

Lyndall Urwick at the International Management Institute, Geneva, 1928-1934: Right Job, Wrong Man?

Abstract

The International Management Institute, based in Geneva, was established in 1927 with joint funding from the League of Nations, through the International Labour Organisation, and two American foundations, the Twentieth Century Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation. The first director, Paul Devinat, and deputy director, Percy Brown, resigned their positions in May 1928, due to major disagreements over the direction that the IMI should follow. Major figures of the Twentieth Century Fund took the lead in searching for a new director and, in November 1928, the British management practitioner and thinker, Lyndall Fownes Urwick, was invited to take up the post. Urwick subsequently held the post of Director of the International Management Institute until it was wound up, in the early days of 1934, when the Twentieth Century Fund withdrew its financial support.

This paper examines the role of Urwick in the ultimate demise of the Institute and, in particular, assesses, from an American perspective, whether or not he was, in fact, the right man for the job. Utilising secondary information and primary materials contained in the Urwick archive of the Henley Management School and the Harry Ward Papers held at the British Library of Political and Economic Science, this paper examines the background to Urwick's taking over the position of Director at the International Management Institute, considers the activities of the Institute whilst Urwick resided in Geneva and, ultimately, tries to assess the success or otherwise of Urwick's appointment.

Introduction

In November 1928, Lyndall Fownes Urwick (1891-1983) took over as the second Director of the International Management Institute (IMI) in Geneva, a position he was to hold until the organisation closed in the early days of 1934 following the withdrawal of financial support by the American foundation, the Twentieth Century Fund (TCF).

Urwick's appointment was determined, in the main, by the views of key players in the TCF, especially its founder, Edward A. Filene, and Henry S. Dennison, who was not only a trustee of the TCF but also vice-chairman of the IMI. It is one of the contentions of this paper that Urwick's appointment reflected his success in establishing Management Research Groups (MRGs) in Britain from 1926 through to 1928. By appointing Urwick, Filene and Dennison thought that they were getting somebody who could fulfil their key vision, namely that the IMI would focus its attention on spreading the ideas and practices of scientific management across Europe through the establishment of management research groups and facilitating their effective and continuing operation. While some fifty such groups had been established across Europe by the end of 1932 (Wregge *et al.*, 1987, p. 261), it is clear that many commentators in the early 1930s considered that the IMI often failed to support European businesses in an appropriate manner.

There are several possible explanations for such a failure, not least the political and financial problems which beset the IMI throughout its life (see, for example, Wregge *et al.*, 1987; Nyland, 2001). However, we will argue in this paper that a key factor in the eventual demise of the IMI was the appointment of Urwick as the institute's Director. For the Americans, the appointment of Urwick turned out to be something of a two-edged sword. His experience in establishing the MRGs in Britain was clearly a major plus point from the American perspective, but there were two other key aspects to Urwick which the Americans failed to recognise or, alternatively, chose to ignore. Firstly, there was Urwick's conception of scientific management. This accorded much more closely with the broader, social perspective prevalent in Europe and enshrined within 'rationalisation' than with the narrower, technical American viewpoint. In this respect, Urwick was closer to the views of Albert Thomas, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the IMI's first Director, Paul Devinat. How aware the Americans were of his views is unclear but, given Urwick's previous writings on the subject, it seems unlikely that they could have been totally unaware of them before his appointment. Perhaps they chose to ignore his leanings, being blinded by his success with the MRGs in Britain, or believed that they could influence him appropriately. It will be argued, however, that the nature of Urwick's

views had a significant influence on the manner in which the IMI developed after November 1928.

In addition to Urwick's views, a second aspect which the Americans failed to take into account concerns Urwick's own motivations for going to Geneva. It will be argued that his desire for self-aggrandisement likewise diluted the impact of the IMI in those areas especially coveted by its American backers. It will be argued that it was this failure to focus its operations in what were considered by the Americans to be the right areas that was a key factor in the decision by the TCF to withdraw its support for the IMI at the end of 1933. It is therefore argued that, in this sense, Urwick's appointment as Director subsequently played a significant role in the ultimate demise of the IMI: although he was an American choice, from the American perspective, he ultimately turned out to be the wrong man for the job!

The IMI's backers and their differing conceptualisations of scientific management

The IMI came into being in 1927 as a result of decisions reached by the League of Nations (through the ILO) and two American foundations, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Twentieth Century Fund, to jointly fund its establishment. The idea for such an organisation to help disseminate the ideas of scientific management amongst businessmen and others in Europe had developed in the aftermath of the First World War. However, the two main parties to the agreement to fund the IMI came at the issue from essentially opposite viewpoints which led to fundamental disagreements over policy and activities that remained a source of tension throughout the duration of the IMI's existence. Fundamental to this was differing conceptions of scientific management: in America, Taylorism/scientific management was generally conceived as being a narrower concept than was the case in Europe where, under the guise of rationalisation, it took on broader social connotations (Nelson, 1992). However, as Nyland (2001) has pointed out, this is perhaps something of an over-simplification since, during the interwar years, the Taylor Society in the US increasingly embraced a broader conceptualisation.

On the American side, the key financial backer of the IMI was the TCF (see Table 1). Under the title of the Co-operative League of Boston, the TCF had been founded in 1919 by the American Jewish businessman, Edward A. Filene (1860-1937), a member of the peace movement and backer of the formation of the League of Nations. Having, together with his brother, Albert Lincoln Filene, made a fortune from the retail business started by his father, Edward determined to use some of it to enhance enlightened business attitudes. A progressive thinker, a social reformer and a believer in industrial democracy, together with his brother, Edward had established the Filene Cooperative Association, probably the first company union in America. Edward also played a pivotal role in the passing of America's first Workmen's Compensation Law in 1911, and favoured paying workers a 'buying' wage rather than a marginal 'living' wage. In 1904, two years after he had introduced the concept of the 'bargain basement' into the company's stores, Edward propounded, without much success, 'an underconsumptionist rationale for high wage policies which, a decade later, became identified with ... Henry Ford' (McQuaid, 1976, p. 82).

