

Worlds of Women

International Material in the Collections of ARAB



Letters from Clara Zetkin

Martin Grass



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Worlds of Women – International Material in ARAB’s collections (WoW) is a project at ARAB to highlight and promote research on working women’s transnational relations. Through distribution of these works ARAB hopes to encourage international research and exchange. The project is financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond

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Correspondence in various forms—from circulars to personal letters—was the main contact and information medium during the early socialist transnational cooperation, also for women's organizations and between women. They report and disseminate information, send invitations to, for example, conferences, follow up personal contacts made at congresses, conferences, and study tours, ask for transnational assistance, and more. Correspondence is always an element, often a key one, in women's personal papers, in the archives of the women's federations, including the socialist, communist, and syndicalist, at the Labour Movement Archives and Library (ARAB) in Stockholm. But women correspondents naturally also appear in other organizations' archives, as well as in men's. Accessing the letters is not always easy as there is neither a list of correspondents for all the archives nor as yet a common, cumulative database of correspondents. Furthermore, the correspondents are not classified as either women or men, and the contents of the letters are not shown by search criteria. Where there is a list of correspondents, it is necessary to know names in order to find letters from, for example, women. In order to ascertain whether letters contain relevant information on transnational contacts, one must simply read them.

As an example, the eleven letters in the ARAB's archive collection written by Clara Zetkin will be presented below. Clara Zetkin (born 5 July 1857, died 20 June 1933) was a prominent figure in the German and international socialist women's movement up to and including the First World War. In 1907, she took the initiative to form an organizationally cohesive international organization, the Socialist Women's International, and served as its secretary. She was the coordinator and the driving and unifying force of the Women's International. Up until the spring of 1917, she was editor of the German Social Democratic Party's women's journal *Die Gleichheit. Zeitschrift für die Interessen der Arbeiterinnen*, which was both a kind of mouthpiece for the Women's International and a forum for a transnational exchange of information. Naturally, Clara Zetkin early on received attention in *Morgonbris*, the journal of the Swedish Social Democratic women's movement that formed itself under different names between 1902 and 1920, when Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Kvinnoförbund (the National Federation of Social Democratic Women in Sweden) was formally established. In no. 3, 1906, for example, she was presented by Wilhelm Jansson, a former Swedish gardener who went on to make a career in the German trade union movement and was much in demand as an important contact between the Swedish and German labour movements. Clara

Zetkin's book *Arbeiterinnen- und Frauenfrage der Gegenwart* (1889) was published in Swedish under the title 'Arbeterskor och nutidens kvinnor' in *Morgonbris* no. 2–4, 1905, and 1–4, 1906.

Clara Zetkin's eleven letters span just over a decade, from 1906 to 1917—three letters from 1906 and one from 1907, three letters from 1910 and one from 1911, one letter from 1914 and two from 1917. With the exception of one from 1910 and the two from 1917, the letters can be described as personally addressed circulars from the secretary of the Women's International. They were also sent to women's organizations in other countries. But the letters are interesting, nevertheless. They reflect not only Clara Zetkin's aim of bringing women together, making contacts and disseminating information across borders, but also the barriers to transnational cooperation, namely language difficulties, problems with recipients of letters with whom Clara Zetkin was acquainted but who were perhaps not always the most appropriate counterparts, dependence on committed people in national organizations, dependence on the national organizations' resources, actions, reactions, etc.

Letters written in German will be summarized and commented upon. A list of letters and the archives in which they can be found follows at the end of this overview. Seven of them were recently published under the title 'Sieben Briefe an Mitstreiter in Schweden 1906-1914' in Ulla Plener's book *Clara Zetkin in ihrer Zeit*.¹

Letters to Hjalmar Branting, 1906 and 1907

On 17 March 1906, Clara Zetkin writes to Hjalmar Branting, chairman of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) and well known within the international labour movement. Based on a news item in the *Hamburger Echo* on women's suffrage in Sweden, and with reference to a resolution on women's voting rights put forward at the Socialist International Congress in Amsterdam in 1904, she asks Branting to see to it that an article is written for *Die Gleichheit* about women's suffrage in Sweden.² She asks Branting for 'assistance' because she does not yet know any other Swedish female or male party member. It is certainly evident from the following letter sent in June that there had, after all, been contacts with female Swedish party members, but to contact Branting, the leading personality in the Swedish Social Democratic movement, was, at the same time, a way to lend greater legitimacy to her request. Her wish is for someone to write 'a very thorough account of the issue'—later she repeats: 'a clear and comprehensive description of the situation'. *Die Gleichheit*, she informs, is the Social Democratic women's journal and has 36,000 subscribers, but is read by 'at least double that number of people'. Given *Die Gleichheit*'s

circulation, it, therefore, ‘pays’ to invest the time in writing such an article, quite aside from the fact that the female German party members, ‘both as fellow party members and as women’, are more or less entitled (‘Anrecht’) to be informed on this issue, which Clara Zetkin describes as ‘very important’.

