

The Socialist International

by Bernd Rother

Solidarity across borders is part of the core programme of the workers' movement. The International Working Men's Association, which was established in 1864, was the first federation of European workers' organizations. Though it disintegrated in acrimonious circumstances after twelve years, it had by then attained a legendary status, which endured. The Second International founded in 1889 was only a loose affiliation of independent national parties also. Its debates on fundamental principles had little effect on the policies of its member organizations, though these debates did formulate standards for ideal socialist action. This association disintegrated in 1914 when almost all of the member organizations joined their respective national consensus on the issue of the war. In 1923, a new association called the Labour and Socialist International formed, though this did not have the same weight as its predecessors in terms of influencing the broader programme and its activities came to an end in 1940. There was a further new start in 1951 with the "Socialist International".

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See also the article "Socialists and Europe" in the EHNE. (→ Media Link #ab)

In the second half of the 19th century, socialist workers' movements emerged in all European states. In most cases, the foundation of political parties was preceded by the foundation of trade unions, though in Germany the process occurred the other way round. However, in spite of significant electoral successes and rapidly increasing memberships, the socialist movements remained too weak and isolated to form governments. Europe's socialists paid particular attention to international cooperation (→ Media Link #ac), as they believed that the struggle to emancipate the proletariat would have to be fought across state borders because capital operated internationally.¹

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Of course, efforts towards international cooperation were not exclusively a feature of workers' movements. The 19th century was not only characterized by the rise of nationalist movements and nation states; international cooperation expanded palpably in the second half of the century. New supra-national institutions resulted in some cases from the growth in global trade (→ Media Link #ad)(such as the Universal Postal Union founded in 1874), while in other cases they were inspired by humanitarian and in particular pacifist ideas.² This was the case for example with the foundation in 1863 of the International Committee of the Red Cross and with the foundation in 1889 of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. However, in the narrower political arena, internationalism asserted itself only in the workers' movement, in which it became a fundamental element of the programme of the movement.

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The International Working Men's Association (1864–1876)

From the 1860s onward, there was a growing consensus in the proletarian left-wing movement that international solidarity was indispensable for the emancipation of the working class. Workers were also encouraged to look for an identity beyond the confines of national borders by the fact that in several European countries – most notably the German Empire – they were not recognized as an equal part of the nation. During the same period, the workers' movements in Britain and France continued to gain in strength and

influence, and in other parts of Europe popular movements also gained in influence again around 1860. On the fringes of the International Exhibition (→ Media Link #af) in London in 1862, first contact was made between a French workers' delegation and British trade unionists. At a further meeting the following year, the idea of founding an international workers' association emerged, prompting the British side to address an appeal to the workers of France to work together with them in solidarity in future. Making direct reference to the congresses (→ Media Link #ag) at which the governments of Europe repeatedly came together, the manifesto invited the national workers' movements to also hold cross-border gatherings.³

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On 28 September 1864, the first of these congresses convened in London. In addition to the French workers and leading British trade unionists, German, Italian, Polish and Swiss delegations were also present; many of them were exile groups. The official response of the French workers to the British appeal became the initial basis for the International. It contained the programmatic sentence: "Our salvation lies in solidarity."⁴ The gathering elected a provisional central committee which was to be based in London.

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The International expanded in the subsequent years, primarily in western and southern Europe. The organization was mainly headed up by workers. The International included a number of different political perspectives, which was both an opportunity and a risk. While revolutionary democrats dominated the Italian section, the influence of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) (→ Media Link #ah) and his idea of a federation of free communes was particularly strong in France. Many British trade unionists, by contrast, cultivated a parliamentary alliance with the Liberals. The prevalent anarchist strand, which had its strongholds in Latin Switzerland, Italy and Spain, played an important role over the longer term. Last but not least, there were those who were influenced by Karl Marx (1818–1883) (→ Media Link #ai). Marx, for whom the foundation of the International further strengthened his fresh hopes that a European revolution might be close at hand, served as secretary for Germany on the general council of the International, which was otherwise dominated by British trade unionists.