Although the Filene brothers were 'social reformers who believed that capitalism had to be more humane and advance the welfare of the individual or it would face radical reform... Edward maintained that "his social and economic views represented enlightened self-interest of a businessman rather than altruism" (*Encyclopedia Judaica*)' (Stillman, 2004). In an attempt to help improve management practices in the retail industry, in 1916 Filene established the Retail Research Association, an international association devoted to research into all areas of retail practice. The members of this organisation 'regularly travelled around the world visiting member stores in their efforts to spread innovations in management' (Jeacle, 2004, p. 1167). Another Boston businessman, the manufacturer Henry S. Dennison, was also interested in improving management practices. A member of the Taylor Society from May 1917, in March 1922, Dennison formed the Manufacturers' Research Association of Boston (MRA) (Vollmers, 1999, p. 132), 'a group of twelve manufacturers who met periodically to exchange information about management methods and visit each other's factories' (Urwick Archive, Henley – 8/2/2, f. 62). It was as a result of discussions between Filene and Dennison, who became a trustee of the TCF from 1926 (Vollmers, 1999, pp. 130, 132),

which led to the plans to develop a central management institute in Europe to promote scientific management.

While businessmen such as Filene and Dennison might have embraced aspects of social reform and industrial democracy, it is quite clear that during the 1920s and early 1930s their views reflected a narrow view of scientific management, with its emphasis on shopfloor practices and methods to eliminate inefficiency. While some members of the Taylor Society in the USA were beginning to adopt a wider viewpoint of scientific management, even this fell far short of the much broader European conceptualisation being espoused by key members of the IMI's other major financial backer, the League of Nations. In 1919, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) had been founded as an agency of the League of Nations. It was established as a tripartite organisation of workers, employers and governments, in a manner which allowed the first two groups to voice concerns and issues to the last group. The ILO had a permanent secretariat, the International Labour Office (Bureau International du Travail, or BIT), with offices in Geneva. The Frenchman, Albert Thomas (1878-1932), was chosen to be the first Director of the BIT which was separated into three divisions: 'a diplomatic division that prepared, organized and administered the general conferences; a political division that maintained contact with organizations of workers and employers; and a research division that documented, initiated, or executed inquiries (Guérin, 1996, pp. 28-29)' (Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 219).

With its tripartite structure, the ILO was concerned with broad social issues rather than narrow managerial ones as revealed in the discussions which took place at the 1927 World Economic Congress, organised by the League of Nations and the ILO.

The final declaration of the conference called for the rapid diffusion of scientific management but insisted that Taylor's enterprise focus must be perceived as but one part of a wider movement that would enable humanity to win control of economic life. This movement the Conference termed "rationalisation"....

(Nyland, 2001, p.13)

The declaration, partly inspired by staff of the BIT and the IMI, stated that:

The Conference considers that one of the principle means of increasing output, improving conditions of labour and reducing costs of production is to be found in the rational organisation of production and distribution ... such rationalization Must be applied with the care which is necessary in order, while at the same time continuing the process of rationalization, not to injure the legitimate interests of the workers; and suitable measures should be provided for cases where during the first stage of its realization it may result in loss of employment or more arduous work.

(IMI Jahresberichte, 1929, p. B. 1, quoted in Walter-Busch, 2006, p.222)

This declaration clearly reveals the differing standpoints of the ILO and the leading members of the TCF. Thomas was delighted by the declaration, and 'called upon the IMI to develop a program that encompassed both technical and social issues and that included "the part to be played by labour organisations in the field of rationalisation and the possibility of raising wages in consequence of rationalisation" (Nyland, 2001, p.13). At the same time, however, the declaration caused 'acute distress to Filene, Dennison and Brown' since it was considered that it would 'alienate employers' (Nyland, 2001, p. 14). They were also dismayed by similar developments in the views of the Taylor Society, leading to them becoming increasingly distanced from that organisation.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the ILO continued to push for the inclusion of the social emphasis within scientific management. Thomas, for example, in the early 1930s recognised that 'scientific management could not any longer be understood merely as a set of labour-saving techniques as, for example, time and motion studies, premium wages, psychological work studies, etc., or as principles of functionalizing organizations. Increasingly it had to be understood as the science and art of socioeconomic planning of whole industries and economies' (Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 223).

The formation of the IMI and the appointment of its first Director

From as early as 1920, Thomas had formulated plans to establish a section within the BIT to carry out studies of scientific management in the narrow, technical sense of the term. In pursuit of this plan he travelled across the Atlantic for the first time between 12 December 1922 and 19 January 1923, visiting the US, Canada and Cuba. On this trip he was accompanied by Paul Devinat, 'the official responsible for BIT's relations with employers' (Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 220) and, during his travels he met Edward Filene in Boston between 3 and 5 January 1923 (Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 219). Nothing positive came out of this early meeting, but the ground had been prepared for a future possible collaboration.

From the American perspective, the idea for a European organisation to provide a 'mechanism for the interchange of management knowledge' (Wregge *et al.*, 1987, p. 249) arose from discussions, in 1924, between Filene and Dennison. In April 1925, when Thomas learned that Filene, who was chief financier of the TCF, wished to have the Fund endow a body that would promote the international diffusion of a high wage/mass production approach, he dispatched Devinat to the USA with instructions to 'inquire on the present situation of scientific management policies in the States'. Part of Devinat's task was to convince Filene and other prominent trustees of the TCF that the ILO was the body best able to internationalise progressive management thought (Nyland, 2001, p. 9; Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 220).

During 1926, plans to float an international centre for the study and diffusion of the ideas surrounding scientific management, rationalisation and the balancing of the economic interests of production and consumption, were firmed up, though initial attempts to secure funding from the TCF were frustrated by the prevarication of Filene who 'doubted that an ILO management centre would be supported by business' (Nyland, 2001, p. 11). However, following the agreement of John D. Rockefeller's Industrial Relations Counsellors to agree to the provision of seedcorn funding for the proposed body, Filene capitulated.