The requested article was written by Branting himself, who was, of course, very involved in the suffrage issue. This is evident from Zetkin’s letter of 26 June, where she thanks him for his ‘very interesting and useful article’, which will be published in a forthcoming edition of *Die Gleichheit*. On behalf of the German female party members, she gives special thanks that Branting himself had taken the time to write ‘in such detail’. Branting’s status naturally lent weight. She also mentions that, among other things, the suffrage issue will be discussed at the German Social Democratic women’s upcoming party conference in Mannheim. It would be ‘very nice’ if any of the Swedish Social Democratic women ‘who have already been to Germany several times’ could participate. The direct contacts that clearly existed would thus become more official. In a postscript, she asks for some supplementary information. Branting had mentioned Anna Sterky in his article and described her as the ‘organizer of most female trade unions in Stockholm’. Does this mean specific trade unions for women, or is it that Anna Sterky specifically organizes women as union members? Clara Zetkin wonders. The special local women’s unions (mostly different seamstress’ unions) and the Women’s Trade Union Federation formed in October 1902, to which Branting was referring in his article, differed from the norm in Germany and, therefore, needed explanation. Whether Branting replied, and if so what he said, I do not know. There is, in any case, no letter in the personal papers of Clara Zetkin in the Federal Archives in Berlin (BArch-SAPMO, Ny 4005). This letter and other relevant letters may be found in Moscow (Rossiskij Centr Chranenija i Izučeniija Dokumentov Novejšj Istorii/Russian Centre for Preservation and Research of Modern Historical Documents). In any case, the abovementioned sentence remains in the published article, and there is no explanatory note.

Branting’s article, dated 20 June 1906, was published in *Die Gleichheit* no. 14, 11 July 1906, pp. 92–3, entitled ‘Frauenstimmrecht und Sozialdemokratie in Schweden’. Branting mentions, among other things, that women have the right to vote in municipal elections only, but because the right was income related it still effectively excluded women. He also mentions that women have the right to vote in a meaningless election, the church elections—incidentally, translated incorrectly as ‘clergy

elections'. The SAP and a radical faction of the non-socialist parties demand universal suffrage. However, the SAP's tactic was—in order to achieve results—universal suffrage for men first, then universal suffrage for women too; a tactic that, according to Branting, was also supported by the leading female members of the SAP, Anna Sterky and Kata Dalström. 'Anarcho-Socialists' within the SAP have the opposite view. Social Democracy's goal, however, is 'universal, equal, and direct suffrage for men and women in elections to a single parliamentary chamber!' This suggested tactical approach had, for instance, been formulated by Branting and the chairman of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), Herman Lindqvist, on behalf of the Social Democratic parliamentary group in a declaration dated 2 March 1906. In a meeting at Folkets Hus in Stockholm a few days later, Branting justified the resolution, but it was heavily criticized by women. In *Morgonbris* no.1, March 1906, where the statement and the debate were reproduced, it was said, however, that opinion was 'extremely divided' on this issue among working-class women.

Clara Zetkin immediately sent some copies of *Die Gleichheit* to Branting, but they clearly never arrived. In a postcard, dated 31 October, she promised to send some more copies and thanked Branting again for his 'efforts'. The card, addressed to *Social-Demokraten*'s editorial office, did not reach Branting in Stockholm. It was forwarded *poste restante* to Amsterdam, where Branting was at the meeting of the International Socialist Bureau on 10 November. A postmark reveals that the card arrived in Amsterdam on 17 November. Branting was then no longer in Amsterdam (on 13 and 14 November, he was in Brussels on his way home). But he must have received it eventually because it is in the correspondence in his personal papers.

On 8 November 1907, Clara Zetkin had another request for an article, this time a 'very thorough and accurate' article on women's limited voting rights in Norway. In 1907, women taxpayers in Norway had been granted political voting rights and eligibility for election. Again, she asks Branting to arrange an author for the article. Whether Branting wrote this article too, or managed to find another writer, I have not been able to ascertain.