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The inaugural address and the statutes of the International Working Men's Association (IWA) were written by Marx himself. They were written in such a way as to represent all of the various strands within the workers' movement.⁵ The plan was that individual local and national workers' organizations would become members of the IWA, but in the event individual people also joined as members. The IWA leadership exerted very little influence over the individual sections. Up to the establishment of the Paris Commune in 1871 "war die Internationale eine lockere revolutionäre Organisation, die in erster Linie den Zweck verfolgte, Kontakte zwischen den Arbeiterbewegungen in den einzelnen Ländern herzustellen und die Voraussetzungen für ein gemeinsames Handeln zu schaffen."⁶

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The membership of the IWA always remained very small. Julius Braunthal (1891–1972) (→ Media Link #aj) estimates that the individual members numbered no more than a few thousand. Of course, the corporate members – the unions and workers' associations – were much more strongly represented. In 1869, 28 British trade unions with a collective membership of 95,000 belonged to the IWA,⁷ but even this number was far removed from the fanciful numbers quoted by opponents of the IWA. To give just a couple of example: In June 1870, the French judiciary spoke of 811,153 members worldwide, and the otherwise dependable *Times* of London estimated a membership of 2.5 million one year later. Rumours of the financial resources available to the organization were correspondingly lavish,⁸ though in reality the International only had access to very small sources of income.⁹

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There was nonetheless a core of truth to these exaggerations:

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Der Generalrat intervenierte in der Tat in zahllosen Streiks, die durch ausländische Streikbrecher bedroht waren. ... Diese Akte hilfreicher Solidarität trugen den Ruhm der Internationale in tausende Arbeiterfamilien. ... Das Ansehen der Internationale wuchs ins Legendäre, als bekannt wurde, daß es ihr da und dort gelungen war, Kämpfe der Arbeiter durch ihr Eingreifen zu einem erfolgreichen Abschluß zu bringen.¹⁰

The Paris Commune also raised the profile of the IWA among both its supporters and its enemies, even though the IWA had played no part in the emergence of the Commune and the supporters of the International in Paris were in a minority. However, the general council of the International declared its unreserved support for the Commune.¹¹ After it had put down the rebellion, the French government identified the International as the initiator and wrote to the other European governments a few weeks after the end of the Commune to convince them of the dangers of the IWA.¹² The subsequent suppression of the French workers' movement weakened the International considerably, as the French had been one of the main pillars of the IWA up to that point along with the British. They were now gradually replaced in this role by the rapidly growing German workers' movement.

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It should be noted here that the International Working Men's Association was to a certain extent a media phenomenon, or more accurately a propaganda phenomenon. Both supporters and opponents had an interest in overstating its influence, though it was of course highly significant that this grouping – which was actually very small – acted as a vanguard for a social class seeking a greater voice, i.e. industrial workers. The actions that were attributed to it had less to do with reality, and more to do with what people hoped or feared the proletariat might achieve in the future.

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In reality, the short history of the IWA was dominated by debates about its programme. These could not be avoided indefinitely, as completely different strands belonged to the organization. The first of these conflicts saw the supporters of Marx and Proudhon pitted against each other. The latter argued for decentralized or federal solutions on a series of issues, but the Marxists imagined state monopolies and strong governments. Additionally, the Proudhonists fundamentally rejected alliances with bourgeois forces, in contrast with the supporters of Marx. The influence of the ideas of Proudhon declined from congress to congress, until a split occurred in 1869 in Basel over the question of the transfer of land (→ Media Link #ak) into collective ownership. Marx's argument in favour of collective property ultimately prevailed with the support of delegates from Britain, Germany, German-speaking Switzerland, and of delegates from Latin Europe who otherwise exhibited anarchist leanings.¹³ This change of direction made it considerably more difficult to win the support of peasants as allies.

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The subsequent controversy between the Marx-inspired IWA majority and the anarchists around Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876) (→ Media Link #al) revolved around a similar question. Bakunin planned to bring down the government in a putsch-style overthrow, followed directly by the destruction of the machinery of the state. Marx, on the other hand, believed it was necessary to build a political party of the proletariat in each nation state, as a long-running struggle between the classes would – in his view – ultimately result in social revolution. The proletariat would have to take control of the state apparatus and transform it – according to Marx – in order to bring about the transition to a classless society.¹⁴ Marx thus parted company with the expectation of an imminent proletarian revolution, a hope that he had still held in the 1860s. The collapse of the Paris Commune in 1871 put the seal on this change in direction.