The IMI thus came into being in Geneva in early 1927 with funds being provided by the TCF, the Rockefeller Foundation and the ILO (see Table 1). It was to 'be governed

jointly by the TCF, the ILO and independent management scientists' (Nyland, 2001, p. 10) and to be entrusted with collecting and disseminating scientific management knowledge (Devinat, 1927, p. 1). The IMI's first Director, largely as a result of Thomas's insistence was to be Devinat, with the American engineer, Percy Brown, proposed by Filene and Dennison, as Assistant Director. The selection of the Director and Assistant Director clearly reflected the IMI's origins and the nature of its financial backing.

Despite the financial backing from the Americans, the IMI's financial position was a far from sound one. The Rockefeller Foundation's funding was to be for a limited period since, like the TCF, they envisaged that the IMI should ultimately become self-financing. Devinat's policy in this respect was to try to 'win governments as "contributing members" paying at least 50,000 Swiss Francs annually' while Brown 'favored the practice of selling firms tangible consulting services' (Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 222, citing Bloemen, 1996, pp. 124-125). In the view of Walter-Busch (2006, p. 222), neither strategy was successful and these conflicting views about the IMI's strategy and tactics hampered teamwork between Devinat and Brown. The hostility engendered within the IMI because of the different approaches became so intense that, on 18 May 1928, Brown resigned and, a week later, Devinat followed him. According to Nyland (2001, p. 14) this was in order that the IMI could survive. The search began for a new Director.

The appointment of Lyndall Fownes Urwick as second Director of the IMI

As Walter-Busch has pointed out, since Devinat's appointment had proved unsuccessful, Thomas had no desire to try to dominate the selection of the IMI's second Director. More significantly, the appointee had to be someone acceptable to the TCF, and the man ultimately chosen was the Englishman, Lyndall Fownes Urwick. He was initially approached by Professor Joseph Willits, Dean of the Wharton School in Pennsylvania, and a trustee of the TCF, who was on a year's sabbatical in Europe. Following a subsequent interview with Filene in Vienna, Urwick was offered the position of Director of the IMI on 7 September 1928. He accepted, taking up his new post as of 7 November 1928.

The precise reasons behind the choice of Urwick as Director of the IMI are not documented, but Roper (2001, p. 186) has suggested that it had much to do with Urwick's connections with the American human relations theorist, Mary Parker Follett, and the British businessman, (Benjamin) Seebohm Rowntree. Wregge *et al.* (1987, p. 252), on the other hand, have suggested that it probably had much to do with Urwick's success in establishing seven MRGs in Britain during the period 1926-1928 and the publication, in 1927, of a small, 16-page booklet entitled, *Management Research Groups: What They Are and How They Work*. The links between Urwick, Rowntree and the MRGs in Britain clearly make both suggestions plausible, though the emphasis placed by Wregge *et al.* is more appealing, given the original American conceptualisation of the role of the IMI and the criticisms of Devinat's failure to establish MRGs while Director.

Urwick and the issue of Management Research Groups

Urwick made his first public pronouncement on the subject of management in April 1921, delivering a lecture entitled 'Management as a Science' at one of Seebohm Rowntree's Management Conferences.¹ The following Spring, Urwick was invited to join the staff of Rowntree Co. Ltd. in York where he worked initially in the Coordination Office as Personnel Secretary (Company organisation chart for 1922, reproduced in Fitzgerald, 1995, pp. 244-245). The Coordination Office was run by Oliver Sheldon who, as organising secretary, effectively acted 'as personal assistant to the company's chairman, Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree' (Thomas, 198?, p. 117). Between 1924 and 1926, Urwick worked in sales as deputy to the Director of Distribution but was not especially enamoured with this area of work and he subsequently took on the role of organising secretary previously carried out by Sheldon:

¹ The Rowntree Management Conferences for works executives and foremen began life at York but in 1924 moved to Oxford where they were held bi-annually.

This comprised control of the organisation office, the work of the office co-ordination committee, and the personnel management of all executive, technical and clerical employees. (Urwick Archives, Henley – 8/2/2, f. 39.)

In 1926, Seebohm Rowntree visited the USA, staying for a while with Henry S. Dennison, the founder of the MRA. Rowntree was so enamoured with the MRA concept that, on returning to Britain, he convened a dinner of senior businessmen at the Euston Hotel, London on Tuesday, 1 June 1926 to discuss the possibility of establishing a similar organisation in Britain. At this dinner it was agreed to proceed with the formation of an ‘Industrial Group’ consisting of large-sized firms, the aim of which would be to exchange and discuss management ideas and practices (BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/27/7, 1st Annual Report of the Management Research Groups, f.1). Urwick was chosen to explore the possibility further and, during the second half of 1926, since his work as organising secretary at York only occupied him there for three days a week, he spent the other half of his time working on this project from his new home in London.

Following the dinner at the Euston Hotel, representatives of a number of small firms expressed interest in establishing a similar grouping and, ultimately, Urwick was able to inform Seebohm Rowntree that three groups were to be established at the beginning of 1927. The ‘Industrial Group’ held its first official meeting on Wednesday, 2 February 1927 at the Euston Hotel, but the other two groups were quicker off the mark:

At a dinner-meeting held on Wednesday, November 10th, 1926, it was decided to form a second group of firms employing up to 500 people. The first official meeting took place at the factory of the Shredded Wheat Co. Ltd. on Thursday, January 13th, 1927. At a further dinner, held on Thursday, November 18th, 1926, a third group, consisting of firms employing between 500 and 2,000 people, was established. The first official meeting took place at the factory of the British Xylonite Co. Ltd. on Friday, January 21st 1927. This Group was subsequently numbered ‘Industrial Group 2’, while the group of smaller firms was numbered ‘Industrial Group 3’.

During the course of the year [1927] – largely at the initiative of Mrs. E.M. Wood – a further meeting was held on June 26th 1927, at which a fourth group – again of smaller firms – was created. The first official meeting took place at the factory of the Blue Bird Laundry Company Ltd., London, on Wednesday, November 9th, 1927.

(BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/27/7, f.1)

The purpose of the MRGs in Britain was noted as being ‘to provide a vehicle for the exchange of ideas, the collating of information, and the discussion of problems common to member companies – in order to promote more efficient management’ (BLPES, Catalogue/Guide to the Collection, Harry Ward Papers, Appendix 1, pp. 1-2). In a booklet published subsequently by the MRGs, the objects were listed as follows:

- (1) The confidential exchange of experience and ideas on every type of management problem between member firms.
- (2) The promotion of efficiency in management through the co-operative study of management problems.

(MRGs (no date), pp.1-2)

Given this emphasis on management problems, it is perhaps not too surprising that some members of the various groups felt that their original label, ‘Industrial Groups’, did not adequately reflect their nature. Hence it was decided, at a meeting held on 23 June 1927, to change the title of the movement to Management Research Groups (MRGs) (BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/27/7, f.1).

Each group was ‘entirely independent and autonomous’ (BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/27/7, f.2). Group No. 1 initially comprised 11 member firms, No. 2 10 firms, and No. 3 fifteen firms. Group No. 4, which only came into being in the last quarter of 1927, initially comprised 10 members. By the end of 1927, Urwick, who acted as

Honorary Secretary to the MRGs² (and received a small sum of money for such activities from one of the trust funds that had been established by Seebohm Rowntree's father, Joseph), had been responsible for the establishment of four groups, comprising representatives from nearly fifty firms. However, the vast majority of these firms were located in London or its surrounding area. Thus, during 1927 preliminary steps were taken to establish groups based in the English regions, a meeting with this idea in mind being held in York on 17 January 1928 for firms in the north-east of England. During early 1928 it was decided that the membership of Group No.3 would split at the end of March 1928 and form the basis for three separate groups, one in the Liverpool-Manchester area (Group 6), one in the Midlands (Group 3A) and one in London (Group 3) (BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/27/7, ff.5-6; W/3/28/7, f.1). By the end of 1928 the number of groups had expanded to seven with the addition of Group No. 5 in the north-eastern area (BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/28/7, f.1).

Urwick at the IMI

Urwick took over the reins as Director of the IMI in November 1928, and remained at the institution's head until it was wound up in the early days of January 1934 following the decision of the TCF to withdraw its support as of 31 December 1933. On taking up his post, it is unclear if Urwick was fully aware of, or prepared for, the challenges he would face, especially in the financial and political spheres. On the political front, in addition to conducting its more routine activities, e.g. securing and distributing information, producing its *Bulletin*, acting as the secretariat to the International Committee for Scientific Management (Comité International d'Organisations Scientifique, or CIOS³), etc., the IMI under Urwick found itself having to complete the projects and studies into the effects of scientific management, largely for the ILO, originally instigated by his predecessor (Wregge *et al.*, 1987, pp. 252-253 – see Appendix 1 for a list of the IMI's

² Urwick resigned this position on taking up the post of Director of the IMI (BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/28/7, f.2).

³ CIOS had been established in 1927 and held triennial conferences (1924 (Prague), 1926, 1929, 1932, 1935 (London)).

accomplishments). On the financial front, Urwick's initial goal was to ensure continuing funding of the IMI, in particular, the securing of ongoing financing from the TCF. This required him to make progress on developing and nurturing MRGs throughout Europe. Indeed, the Americans had indicated that they would withdraw funding unless the IMI focused its attention on problems of immediate interest to business, leaving other issues of a more social nature to the ILO (Nyland, 2001, p. 14).

With Devinat's resignation being triggered, at least in part, by his failure to put much effort into attempting to establish MRGs⁴, and having been appointed ostensibly by the TCF, Urwick was expected to deliver the goods, and quickly. In April 1929, only six months into his tenure of the Directorship, Filene was urging Urwick to work harder in this area, since he had only managed to establish four MRGs (Wregge *et al.*, 1987, p. 254). Filene instructed Brown, who had returned to the US to become his personal assistant and advisor on the IMI, to assist Urwick in establishing additional MRGs, a task which Brown considered to be the IMI's 'most important function' (Report from Brown to Filene, 22 April 1929, quoted in Wregge *et al.*, 1987, p. 254). In early 1930, Brown urged Urwick to establish a Department Store Research Group, but Urwick considered this to be impossible since he simply did not have the necessary staff at his disposal (Wregge *et al.*, 1987, p. 255).

Urwick and the IMI were clearly hampered in their activities by a lack of finance. To try to overcome this problem, Urwick immediately proposed a change to the organisation's constitution which involved a simplification of the IMI's statutes, creating just two classes of membership, associates and others, in place of the former three categories. This move, involving as it did a reduction in the minimum payable fee, increased both membership and total fee income (see Table 1 and Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 222). Such a development was clearly timely for, in 1930, the Rockefeller Foundation ended its support for the IMI. The Foundation's decision to provide seedcorn funding had been fundamental in helping to secure financial support from the TCF, but it had always indicated that its funding would be of limited duration and believed that the IMI should become self-supporting. While this never happened, Table 1 clearly shows that, in 1930

⁴ Wregge *et al.* (1987, p. 252) indicate that, at Filene's insistence, Devinat had established 'a number of Management Research Groups' but they fail to specify how many.

and 1931, increased membership fee income secured by Urwick's changes offset any decline in financial support from America.

Financial constraints, and consequently limited staff numbers, clearly hampered the range of activities that the IMI was capable of carrying out, and the effectiveness of its operations. In an address planned for delivery to the British House of Commons in November 1933, Urwick indicated that the IMI played two important roles: (1) as a clearing house 'sorting out the new and original work [on scientific management and rationalisation] from the mass of ephemeral and repetitive writing, and to put it at the disposal of subscribers throughout the world'; and (2) to 'spread the idea of scientific, factual organisation into fields where it is not fully appreciated'.⁵ In the IMI's annual report for 1929, Urwick put forward a pragmatic programme of work covering the period from 1930 to 1933, noting that:

The Institute should concentrate its practical efforts on strictly delimited tasks likely to prove of immediate interest to industrialists, and yield results of a positive character within a comparatively short period.