The interesting thing about Clara Zetkin's letters to Branting is that they show that contacts with the Swedish Social Democratic women's movement were not so developed that it was possible to directly approach without the need for a 'detour' via the Social Democratic movement's best-known man, Hjalmar Branting. This 'detour' can, at the same time, be seen as a tactical move to increase

the importance of the women's movement and its demands within the SAP and the labour movement in Sweden.

The Swedish women did not participate in the German women's conference held in Mannheim in 1906, but a short news item about the conference can be found in *Morgonbris* no. 3, September 1906. Sweden was, however, represented by one participant at the First International Socialist Women's Conference in Stuttgart in August 1907, initiated by Clara Zetkin, which laid the foundations for a Women's International. Borlänge women's club delegated Maria Kvist. Stockholm's women's club had proposed her at the executive committee meeting of the Social Democratic women's organization on 14 August 1907, because she 'was already there'. Her husband, Fabian Månsson, was part of the Swedish delegation to the International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart, and she came along. But 'the issue came to nothing' because she had, of course, already been chosen by Borlänge women's club. The discussion revealed that internal communication did not function satisfactorily. Anna Sterky, one of the pioneers of the women's movement and the first editor of *Morgonbris* (1904–1909), had received an invitation to the conference, but had not 'informed about it', so that the issue could be dealt with in time'. In response to this criticism, Anna Sterky said that Maria Kvist could not, in any case, have been sent as a representative as they had no knowledge of her position on decisions taken. In *Morgonbris* no. 6, December 1907, 'Några ögonblicksbilder från Stuttgart' was published by Maria Quist (with that spelling), and in no. 4, September 1907, the outcome of this first international conference was summarized by Wilhelm Jansson.

Letters to Ruth Gustafson, 1910

In 1910, the situation is different. In conjunction with the 1910 International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen, the Second International Women's Conference took place on 26–27 August. In view of this conference, Clara Zetkin wrote, on 10 May, a longer, nine-page letter to Ruth Gustafson, chair of the Social Democratic women's organization (1907–1910) and the editor of *Morgonbris* (1908–1910 and 1917–1920). At the same time, she replied to a letter from Ruth Gustafson. Clara Zetkin discusses, first, the women's conference. It was to take place before the General Socialist Congress in order to be able to present, there, joint motions from the women's conference. The programme was to include three items:

- (i) regular contact between the various countries' women's organizations;

- (ii) universal suffrage for women; and
- (iii) government measures for caring for mothers and children.

This programme had been approved, but, at the same time, an additional number of subjects had been proposed, which would have required not ‘a two-day, but a three-month’ conference. Clara Zetkin recommends a few items that could be discussed ‘thoroughly’. With regard to items 2 and 3, she, thus, sees it as the task of the conference to formulate ‘some general guidelines—without disregarding the different circumstances in the individual countries and without stereotyping’. This was in keeping with a typical attitude during the period of the Second International: it is up to the affiliated organizations which are sovereign to determine whether they want to or can implement the international resolutions which are only advisory recommendations.

Clara Zetkin’s request is that the Swedish women’s organization participates in the conference in order to establish a ‘permanent and regular contact with the female party comrades in other countries’. A link with the Women’s International is, according to Clara Zetkin, ‘easy’. A contact person is appointed who is ‘obligated’ to inform about the organization, the situation and political activities in each country, the development of the women’s movement, and the status of the female workers. This can be done in the form of articles—for longer articles a fee is received—news items or ‘personal newsletters’. These will be published in *Die Gleichheit*, principally under the heading ‘I.K.: Internationale Korrespondenz’. The contact person is, in turn, ‘duty bound’ to disseminate the international information in her country.

Clara Zetkin points out that, as the current secretary of the Women’s International, she has regular contact with Austria, Bohemia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, England, France, Finland, Russia, Poland, and the USA. There exists sporadic contact with Denmark, Belgium, and Italy. Sweden and Norway have been on her wish list for a long time. There had by way of letter been contact with Sweden, namely with Kata Dalström, the only woman on the SAP’s executive committee since 1897. Hjalmar Branting had recommended her. However, the contact did not work satisfactorily since Kata Dalström only wrote in Swedish, and Clara Zetkin did not have anybody who could translate the letters and the information. In a letter to Hjalmar Branting, dated 19 October 1895, Kata Dalström herself acknowledged: ‘Admittedly, my written German is so terrible indeed’. Here, a problem is touched on that played an important role for the transnational contacts within the early labour movement: the language problem. Clara Zetkin hopes that a contact person is appointed