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The resistance of Bakunin to this change cannot be explained solely in terms of differences of opinion on the fundamental programme. It was also – perhaps primarily – about power within the IWA. The congress of the IWA in The Hague in September 1872 decided the issue in favour of the supporters of Marx, but it also brought about a split within the International. The seat of the general council of the IWA was transferred to New York because of the danger of a seizure of power by Blanquists in London¹⁵, who were strongly represented in the British capital after having been driven out of France by the French government. They had been on the side of the Marxian social democrats in the controversy with the supporters of Bakunin, but their putsch strategy was totally at odds with the ideas of Engels and Marx. In the four years leading up to the last congress, which was held in Philadelphia, the IWA descended into insignificance. However, Marx's adversaries did not succeed in establishing a new International either, at least not one that lasted any length of time.

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While the organization itself fell victim to struggles between factions, the legendary status of the "International" lived on, and it was most strikingly formulated in a poem by Eugène Pottier (1816–1887) (→ Media Link #am) in 1871 that was recorded in 1888 (→ Media Link #an). The International had also brought about lasting resolutions to a number of debates about aspects of content, and these resolutions subsequently served as an orientation guide for socialists and social democrats – generally speaking workers' parties inspired by Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) (→ Media Link #ao) and Marx. These resolutions included not only the primacy of the political

struggle over the trade union struggle and over the establishment of cooperatives, but also the campaign for state-sponsored social reforms within the context of the capitalist society, such as shorter working hours and calls for the nationalization of central branches of the economy, such as mining and railways.¹⁶

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The attitude of the workers' movement to war, which ultimately brought about the demise of the Second International in 1914, had also been debated in the IWA. The Brussels congress of 1868 rejected standing armies and called for wars to be prevented by means of general strikes. However, this should not impinge upon the right of a country to defend itself, as the debate in the International about the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1871 demonstrated. But this discussion also demonstrated how difficult it would be to differentiate between purely defensive campaigns and provoked attacks.¹⁷

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The Second International (1889–1914)

While international cooperation between workers' movements declined as a result of internal turmoil within the IWA and repressive measures in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, national workers' movements continued to grow in strength in the context of constantly expanding industrialization (→ Media Link #ap). After a number of failed attempts, the international workers' congress that convened in Paris on the hundredth anniversary of the storming of the Bastille (→ Media Link #aq) led to the permanent re-establishment of the International, in which Marxism was now clearly dominant. How loose this organization was – even less centralized than the IWA – was made apparent by the namelessness of the new entity. "Der Name 'Zweite Internationale' wurde ihr [...] von der Zeitungsliteratur und den Historikern verliehen."¹⁸ It met on the invitation of the organizing (and financing) party, and the International initially only existed when it constituted itself as a congress. The "International Socialist Bureau" (→ Media Link #ar), which consisted of two representatives from each of the member organizations, was only formed after eleven years. It received the right to adopt positions with regard to current issues. An executive committee based in Brussels had responsibility for the running of the International.

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The very first congress adopted a resolution that was to make the international connection between the workers' movements palpable for years to come: there were to be worldwide demonstrations on May 1 calling for the eight-hour working day. There was disagreement about whether the demand should be made by means of a strike on this exact day – as favoured, for example, by the French and the Austrians – or whether it was sufficient to demonstrate by means of marches and indoor events in the evening or on the following Sunday – the course adopted by the German and British workers' movements. In any case, both forms proved to be impressive demonstrations.¹⁹ Just as the IWA had gained attention through international appeals for financial support for striking workers and against strike breakers, the Second International immediately entered the consciousness of broad circles of society through the May demonstrations. It was able to draw on the old legend, even in the minds of its opponents.