(IMI Jahresberichte, 1929, p. F. 1, quoted in Walter-Busch, 2006, p.222)

The pressure on Urwick from the IMI's American backers is evident in the phraseology adopted, but there is an issue as to whether this statement represented rhetoric or a real intention on the part of Urwick and the IMI. Clearly it was not a case of pure rhetoric since effort was put in, under Urwick, to develop MRGs across Europe. Thus, in late 1932 it was noted that fifty such groups had been established in Europe (Wregge *et al.*, 1987, p. 261), but concerns were expressed, from time to time, that the IMI failed to provide sufficient support for these MRGs once they had been established.

The IMI's work in relation to MRGs and helping businessmen cope with practical matters was to a large extent overtaken in the early 1930s by the world economic crisis and a concern with the social issues which emerged in consequence thereof. This led to a frustration with the IMI's activities, not only from America. Two of the leading figures in CIOS, Mauro and Landauer, claimed that businessmen in Europe were becoming

⁵ Urwick Archives, 34/3/10(iv), f.3.

increasingly alienated from the IMI at this time. Indeed, in 1931, Landauer, head of CIOS, 'informed Urwick that businesspeople believed a "wrong attitude of the mind" was emerging within the Institute' (Nyland, 2001, p. 20). The views of Mauro and Landauer were echoed across the Atlantic, but while Dennison appears to have been more favourably disposed towards a broader approach to Europe's problems, Filene was less inclined in this direction and eventually lost patience with the institute. In late 1933, Filene overruled Dennison, with the result that the TCF decided to withdraw its funding for the IMI as of 31 December 1933, forcing the institute to close its doors in January 1934 (Nyland, 2001, pp. 21-22).

The closure of the IMI

The official reason given for the closure of the IMI was the cessation of funding from the TCF, and the reasons the TCF decided to withhold further funding were given as the world economic situation, including the depreciation of the dollar, and the problems associated with the development of Fascism, in particular the rise of Hitler in Germany. Clearly the depreciation in the value of the dollar in 1933 did not help the financial causes of either the IMI or the TCF, but the 'official' explanation for the withdrawal of funding does not, in our view, tell the whole story. From a financial point of view, while the TCF's contribution accounted for 40 per cent of the IMI's income, the amount of funding provided represented only a small proportion of the finance distributed annually by the Fund. It is our contention that the TCF could have made up the deficiency created by the fall in the value of the dollar if it had so wished, but that the will to do so was not there. But why was this the case?

The explanation for the lack of such will is to be found in the concerns of members of the TCF, and especially Filene, with the operation and achievements of the IMI. Filene had always had his doubts that an ILO-linked organisation, based in Geneva, could do the job that he saw as being necessary. The failure of Devinat to deliver, in Filene's eyes, was a crucial factor in his resignation and the subsequent appointment of Urwick. While the latter lasted longer in post than his predecessor, under Urwick the IMI

similarly failed to focus its operations in the direction which Filene considered to be the only proper one, namely a focus on MRGs and providing practical help for industrialists. Rather, under Urwick, the IMI continued to concern itself with broad social issues, especially during the depression of the early 1930s. It was this which lay behind the increasing frustration and alienation of Filene over several years; the rise of Hitler and the problems of the dollar in 1933 simply provided him with the excuse to pull the plug on the IMI at the end of 1933.

But why, under Urwick, did the IMI not focus its attention purely on establishing and fostering MRGs and helping industrialists? Did it simply reflect the pressures faced by the organisation which Urwick was unable to resist, or did Urwick's own ideas and motivations play an important role in the strategy of the IMI and, ultimately, its demise?

Urwick's role in the demise of the IMI

Crucial in analysing Urwick's role in the demise of the IMI are an understanding of his views regarding scientific management and his motivations in going to Geneva in 1928. Each of these issues will be examined in turn.

Urwick and scientific management

Urwick's views on management, which had been formed by reading Taylor's *Shop Management* while on active service with the British Army in France during the First World War, were further shaped by his experiences at the Rowntree company during the 1920s, where he mixed with not only Seebohm Rowntree and Oliver Sheldon, but also with two other influential early writers of the Rowntree School, Clarence Northcott and William Wallace. These individuals had developed a Rowntree labour management philosophy which criticised the American version of scientific management for not taking account of the 'human factor' (Fitzgerald, 1995, p. 268). Thus, Seebohm Rowntree had published *The Human Factor in Business: Experiments in Industrial Democracy* in 1921,

while two years later, Sheldon published his main work, *The Philosophy of Management*. Sheldon, in particular, 'was convinced that the efficiency of an organisation should be judged not in mechanical terms but by viewing the organisation as a living, social organism concerned with 'human relations' as well as systems, methods, and productivity' (Thomas, 1986, p. 117). Sheldon also argued that management must have two sides: 'a "personal" side (or "soul") concerned with personnel management, including employment, welfare provisions, and training courses, and an "impersonal" side dealing with matters such as research, planning, and costing systems' (Thomas, 1986, p. 117).

Another fundamental of Sheldon's writing and practical experience was its stressing of

the need for a philosophy of management based on scientific standards, (that is, rigorous analysis of the various functions of management and the principles underlying it, such as planning and policy-making, organising, co-ordinating and communicating) and ethical standards, particularly the supreme ideal of 'communal well-being' (that is, the responsibility of management to the community it serves). (Thomas, 1986, p. 117)

In his first publicly delivered talk on the subject of management, entitled 'Management as a Science', 'Rather than being concerned with methods and techniques through which Taylor's principles were applied, Urwick concentrated on the underlying 'mental revolution' and the inter-related systematic analytical approach upon which Taylor had personally set such store' (Unpublished obituary of Urwick by E.F.L. Brech, f. 4). From the outset it seems clear that Urwick saw scientific management not as a specific set of techniques, but rather as 'an entire social philosophy' (Roper, 2001, p. 188). It has been suggested that while Taylor had focused on specific elements of management in relation to operational manufacturing workshops, namely principles of effective planning and control, 'Urwick's objective was pioneering in an endeavour to formulate principles to underlie the effective conduct of all industrial and commercial operations' (Unpublished obituary of Urwick by E.F.L. Brech, f. 10). In discussing

Taylor's legacy, Urwick emphasized the 'less personal and more detached approach to matters which present difficulty, an attempt to marshal, analyze and measure the "facts"' (1929, p. 71). Possibly borrowing from Sheldon's concepts of the 'personal' and the 'impersonal', Urwick's approach to scientific management emphasised the 'masculine' approach as opposed to the 'feminine' one, that is, *a priori* reasoning over the analysis of actual behaviour (Roper, 2001, p. 189). More fundamentally, Urwick considered there to be a need to remove personalities from organizations.