who can write in German, or in English or French. Kata Dalström was probably not the most suitable contact person. She was far too involved in the SAP, not least as a travelling agitator. The International Secretariat had, in any case, been offered a copy of *Morgonbris*, which Clara Zetkin was 'very pleased' about, in exchange for *Die Gleichheit* which Ruth Gustafson had proposed as late as 24 January 1910. 'I saw this as the first opportunity for regular contact', writes Clara Zetkin. She hoped that eventually this information would result in something positive: increased contacts.

To conclude, Clara Zetkin replied to Ruth Gustafson's letter. She reports that she cannot write the desired article—the subject is not mentioned—but encloses a summary of 'the the German women's organizational structure', an eight-page, typewritten text in German. In her supplementary comments, Clara Zetkin points out, among other things, that the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) had, in June 1909, 62,259 women members and that the General Commission of German Trade Unions (GGD) reported 138,443 women union members up to 1908. The SPD's Women's Bureau and the Women's Secretariat of the General Commission of German Trade Unions are responsible for the work with and recruitment of new women members. The women's journal *Die Gleichheit*, published by the SPD, plays an important role for information and agitation. It has 7,000 subscribers, but is read by 'at least double the number'. The following women play an important role within the Social Democratic and trade-union women's movement, above all Helene Grünberg (one of 'the best standard-bearers of the movement' in southern Germany and behind the agitation and organizing work among the housemaids who have now formed their own union) and Emma Ihrer (one of 'the founders of the socialist women's movement' and one of 'the oldest and most deserving female party comrades in Germany'). Also in alphabetical order: Ida Altmann, Ottilie Baader, Linchen Baumann, Käte Duncker, Madame Gewehr, Gertrud Hanna (secretary of the Women's Secretariat of the General Commission of German Trade Unions), Berta Selinger, Paula Thiede, Martha Tietz, Marie Wackwitz, Madame Wengels, Mathilde Wurm, and Luise Zietz (member of the SPD's party executive). Rosa Luxemburg is also mentioned, but she is, according to Clara Zetkin, less active within the German women's movement, but has done so much more within the Polish women's movement.

Clara Zetkin announces that she is going to send a number of brochures and recommends, in particular, the reports from the various countries at the First International Women's Conference, with information about Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland, and England. She

also highlights some issues that are especially topical in Germany at the present moment: women's suffrage, health and accident insurance, maternal care, child care, the increase in food prices, protective measures for female workers, compulsory further education for girls as well as the political activity of women at the municipal level. Moreover, she informs that there is a clear dividing line between the Social Democratic and bourgeois women's movement. 'Our' actions are 'totally independent and without regard to' the bourgeois movement. Finally, she hopes to receive a positive reply with regard to the Swedish women's organization's cooperation with the Women's International and, at the same time, asks for arranging a contact with the Norwegian's women's organization. And she then asks to be remembered to Hjalmar Branting.

In the detailed summary enclosed that was published in Swedish in *Morgonbris* no. 6 and no 10 in 1910 under the title 'Från Tysklands socialdemokratiska kvinnorörelse', Clara Zetkin outlines the development and form of the organization within the Social Democratic women's movement, by citing from the constitution. She also refers to the various SPD congresses, from Halle in 1890 to Leipzig in 1909, where the women's issue had been discussed.³ Incidentally, Hjalmar Branting, who, in 1890, participated in the Halle Congress—one of the seven congresses mentioned—does not include the women's issue in his congress reports and articles on the SPD congresses.

On 6 June 1910, Clara Zetkin sent the invitation to the Second International Women's Conference in Copenhagen on 26–27 August. It was published in *Morgonbris* no. 7, 1910.⁴ The programme included the four items that Clara Zetkin had earlier proposed. Again, she appeals for Sweden to participate. At the same time, she utilizes supposed Swedish transnational contacts within the geographical proximity and asks that an extra copy of the invitation letter be forwarded to the Norwegian women's organization and that the recommendation be put forward that the Norwegian women will approach the International Secretariat.