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The debates about the form of the May celebration were the beginning of a great controversy about the path to socialism which remained unresolved up to 1914. Apart from the question of how to prevent wars, this was the most important topic of the Second International, and the French and German workers' movements were the main protagonists in the debate. The Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) was not only the largest member organization of the International, the contents of its Erfurt Programme of 1891 served as a model for many other parties. Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) (→ Media Link #as), the leading interpreter of Marx's thought, was an SPD member, though his later opponents Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932) (→ Media Link #at) and Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919) (→ Media Link #au) were also active in the SPD. However, France was the country in which revolutions had succeeded (1789, 1848) or had at least been attempted (1871). It was from there that the greatest ideological challenges to the SPD emanated. With the exception of 1907, the German social democrats went from one electoral success to the next. Their membership and that of the German trade unions grew continuously and exceeded the figures for all other European countries. However, their influence on the political direction of their own country was minimal.

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Jean Jaurès's (1859–1914) (→ Media Link #av) criticism at the congress (→ Media Link #aw) of the International in 1904 in Amsterdam amounted to a rejection of the "revolutionary attentism"²⁰ of the SPD, which viewed the coming of socialism as being governed by capitalism's own momentum. Jaurès's alternative was a policy of activism, which permitted both temporary parliamentary alliances

with bourgeois forces and non-parliamentary coercive measures (particularly mass strikes), which were intended to fend off reactionary attacks on the social progress made by the republic, such as the separation of church and state. Even though it was obvious that the divergent positions were rooted in completely different political systems, it was also a fundamental conflict about the value of democratic reforms. For August Bebel (1840–1913) (→ Media Link #ax), for example, it made little difference whether the class struggle occurred in an imperial monarchy or in a republic. During the period of the First International, the Marxist majority in the IWA had never rejected alliances with bourgeois forces, in contrast with the Proudhonists and anarchists. But back then there had never been the prospect of participation in, or support for, predominantly bourgeois governments.

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It proved as impossible to resolve this conflict as it was to resolve the conflict regarding possible mass strikes. While the Marxist programme denounced armed rebellions as Blanquism, the idea of mass strikes increasingly gained supporters. By this means – it was hoped – it would be possible to obtain some fundamental demands, even within the limitations of the capitalist society. It proved possible by this means to obtain universal male suffrage, or at least important steps in that direction, in a number of countries (Belgium, Austria, Sweden), and in Finland it even proved possible to obtain female suffrage in this way. However, the counter-arguments were significant, particularly when the discussion was not about individual demands such as suffrage, but about the achievement of socialism by means of mass strike. Would the state not respond with repressive measures which would result in the workers' movement losing all of its gains to date? Could one be sure that the movement would not slip from the control of the leaders? Was the power of the class-conscious, organized workers sufficient to enforce the strike, or was there a danger of strike breaking by the many indifferent workers? The majority of the SPD leadership rejected this course, while the French socialists including the reformers around Jean Jaurès flirted with this strategy. The (initial) success of the mass strikes of the Russian proletariat in 1905 added considerable fuel to the debate, particularly in the SPD. However, the leading party and the International itself never directly endorsed the tactic of mass strikes, except as a means of defence, for example against attempts to revoke general suffrage for men in German parliamentary elections.

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Preventing a war could of course be considered a legitimate justification for a mass or general strike. But what if the call to strike was heeded in the most industrialized countries, but not in the less-developed countries, specifically in Russia? In this case, would western European socialists not be helping the reactionary Tsarist regime?²¹ Right up to 1914, the International was unable to answer these and other objections. The question of when socialists could actually support a war – for example to defend or obtain progressive conditions – elicited very varied answers. According to August Bebel, it was necessary to defend semi-parliamentary Germany with its seeds of a welfare state against the despotic and regressive Russian Empire. For the French, by contrast, their democratic republic was worth protecting against Prussian militarism.

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In spite of all these debates, nobody had envisaged the situation that emerged in the summer of 1914. In the last week of July, the International Socialist Bureau met in Brussels. Most of the parties represented at the meeting were aware that the international situation was very tense, but they did not believe that their governments would risk war. The Bureau decided that the anti-war demonstrations should continue, but it failed to agree on more severe measures, as the International "setzte auf eine weitere Fortdauer der schwelenden Krise. Im Rückblick ist dies ihr schwerwiegendster Fehler gewesen."²² It was no longer in a position to react when the war broke out; it largely disappeared from the political stage until the end of the military conflict. Almost all of the member parties got behind their respective governments and supported the mobilisation, which they viewed as a legitimate defence of their respective native countries. The socialists only voted against the war in Russia and in Serbia.²³