Having 'grown up' within the Rowntree environment in the first half of the 1920s, by 1927, the year in which he was asked to carry out research and report on the issue of rationalisation following the World Economic Conference, Urwick had already developed a broad, social conceptualisation of scientific management. In recognition of the fragmented nature of the British management scene, which comprised some 50 or so separate bodies, several members of the British delegation to the Conference, on their return, sought to establish an over-arching body for management in Britain.⁶ 'A luncheon meeting was called at the Holborn Restaurant on July 12th. Sir William Mackenzie, G.B.E. (formerly chairman of the Industrial Court) took the chair. There were present officials of some forty different societies and of the five government departments concerned' (BLPES, Harry Ward Papers, W/3/27/7, f.6). A committee was established to give impetus to this process and, in particular, to examine how the issue of 'rationalisation' might be pushed forward in Britain. It was quickly recognised, however, that 'rationalisation' meant different things to different people, and Urwick was selected 'to seek clarification of the meaning and implication of "rationalisation" within the British context' (Unpublished obituary of Urwick by E.F.L. Brech, f. 7). In due course, Urwick produced a series of papers for the committee, which were subsequently published in book form in 1929 as *The Meaning of Rationalisation*.

In this work, Urwick's views on scientific management and rationalisation were made quite clear, leaving nobody in any doubt as to where he stood in the debate. At the end of the first chapter of the book, Urwick indicated how the word 'rationalisation' was

⁶ In the event such a body was not established until 1937, when the British Management Council came into being.

to be used throughout the book. Noting that it could be defined either as an attitude or a process, he went on:

As an attitude it records the belief that a more rational control of world economic life through the application of scientific method is possible and desirable. As a process it implies the application of the methods of science to all problems arising in the organisation and conduct of production, distribution, and consumption.
(Urwick, 1929, p. 27)

This message was reinforced in the conclusion to the book, where he emphasised that rationalisation meant Taylor's concept of the 'mental revolution', but not simply as applied to the individual works or company, but more widely at the problems of industry as a whole (Urwick, 1929, p. 148). Such a conceptualisation clearly went well beyond the narrow viewpoint adopted by many businessmen and, more especially, individuals such as Filene and Dennison at the TCF.

Personal motives for moving to Geneva (Self-aggrandisement?)

Despite the insecure financial position of the IMI and the problem of political infighting which he had to face, Urwick saw his appointment in Geneva as giving him the chance of carrying out 'important work' (Roper, 2001, p. 191). In one sense the chance to become Director of the IMI came at an opportune time. Having been at the Rowntree company for a number of years, not being fully occupied there and, having been told by Seebohm Rowntree that there was little prospect of becoming a director at the company for a few more years, Urwick was becoming restless and looking for new challenges. The establishment of the MRGs during 1926 and 1927 had provided him with some diversion from his normal duties at the Rowntree company, but he did not 'feel that his post at York ... was the most convenient framework for the public work which he wished to do' (Urwick Archive, Henley – 8/2/2, f. 40). Reflecting on his appointment in Geneva later in his life, Urwick noted that, in 1928, he had been 'offered the only international post in

management worth having – the Directorship of the International Management Institute at Geneva’ (Urwick, 1969, p. 36).

The IMI appointment clearly put Urwick centre stage within the European management movement, and he was determined to make the most of it from a personal point of view, even to the extent of allowing his marriage to fail. Thus, in letters to his mother in 1932, Urwick reminded his mother on numerous occasions that ‘private commitments must inevitably be constrained by the international importance of his work’ (Roper, 2001, p. 193). Indeed, Urwick viewed the work that he and his colleagues at Geneva were doing as being to try to ‘retrieve the world from the mess of nationalization, and jealousy and self-destruction’ (Letter from Urwick to his mother, 26 June 1932, quoted in Roper, 2001, p. 194). There is no doubting Urwick’s dedication to his work, admitting to his mother in mid-1932 that he was completely worn out with all the pressures upon him. While some of these pressures were invariably created by the world economic crisis, which once again brought into sharp relief the wide gap between the viewpoints of the TCF on the one hand and the ILO on the other in respect of the tasks to be performed by the IMI, there is clear evidence that Urwick’s own agenda contributed significantly to them.

In going to Geneva, Urwick saw his appointment as an opportunity to raise his own stock within the world of international management. Nyland (2001, pp. 20-21), notes Landauer’s criticism that Urwick wanted to be seen ‘as a “big politician or a big economist”’, it not being sufficient for him merely to be seen as the manager of a “practical business proposition” the goal of which was to provide “goods” to the “manufacturers and merchants actually making money through its help”’. While Landauer’s comments were made in the middle of a period when CIOS was attempting to wrest control of the management movement in Europe from the hands of the IMI, and therefore could be considered to represent an exaggeration of the position, it is not a view that should be dismissed lightly. A key element in Urwick’s drive to gain international recognition was his writings on management and the attempt to fuse together the ideas of other writers and thinkers into a coherent set of principles of management.⁷

⁷ This was achieved with the publication of his book, *Elements of Administration*, first published in 1943.