Clara Zetkin's letter was discussed at the meeting of the women's organization's executive committee on 21 June. It was noted, in particular, that 'a large number of attendees from Sweden' were expected, and the women's clubs were called upon to submit motions for the congress. Clara Zetkin's appeal proved successful. In a letter, dated 29 July, she expressed her thanks for the Social Democratic women's organization's draft resolutions and motions that had been submitted. These are printed in *Morgonbris* no. 8, 1910, including from the Stockholm Women's Club and the Norrköping Women's Club.⁵ There, it also says which representatives had been chosen—in her letter,

Clara Zetkin wondered whether Swedish women are going to participate in the conference and, if so, how many—namely Anna Sterky, Ruth Gustafson, Elin Lindley, Amanda Frösell (all from Stockholm), Helene Ugland-Andersson (Norrköping), and Adolfina Larsson (Gällivare). In *Morgonbris* no. 9, 1910, pp. 1–3, 6–7, and no. 10, pp. 1–4, 6–8, the conference, including the Swedish report to the conference, was reported in detail. It is evident that Kata Dalström was also present.⁶ The geographical proximity contributed to a greater Swedish representation, which, incidentally, was also the case for the general congress.

Letter to Kata Dalström, 1911

The conference in Copenhagen showed that the Swedish women's organization now participated more actively in the international cooperation, but, according to Clara Zetkin, clearly still not enough. All the material she had sent and all the information that was to help inspire, strengthen, and expand the international movement had, according to her, not produced the desired result. In a letter to Kata Dalström, dated 20 January 1911, she again requests that it is ensured that Swedish women appoint an international correspondent who can report 'all that is worth noting about the development and the actions of the Swedish sisters'. She also mentions that she has sent the German material and assumed that they had used the literature sent and that *Morgonbris* had published an article on Emma Ihrer, for which *Die Gleichheit* had given material. Emma Ihrer died on 8 January 1911, and a short obituary was published in *Morgonbris* no. 2, 1911⁷ In this context, Clara Zetkin also mentions Wilhelm Jansson. He sometimes contributed to *Morgonbris*. In *Morgonbris* no. 1, 1911, his article on 'The Women's Organizations in Germany' was published. Moreover, he had already long ago written two articles on the German women's movement that were published in *Morgonbris* (April 1905), in which he, amongst other things, presented some of the leading women who Clara Zetkin had also called attention to, among them Emma Ihrer.

Clara Zetkin is fully aware that Kata Dalström would not have time to regularly send some information given her 'strenuous activities'. She requests, however, a short three-page piece in German, French, or English for a planned suffrage newspaper, of which she was the publisher, for the first Social Democratic Women's Day in Germany on 19 March. The newspaper will have an 'international character'. In the piece, women's suffrage in Sweden should also be briefly discussed, above all the position of the political and trade-union labour movement as well as the non-socialist parties and the bourgeois women's movement. 'Together with the manifestation of international

solidarity, this would give powerful support to our agitation'. If Kata Dalström were to be prevented from doing so, she is, thus, requested to give the assignment to another female party comrade. In this newspaper, *Frauenwahlrecht!*, published on 13 March 1911 (sixteen pages), there was no piece by Kata Dalström and neither was there a piece by any other Swede; however, there were messages from both Finland (Hilja Pärssinen) and Norway (Anna Gjøstein). Moreover, among others, nine of the leading Germans within the trade-union and political movement, mentioned in the letter to Ruth Gustafson in May 1910, contributed. Consequently, contacts with the Women's International and the German women are, on the part of Sweden, still irregular. Even the Norwegian women's organization, which who Clara Zetkin was interested in approaching made an appearance.

Letter to Anna Lindhagen, 1914

In March 1914, the fourth German Social Democratic Women's Day took place. Again Zetkin published another issue of *Frauenwahlrecht!* no. 4, 8 March 1914. On 28 March, she wrote a letter to Anna Lindhagen, who worked as the international secretary of the Social Democratic women's organization and the editor of *Morgonbris* (1911–1917), informing her that Women's Day had been 'a total success everywhere'. However, the letter was about something else. In August, a new International Women's Conference was to convene in conjunction with the Socialist International's planned congress in Vienna. A preliminary meeting was to be held on 20 April in Copenhagen, which was later changed to Berlin, and, according to Clara Zetkin, it would be of 'particular importance' that a Scandinavian representative participated. Moreover, it would be 'very good' if a Swedish or Scandinavian could, on 21 April, speak at a follow-up protest meeting on the subject 'World Peace and International Solidarity'. They had to, however, bargain on the police prohibiting foreign participants from giving speeches or 'at the last minute' even banning the whole meeting. However, 'the agitatorial effect' would not, for that reason, be any less and the planned speeches and messages would be published as well.