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Why did this reaction occur? The most common explanation is the communist thesis that the right-wing party leaders betrayed the principles of the International. However, this view does not stand up to serious historical analysis. Four other explanatory strands are more convincing, particularly if they are viewed as complementing each other rather than individually explaining the change of heart of most of the socialist parties:

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Neither the International as a political organization nor its member parties had developed a strategy for influencing international politics beyond congress declarations. This now became apparent.²⁴

Socialists everywhere were swept up by the wave of patriotism and nationalist sentiment. The international workers' movement had never considered this possibility in preceding years and decades, and had dramatically underestimated the influence of this sentiment

on workers, just as they had underestimated the integration of their own organization into the existing society.²⁵ Particularly – though not exclusively – in Germany, the workers' movement had built up diverse and strong organizations, and it was feared that the state would destroy these in the event of radical anti-war measures, such as a general strike. Finally, a situational factor is put forward by means of a counterfactual perspective: If the SPD had voted against the war loans or had abstained, due to the influential position of this party in the International other parties might have followed suit, particularly its French counterpart. The war would not have been prevented but the splitting of the International could have been avoided.²⁶

The military conflict fundamentally changed the position of many socialists with regard to the state. Up to 1914, no socialist in Europe had ever become a cabinet minister with the endorsement of his or her party. The *Burgfrieden* (cross-party cooperation) that now emerged in most of the states involved in the war brought an end to this taboo. By the end of the war, the participation of socialists in government was determined solely by election results; it was no longer ruled out on principle. However, not all party members endorsed this change. The general attitude to the war and participation in cabinet caused divisions within socialist parties in many countries. In Germany, for example, the Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei (USPD) split from the SPD in 1917. The central European revolution of 1918 deepened the divide further and brought about an increase in the number of socialist ministers serving in cabinets.

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The October Revolution in Russia was also a result of the First World War. The seizure of power by the Communist Party in the former Tsarist empire irreversibly split the international socialist workers' movement as it gave rise to a third, nominally Marxist strand, which became the Communist or Third International in 1919, in addition to the advocates of cooperation with bourgeois democrats and the left-wing socialists. Among the non-communist left wing, the attitude toward the Soviet Union was a topic that was repeatedly acrimoniously debated and which in terms of its importance for the International was on a par with the question of participation in government and the prevention of war prior to 1914.

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The International in the Interwar Period

Efforts to resurrect the International during the war failed,²⁷ and the first conference after the end of the war, which was held in February 1919 in Bern, was anything but a promising new beginning. The Belgian socialists refused to sit at the same table with the German majority SPD (MSPD) because the latter had not protested against Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. However, the German USPD was present. The conference was dominated by discussion of the stance of the German social democrats during the war and of the position with regard to Bolshevik rule. The gathering passed a resolution declaring that the International stood "unerschütterlich auf dem Boden der Demokratie", though it avoided directly condemning the Russian communists. The conference established a commission to drive the rebuilding of the International.²⁸

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However, this commission collapsed due to disagreements regarding relations with the Bolsheviks. The USPD and the parties from Italy, Norway, Austria and Spain refused to participate in the refoundation of the Second International. Consequently, it was a rump organization that met again in early August 1920 in Geneva. It clearly distanced itself from the course adopted by Vladimir Ilich Lenin (1870–1924) (→ Media Link #az), but it nevertheless suggested that the unity of the International could be re-established by means of talks with all parties, including the communists.²⁹ The seat of the secretariat was moved to London.

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Parallel to this, the middle left-wing socialist strand (the one between the social democrats and the communists) established the "International Working Union of Socialist Parties" in February 1921 in Vienna, with 20 member parties from 13 countries. Thus, the international workers' movement had now split into three competing organizations. Efforts towards mediation with the communist Third International (Comintern) failed, while talks between moderates and the left-wing socialist Working Union yielded success. These talks were aided by the intransigent attitude which the communists adopted towards the Vienna International also. It also helped that the right wing of the USPD had reunited with the MSPD to re-establish the SPD in 1922, after the left wing had joined with the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1921. In May 1923, it proved possible to reunite the non-communist left at the international level at a congress in Hamburg. The organization now known as the Labour and Socialist International (LSI) did not adopt a programme, but its statutes defined it "als eine Vereinigung sozialistischer Arbeiterparteien, die in der Ersetzung der kapitalistischen Produktionsweise

durch die sozialistische das Ziel und im Klassenkampf ... das Mittel der Emanzipation der Arbeiterklasse erkennen." In order to prevent the recurrence of the situation that obtained in August 1914, the statutes laid down that "bei Konflikten zwischen Nationen" the member parties should recognize the LSI "für sich als höchste Instanz".³⁰