An analysis of Urwick's writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s reveals that this proved to be an especially productive period (see Appendix 2). While some of the papers relate to the topic of MRGs, these were in the minority. A small number of papers focused on the role of the IMI, but many more were focused on rationalisation. As the problems consequent upon the Wall Street Crash gathered momentum, issues such as rationalisation and the world economic crisis, and rationalisation and unemployment became important foci of Urwick's attention. From time to time there were also papers on various aspects of management theory.

While Urwick's writings may have served to enhance his own position within international management circles, there were those who considered that they only served to divert him from effectively managing the IMI's activities, and from focusing the activities of the IMI in the right direction. From early on in his time at the IMI, Urwick was being accused of spending too much time writing and theorizing (Brown, 1929). In 1930, in a letter commenting on the lack of effort being applied to the issue of establishing MRGs, Brown complained to Dennison 'about excessive documentation and non-productive effort by Urwick' (Wregge *et al*, 1987, p. 255). If anything, such 'non-productive' writing and presentation of papers continued throughout 1930 and 1931, though there are signs of a reduction in 1932.

Urwick's appointment – good or bad?

Walter-Busch (2006, p. 222) has recently commented that the choice of Urwick to head the IMI was 'undoubtedly an excellent appointment', and considers that while he did his best to implement the goals he had outlined in the IMI's annual report in 1929, it was the 'economic crisis of the 1930s [which] put an end to his endeavors'. Although not based on any substantive analysis of Urwick's performance, Walter-Busch suggests that 'Urwick managed the IMI quite successfully' (2006, p. 225).

It has also been suggested that:

Urwick was able to accomplish five years of continuous and concentrated work for management In Geneva until 1933, although it was largely ephemeral, being put over in frequent speeches in various European countries, in the Institute's Bulletin, and in various reports. (Urwick Archive, Henley – 8/2/2, f. 43.)

This second judgement suggests that little was achieved in any practical sense and this was the problem, at least from the perspective of the IMI's American backers. For them, what Europe needed was an institution which fostered the practical implementation of scientific management practices. Insofar as fifty or so MRGs had been established throughout Europe by late 1932, clearly there was some degree of success in this direction. But establishing groups was only the first stage in a process of wider dissemination of knowledge and practices. Such groups had to be nurtured and provided with practical assistance on an on-going basis, and there is evidence to suggest that the help provided by the IMI in this regard before its closure was limited.

The failure of the IMI to fully support MRGs once they had been established was partly down to financial constraints and the limited staff that it had, but also because, under Urwick, the IMI continued to focus on what, from an American perspective, was seen as non-core activities. While part of the explanation for this is undoubtedly the political pressures coming from European voices such as Thomas and the ILO, Urwick's own views and motivations played a crucial role. While Urwick, in terms of former connections, may have been independent of both the TCF and the ILO at the time of his appointment as Director of the IMI (Unpublished obituary of Urwick by E.F.L. Brech, f. 8), he was much closer in his political and conceptual viewpoints re. scientific management to those of the ILO-European view than he was to those of the IMI's American backers and many businessmen. It was this which meant that, in the early 1930s, the IMI continued to pursue a broader agenda than the American backers wished and ultimately led to the TCF withdrawing funding from the IMI. The rise of Hitler and the decline of the dollar in 1933 represented an expedient excuse to withdraw funding; the real cause of the withdrawal was the continued failure, under Urwick, of the institute to focus on what the Americans considered to be its core activities, providing practical

support for businessmen through the establishment of, and supplying ongoing support to, MRGs. Eventually, Filene's patience was pushed beyond the limit, and the IMI was forced to close.

If Urwick had steered the IMI in a different direction, the closure of the IMI could probably have been averted. His failure to alter course, means that he was not the right man for the job. The Americans thought that, in appointing Urwick to the directorship in late 1928, they had appointed someone who could deliver their vision of a network of MRGs across Europe, with the IMI in the middle providing practical help and assistance to the groups and to businessmen; in reality, they got someone who, though experienced in establishing MRGs in Britain, saw the move to Geneva as being a stepping stone to greater things. Urwick's own motivations and beliefs allowed the IMI to follow a course which ultimately brought it into conflict with its chief financial backer, with the inevitable consequences.

Postscript

Somewhat ironically, in 1935, after the demise of the IMI, Filene and Dennison moved closer to the European conceptualisation of scientific management, following the 'uncompromising vigour with which the [US] business community promoted its undemocratic response to the depression', coming to believe that 'the U.S. had to embrace the role that the general population and organised labour played in both micro and macro management' (both quotes from Nyland, 2001, p. 22). It remains a matter for conjecture whether if the 'conversion' of Filene and Dennison had occurred eighteen months earlier, the IMI would have had to close.

Table 1 – IMI's income and expenses, 1927-1932 (000 Swiss Francs)

Source of income and expenses	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
						(budget)	
ILO	86.30	91.84	76.37	86.90	86.29	86.00	86.00
TCF	130.78	129.52	129.34	128.80	128.62	128.33	128.00
Rockefeller Foundation & other USA income	129.81	103.60	77.74	77.10	50.70	50.65	-
Other (members') income	2.50	8.03	38.30	127.60	121.59	86.30	106.00
Total Income	349.39	332.99	321.75	420.40	387.20	351.28	320.00
US contributions as % of total income	74.58	70.01	64.36	48.98	46.31	50.95	40.00
Expenses	295.26	364.80	306.22	379.47	388.38	327.04	n.d.

Source: Walter-Busch, 2006, p. 221 and author's own calculations of US percentage.

Appendix 1 – Accomplishments of the International Management Institute, 1928-1933

[These details have been extracted from Wregge *et al*, 1987, pp. 252-263.]

