945**

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Thesis submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
Department of Management and Employment Relations, University of Auckland, 1998.

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# Introduction

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## Rationale and structure of the thesis

### The chronological scope of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the development of the international labour standards regime and the role of New Zealand in the development of this regime. To achieve this aim, it first sets out to determine what we mean by a regime, second it examines the development of relations between the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and New Zealand in the context of regime development from 1919 to 1945. The substantive analysis is confined to the period from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second World War. This is done for the following reasons. First, the period saw the introduction of an international labour standards regime and constituted a critical period in regime formation and development. Second, it marks a period when New Zealand developed from a reluctant and passive regime member to a proactive advocate of the principles and norms of regime compliance. Third, the international order that prevailed from 1945 onward is of such significant difference from that which prevailed during the inter-war period that it merits a sustained examination in its own right and as such remains outside the scope of this thesis.

## 7. Conclusions

### II

This thesis demonstrates that three substantive policies - a policy of autonomy; a policy of presence; and a policy of relevance - cultivated and employed by the ILO made a significant contribution towards the development and consolidation of the international labour standards regime. In the context of these three policies it explores the role of New Zealand's in this process. In particular, it identifies and examines linkages between domestic and international interests and their influence on regime development. Furthermore it shows how and why the international labour standards regime distanced itself from the League of Nations.

This thesis seeks to achieve these aims for three reasons. First, no previous work has attempted to conduct a detailed examination of relations between the ILO and New Zealand. Second, no previous work has examined the formation and development of the international labour standards regime from the perspective of international organisation/state relations. Third, it seeks contribute to a research programme<sup>1</sup> that views international co-operation as not only a product of inter-state relations but of the interaction between domestic and international interests.

#### **Methodological preliminaries**

The method of enquiry employed in this thesis combines the following. First, our conceptual framework is the analysis of international regimes. An international regime is defined as 'implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor's expectations

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Haggard and Beth Simmons. 1987, Theories of international regimes. *International Organisation*, 41, 3, Summer, pp. 513-517.

## 7. Conclusions

### III

converge in a given area of international relations'.<sup>2</sup> One of the main tasks of regime analysis is to explain the determinants of regime formation and its persistence or demise. The success or failure of regime-building can be partially explained by the extent to which a regime provides information, monitoring capabilities and focal points for its members. In this respect, regime creation and maintenance can be a function of the distribution of power and interests among its members. It follows as regimes shift from their initial formation to their development, domestic factors become critical considerations. To reiterate a point made earlier, one of the objectives of the thesis is to identify and examine linkages between domestic and international interests and their influence on regime development.

Second, the mode of analysis is historical narrative in form. Here, the thesis subscribes to Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie<sup>3</sup> notion that understanding how people think about institutional norms and rules, and the discourse they engage in, is as important in evaluating the significance of these norms as measuring the behaviour that changes in response to their invocation. Third, the method of analysis is by way of a critical examination of key primary sources identified during a comprehensive examination of archives housed in the International Labour Office, Geneva; the New Zealand National Archives, Wellington; the William Turnbull Library, Wellington; and the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Krasner. 1982, Structural causes and regime consequences: regimes as intervening variables, in *International Organisation*, 36, 2, Spring, p 186.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie. 1986, International Organisation: A State of the Art on an Art of the State. *International Organisation*, 40, p 765.

## 7. Conclusions

### IV

#### **The organisation of this thesis**

In seeking to achieve the aim it has set itself this thesis is organised in the following manner. Chapter One examines the literature on international organisations and regimes and determines how this literature can aid our understanding of ILO-New Zealand relations between 1919 and 1945. In this regard, assessment is made of the extent to which the key literature addresses linkages between domestic and international interests, how regimes influence national policy choices, and what questions arise as a result.

Chapter Two examines the political and institutional roots of international organisations in order to determine the extent to which these roots influenced the establishment of the ILO. Having established in Chapter One that international organisations are not fully autonomous entities but subject to environmental forces that can affect organisational decisions, Chapter Two examines why and how these forces change and interact through time and how they influenced the establishment of the ILO and the international labour standards regime.

This leads into the purpose of Chapter Three. If the international labour standards regime was to become a reality then a self-consciously dynamic process of organisational activity had to be implemented by the Executive of the ILO. The purpose of Chapter Three then, is to examine how this dynamism articulated itself with regard to relations with New Zealand. In this respect, three substantive policies are identified as governing ILO activities in its early years and laying the foundation for regime development and survival. Chapter Three examines the first substantive policy, the Policy of Autonomy.

## 7. Conclusions

### V

Chapter Four examines the second of these substantive policies - the Policy of Presence. The main task of this policy was to convince opinion in member states such as New Zealand, that national labour standards had an international dimension to them – one which linked national interests with international concerns. Chapter Four notes how the decisions and activities of the ILO Directors loomed large in influencing institutional and regime development.

This leads to Chapter Five's analysis of the leadership and policies of the ILO Directors. This follows from Robert Cox's<sup>4</sup> argument noted in Chapter One that since 1919 the ILO has survived to a significant extent on the activities and initiatives of its Executive leaders. Thus, Chapter Five develops a deeper, more comprehensive, understanding of the link between domestic and international interests in regime development, by undertaking a fuller examination of this Executive role.

Following from this undertaking, the purpose of Chapter Six is to examine how specific policies introduced by the ILO's executive leadership had significant implications for the international labour standards regime in the context of post-war reconstruction. To the ILO's Acting Director Edward Phelan political support for the Organisation remained ambiguous and uncertain. Without this support becoming more substantive there seemed little hope that the international labour standards regime would retain the necessary unity of purpose to survive. Chapter Six examines efforts to establish the ILO's future role in the international system, through garnering

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Cox. 1973, *ILO: Limited Monarchy* in, Cox, R. and Jacobson, H. (eds). 1973, *The Anatomy of Influence. Decision Making in International Organisation*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

## 7. Conclusions

### VI

support for its activities at the national level, and through the construction of a definitive and constitutionally binding declaration of its role in the post-war world.

Chapter Seven brings the thesis to a close. It identifies and reflects on the main conclusions of the thesis, and examines the extent to which the questions identified in Chapter One have been addressed, and the aim of the thesis achieved.