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For the sake of the re-established unity, it was essential that the LSI formulate a common position with regard to the Soviet Union. The congress condemned the brutal suppression of political liberties, but also declared itself unanimously against "jede Absicht einer militärischen Intervention[, die] nicht die Fehler der gegenwärtigen Phase der russischen Revolution beseitigen [würde], sondern die Revolution selbst." This remained the position of the LSI up to the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939.³¹

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The congresses of the International never again attained the importance that they had enjoyed before 1914. For the prevention of wars (→ Media Link #b0), the LSI – to which 36 mostly European parties belonged in 1928 – set its store by the adjudication of the League of Nations (→ Media Link #b1), which had begun its work in 1920. If a country should take up arms in spite of this, then LSI members were called upon to exert "stärkstmöglichen Druck der Massen, selbst in der revolutionären Form".³² It is questionable whether the delegates believed this to be realistic in view of the experiences of 1914. In any case, the International was not capable of influencing national developments – this was demonstrated as clearly by the emergence of fascism in Italy in 1923 as by the rise of the NSDAP in Germany after 1929.

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After Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) (→ Media Link #b2) was appointed chancellor of Germany, the LSI issued an appeal to all workers in Germany on 18 February 1933 "die gegenseitigen Angriffe einzustellen und gemeinsam gegen den Faschismus zu kämpfen." However, this appeal proved unsuccessful. Worse still, at the end of March the SPD chairman Otto Wels (1873–1939) (→ Media Link #b3) resigned from the secretariat of the International in order – as he explained – to offer the new government no pretext for the "durch Jahre angekündigten Vernichtungsmaßnahmen gegen die Organisationen und Institutionen der Arbeiterklasse". As it became clear that this tactic had not worked, Wels reversed this move on 18 May.³³

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The communists were only prepared to stop their attacks on the social democrats and to come together with them to oppose fascism from 1934 onward. But the International was now buried by the propaganda of the Comintern and was forced onto the defensive in view of the communist *Volksfront* (popular front) strategy. Cooperation with the Third International remained unimaginable for some LSI members in view of the previous attacks. Consequently, only the French, the Italians and the Spanish responded directly to the offer from Moscow. The International avoided this dilemma only by leaving the decision about alliances up to the individual member parties.³⁴

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During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) also, there was no joint action between the two Internationals. The show trials that began in Moscow in 1936 under the rule of Iosif V. Stalin (1879–1953) (→ Media Link #b4) and their effects in Spain, where Soviet agents hunted left-wing opponents behind the front, made many LSI members even more doubtful that the communists were genuinely interested in cooperation. At the same time, however, the LSI failed to show anything like as much solidarity with the Spanish Republic as the Comintern did, notwithstanding the actions of individual parties, particularly those from Scandinavia. The French Popular Front government under the socialist Léon Blum (1872–1950) (→ Media Link #b5) largely adhered to the non-intervention pact. The international brigades recruited by the Comintern appeared as a purely communist project, even though socialists also fought in them against the putschists under Francisco Franco (1892–1975) (→ Media Link #b6).

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The end of the LSI was in sight when it failed to adopt a unified position on the Munich Agreement of September 1938, in which Italy, Great Britain and France consented to the annexation of the Sudetenland by National Socialist Germany. The British Labour Party completely rejected the agreement and called for stiff resistance against the expansionary aims of the National Socialist regime, while the French socialists supported the agreement. The Czech social democrats for their part resigned from the LSI, renounced the class struggle and internationalism, and expelled all Jews from their ranks.³⁵ In the context of this political paralysis, the leadership of the LSI

resigned in May 1939. While the executive did meet a number of times after that – for the last time in April 1940 – the ability of the International to act was irretrievably gone. Thus, the umbrella organization of the non-communist workers' movement quietly disappeared from the political stage.