1928

Established relations with CIOS (through Landauer)

Launched the *Bulletin of the International Management Institute*

Published a pamphlet on the IMI

Created a Terminology Committee to prepare a list of management terms and definitions

Formed a number of Management Research Groups

Commenced studies of the application of scientific management to agriculture, railways, small factories and the textile industry

1929

Produced special reports on:

Tasks in the field of rationalisation

The IMI's work for the League of Nations

Initiated work on:

Scientific management in banking

Scientific management in small factories

Administrative and management problems of combines of companies

1930

Held an International Conference on Budgetary Control in Geneva

Initiated a special course on 'The National Organisation of Commercial Enterprises' at the University of Geneva

Issued special reports on:

Glossary of budgetary control terms

Management terminology

US Census of Distribution

1931

Held a second International Conference on the topic of Management Research
Groups and Rationalisation

1932

Issued special reports on:

Safety on the Boston elevated railway

Organisation and management of railways (this was the final report of the
study begun in 1928)

Administrative problems of large-scale business

1933

Issued special reports on:

A railway car plant in Poland

Flow work

Practical use of statistics

Public administration

Rationalisation and prosperity

Reorganisation of a garage

Recent German studies of distribution problems

Appendix 2 List of papers of L.F. Urwick, 1928-1933.

<u>V O L U M E 3.</u>		
<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Index No:</u>
<u>1924</u>		
Feb.	On Prejudice	1
<u>1926</u>		
	Management Research Groups: Origin of the Idea	2
April	The Task Before Industrial Administrators	3
July	Experience with Management Research Groups in Great Britain	4
Sept.	Muddle and Method in Office Management	5
	Some Practical Considerations in Handling Staff	6
<u>1927</u>		
Feb.	Promotion in Industry	7
June	Divisional Staff Organization in the Field	8
	The Sharing of the Product of Industry	9
July	Scientific Management in Great Britain	10
	Scientific Management in Europe	11
	Rationalization in Industry	12
Dec.	What is Rationalization ?	13
<u>1928</u>		
March	What the Mond Conference might do	14
March	Discipline	15
	The Nature of the Educational Training to Equip Foremen and Supervisors	16
	-do- German translation	17
	-do- French translation	18
May	The Principles of Direction and Control	19
	A Note on the Literature of Scientific Management	20
	University Education for Business	21
Sept.	Rationalisation and Industrial Education	22
Sept.	Reorganising an Existing Business	23
Dec.	Science and Business	24
Dec.	Organizing a Sales Office	25
	The International Committee for Scientific Management and The International Management Institute	26
Dec.	Scientific Management and The International Management Institute	27
Dec.	Allocution	28
	An Industrial Esperanto	29

VOLUME 4.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Index No:</u>
<u>1929</u>		
Jan.	The Significance of Rationalization	1
Jan.	Rationalization and Peace	2
Jan.	Rationalization - Europe's New Industrial Philosophy	3
Feb.	The Meaning of Rationalization	4
March	The Service Idea in Rationalization and in International Co-operation	5
August	The Place of the Trained Worker in Commerce and Industry	6
	Rational Organization	7
	Rational Organization - French translation	8
	Rational Organization - German translation	9
	What is a Scientifically Organized Industry?	10
	International Organization for Rationalization	11
	Reorganising an Existing Business	12
Sept.	The Training of the Business Administrator	13
Sept.	Rationalisation Abroad	14
Sept.	Scientific Office Management	15
Oct.	The Work of the International Management Institute	16
Nov.	Recent Economic Changes in the United States	17
Nov.	American Prosperity	18
Nov.	Rationalization - Address delivered at Vienna	19
Nov.	Rationalization - German translation	20
Nov.	Rationalization - Address delivered at Budapest	21
Nov.	The Idea of Management Groups	22
Nov.	Rationalization and the Workers	23
	Scientific Management in Europe	24
	Project for a "Management Map of the World"	25
<u>1930</u>		
Jan.	An International Clearing House of Rationalisation	26
Jan.	Rationalisation: "It is a completely new attitude of mind towards business"	27
Jan.	La Rationalisation et l'Organisation scientifique du Travail	28
Feb.	An International Clearing House of Good Management	29
April	What Other Countries are doing to increase Industrial Efficiency	30
May	Europe Speeds up an American Idea	31
May	Management Groups: The Business Man's University	32
June	Address to the Economic Committee of the League of Nations	33
Sept.	The Pure Theory of Organisation with Special Reference to Business Enterprises	34
Sept.	Rationalization does not lead to Unemployment	35
Sept.	Memorandum on a Market Survey of Europe	36
	The Principles of Successful Business Management	37
	Memorandum and Constitution for A British Institute of Management	38
	Rationalization and Russia	39

VOLUME 5.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Index No:</u>
<u>1931</u>		
Jan.	The Organisation and Administration of Large Scale International Undertakings	1.
Feb.	La Rationalisation et la Crise Économique Management Research Work on the basis of National and International Group Co-operation	2 3
March	La Crise Économique et les Salaires	4
May	The International Management Institute: International Clearing House of Good Management	5
May	International Economic Planning	6
May	American Participation in the International Management Movement	7
June	La Rationalisation et la Crise Économique Mondiale	8
July	Rationalization and Hospital Administration	9
July	The Contribution of Trade Associations to Business Research	10
August	The New Distribution	11
August	World Planning and Business Research	12
August	Rationalization - Address delivered at Amsterdam	13
Sept.	The Study of Management: The International Position	14
Sept.	The Rationalization of Distribution	15
Sept.	Problems of Distribution	16
<u>1932</u>		
Jan.	The Reduction of Distribution Wastes	17
April	Market Research - "What a Manufacturer cannot do"	18
May	The Importance to every Business of a Market Research Policy	19
May/June	Rationalization and Unemployment	20
May/June	Rationalization and Unemployment - Italian translation	21
	The Cinematograph and Scientific Management	22
July	Scientific Management: Fifth International Congress at Amsterdam	23
October	Le vrai visage de la Rationalisation	24
<u>1933</u>		
Jan.	Best Books on Business in 1932.	25
March	Organization as a Science	26
March	Modern Practices in Business Management	27
April	To Prosperity through Science	28
June	Industry Awaits Political Stability	29
Sept.	Organisation as a Technical Problem	30
Nov.	Cost Accounting and Management	31
Nov.	Costing Distribution	32
Nov.	Organisation and Cost Accounting	33
Nov.	Costing as an Administrative Necessity	34
Dec.	Ave Atque Vale	35

Source: Urwick Archives, 1/3 - 1/5.

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