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Conclusion

If one applies the standards of so-called *Realpolitik*, the power of the International was always overestimated by its supporters and opponents alike. Up to 1914, it was considered capable (and considered itself capable) of organizing the victory of the proletariat across state borders in the event of an existential crisis of capitalism. However, this proved to be utopian, in spite of all references to the Marxist programme. As the outbreak of war in 1914 demonstrated, the politics of the socialists was also primarily determined by national factors. This was even more true after 1918, as in many countries member parties of the International participated in national governments. One might expect that this participation of members in governments would increase the power of the International in the interwar period. But the opposite was the case. The aura of the pre-1914 International, which supposedly led the proletariat worldwide, was gone, and the individual parties were more integrated than ever into the national politics of their respective countries and in this way had become more predictable. The small number of initiatives that emanated from the International at this stage failed due to the differences between the individual national contexts.

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The International Working Men's Association and the Second International prior to 1914 had hardly been any more effective than the Labour and Socialist International was after the First World War, but the former had been part of the heroic phase of the workers' movement. Prior to 1914, the congresses of the International had served to clarify the programme, which also meant that irreconcilable positions could lead to splits in the organization (this occurred particularly in the IWA). But the International had never in fact acted as a unified global party of the proletariat. The faith of its supporters and the fear of its opponents were the central resources of its power.

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On the Further Development and Historiography of the International

After the end of the Second World War, the Socialist International (SI) was founded in Frankfurt am Main in 1951 as the successor organization to the LSI³⁶, after several attempts to answer the question of whether the SPD should be admitted to the new organization had failed. The British Labour Party dominated the SI until the late 1950s, though the German, Austrian and Swedish social democrats gained a dominant position thereafter. For a long time, the Socialist International remained essentially a European institution. It was only in the period between 1976 and 1992, during which the former German chancellor Willy Brandt (1913–1992) (→ Media Link #b7) was chairman of the SI, that numerous parties in Latin America, Africa and Asia joined, and the organization gained appreciable influence in international politics.³⁷

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Research on the history of the International Working Men's Association already began in the first years of the 20th century with the gathering of dispersed documents.³⁸ In 1920 the Marx-Engels Institute³⁹ in Moscow, and in 1935 the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam started systematically archiving and evaluating documents relating to the history of the First and Second Internationals. The archive of the Labour and Socialist International was transferred to the IISH in Amsterdam⁴⁰ after the Second World War. From the mid-1950s, the first survey works on the history of the International were published.⁴¹ In the subsequent decade, Julius Braunthal, who had been secretary of the SI for several years, produced a three-volume history of the International, which remains a standard on this topic up to the present, even though sections of it are written in a journalistic style and it often argues in a justificatory manner.⁴² Parallel to this, the conference protocols of the Second International were published.⁴³ However, since then no new comprehensive account of the history of the International before 1940 has been published. While there was a research group on the history of the Second International in the GDR, its research was restricted by the narrow ideological constraints of Marxism-Leninism.⁴⁴ However, the reaction of the international workers' movement to the First World War has repeatedly attracted academic interest.⁴⁵

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Bernd Rother (→ Media Link #b8)

Appendix

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Notes

1. ^ For example, in the message "An die Arbeiter Frankreichs von den Arbeitern Englands" of 1863, cf. Braunthal, Internationale 1961, vol. 1, pp. 106f.
2. ^ See, for example: Paulmann, Reformer 2010.
3. ^ For a summary of the manifesto, see: Braunthal, Internationale 1961, vol. 1, pp. 106f. The full text is printed in: Rjazanov, Geschichte der Ersten Internationale 1926, p. 172.
4. ^ Braunthal, Internationale 1961, vol. 1, p. 108.
5. ^ Marx, Inauguraladresse 1962, pp. 5–13, and idem, Provisorische Statuten 1962, pp. 14–16.
6. ^ Haupt, Internationale 1972, column 1013 ("the International was a loose revolutionary organization, which primarily pursued the aim of establishing connections between the workers' movements in the individual countries in order to create the conditions for joint action." transl. by N. Williams).
7. ^ Braunthal, Internationale 1961, vol. 1, pp. 124 and 127.
8. ^ Ibidem, pp. 121f., citing *The Times* of 5 June 1871. The numbers of reputed members of the International came from documents of the French judiciary about the prosecution of members of the commune revolt in 1871.
9. ^ On this and other examples, see ibidem, p. 124.
10. ^ Ibidem, p. 128 ("The general council did in fact intervene in numerous strikes which were threatened by foreign strike breakers. ... These acts of helpful solidarity brought the fame of the International to thousands of workers' families. ... The reputation of the International grew to legendary proportions when it became known that it had succeeded here and there to bring the struggles of workers to a successful conclusion through its intervention." transl. by N. Williams).
11. ^ Haupt, Internationale 1972, column 1013.
12. ^ Braunthal, Internationale 1961, vol. 1, pp. 163–169.
13. ^ Ibidem, pp. 143–150, 153.
14. ^ For greater detail on this: Marx, Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich 1961, pp. 313–365.
15. ^ This grouping argued for the introduction of socialism by a military coup.
16. ^ For example, the summary in Eley, Forging Democracy 2002, p. 41.
17. ^ Braunthal, Internationale 1961, vol. 1, pp. 154–160.
18. ^ Ibidem, p. 251 ("The name 'Second International' was given to it [...] by the newspapers and historians." transl. by N. Williams).
19. ^ Ibidem, pp. 254–257.
20. ^ Cf. Groh, Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus 1973.
21. ^ Kriegel, Internationale 1976, p. 42.
22. ^ Cf. Rebérioux, Sozialismus 1976, pp. 50f., quotation on p. 51 ("expected the crisis to continue to simmer, but not boil over. In retrospect, this was its most serious mistake." transl. by N. Williams).
23. ^ Sassoon, Socialism 1996, p. 28.
24. ^ Ibidem, p. 29.
25. ^ Braunthal, Internationale 1963, vol. 2, pp. 18 and 37.
26. ^ Sassoon, Socialism 1976, p. 29; and in places also in Braunthal, Internationale 1963, vol. 2, pp. 22 and 30.
27. ^ For example: Schickl, Universalismus 2012.
28. ^ Ibidem, pp. 168 and 173 ("unshakeably on democratic ground" transl. by N. Williams).
29. ^ Ibidem, pp. 177f.
30. ^ Ibidem, pp. 251 and 285f ("as an affiliation of socialist workers' parties (that view the replacement of the capitalist form of production with a socialist one as the aim and class struggle as the means of the emancipation of the working class.", "in the event of conflicts between nations", "as the highest authority for them", transl. by N. Williams).

31. ^ Ibidem, pp. 289ff ("any intention of a military intervention[, which would] not remove the errors of the present phase of the Russian Revolution, but the revolution itself.").
32. ^ Ibidem, pp. 340 and 360 ("the strongest possible pressure of the masses, even in revolutionary form" transl. by N. Williams).
33. ^ Ibidem, pp. 404 and 410 ("to stop attacking each other and to fight together against fascism.", "devastating measures against the organizations and institutions of the working class that it had been proposing for years" transl. by N. Williams).
34. ^ Ibidem, pp. 496ff.
35. ^ Ibidem, pp. 510ff.
36. ^ <http://www.socialistinternational.org>.
37. ^ See Devin, L'Internationale 1993.
38. ^ Cf. Guillaume, L'Internationale 1905–1910 and Rjazanov, Beitrag zur Geschichte 1914.
39. ^ <http://www.gopb.ru>.
40. ^ <http://socialhistory.org>.
41. ^ Cf. Joll, The Second International 1889–1914 1955; Cole, The Second International 1889–1914 1953.
42. ^ See Braunthal, Geschichte der Internationale 1961–1963.
43. ^ See Haupt, La Deuxième Internationale 1964; Labour and Socialist International, Kongreß-Protokolle 1974–1976.
44. ^ For example: Kowalski, Geschichte der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale 1985.
45. ^ Georges Haupt's book remains authoritative on this: Haupt, Socialism and the Great War 1972.

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Eingeordnet unter:

Transnational Movements and Organisations › International Social Movements* › Socialist International

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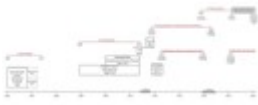
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