Clara Zetkin asks, however, that this information should be treated 'confidentially' and must not be publicly announced 'lest the police stop the thing in advance'. The letter was discussed at the women's organization's executive committee on 2 April. For financial reasons, the decision was taken to not travel to Berlin, but they would submit a Swedish report (I have not been able to find out whether this was the case). The programme of the International Women's Conference was published in *Morgonbris* no. 4, April 1914. The items to be discussed were the struggle for

women's suffrage, safety legislation and social measures for the protection of mother and child, and the high cost of living. The last item was missing from the final programme. Already on 9 February, it had been discussed in the executive committee. Some changes were suggested, for instance Sweden and England would also have the opportunity to report on the suffrage issue because of 'their special circumstances'. On the child-care issue, Denmark should also have the opportunity to speak. Anna Lindhagen took it upon herself to inform Clara Zetkin about these proposals. Neither a Swedish nor any other Scandinavian participant came to the preliminary meeting or took part in the protest meeting. The Swedish Social Democratic women's organization still kept itself within its national borders, this time because of a lack of financial resources. In the end, due to the outbreak of war in August, neither the women's conference nor the International Congress took place.

The outbreak of war

The outbreak of war in August 1914 entailed a suspension of the normal transnational contacts and an end to the Internationals' activities. The Social Democratic parties ended up in different camps, both in various belligerent and neutral camps, but they were also ideologically split. The discussions were, for instance, about supplying the correct information over the now-closed borders, the interpretation of the situation that had arisen, and the right conclusions for the approach to the war during this period as well as peace measures. Clara Zetkin's name, however not in her own handwriting, together with Karl Liebknecht's, Rosa Luxemburg's, and Franz Mehring's (not in their own handwriting either) are on a declaration addressed to the newspaper *Social-Demokraten*, dated 10 September 1914 (in the personal papers of Hjalmar Branting). The four signers also in the name of other German Social Democrats disassociated themselves from the information that the Social Democrats Albert Südekum and Richard Fischer had published in the party press in the neutral countries of Sweden, Italy, and Switzerland. On 12–17 August, Südekum visited Sweden and wrote the article 'Tyskland och kriget. Ett ord till Sveriges socialdemokrater' published in *Social-Demokraten* on 24 August, where he, amongst other things, talked about Germany's vital defensive battle against the Western powers and Russia, and the necessity of winning the war in order to preserve their national existence. In this context, he also justified the attack on neutral Belgium.

In his comment, Hjalmar Branting rejected the view that the strongest power was to be the weakest, denounced the violation of Belgium's neutrality which 'will never be understood in Sweden', and criticized other 'incorrect and misleading' opinions in the article. During the coming

years, the polemic against Südekum, and, incidentally, also against the above-mentioned Wilhelm Jansson, who agitated in the same way in Sweden in August and September 1914 and during the rest of the war, continued. Liebknecht, Luxemburg, Mehring, and Zetkin spoke only in general terms about them having a completely different view of the war, its causes, character, as well as the role of German Social Democracy than the majority of the Social Democratic Party. 'The state of siege' in Germany, however, makes it impossible to develop this 'publicly' at the present time. By voting on 2 December 1914 in the Reichstag against the war credits, Karl Liebknecht and the left-wing opposition then made their dissenting position and the actual split within German Social Democracy publicly known.

Clara Zetkin also became active. On 10 December 1914, she published an appeal to the women of Germany and the international women's movement, demanding a quick peace without annexations. The appeal that was published in *Morgonbris* no. 1, January 1915, p. 7, and that, in accordance with the decision of the Social Democratic women's organization, was to be sent to all of the Swedish party newspapers (minutes of the national executive, 16 December 1914) ended with the exhortation: 'In the fight against the war, we socialist women shall always be among the progressives, the stormers'. Subsequently, she also organized an International women's conference in Berne on 26–29 March 1915. Twenty-five delegates from eight countries participated, nobody from Sweden or any other Scandinavian country. (A month later, however, Anna Lindhagen participated in the International Women's Congress in The Hague on 28–30 April.) The conference, for instance, called upon women to organize mass anti-war and peace protests.

The Stockholm Conference, 1917

After the outbreak of war, attempts were made, principally by the Social Democrats in the neutral countries and the left-wing groups, to bring the divided Socialist International back together again. However, not until after the Russian Revolution in February 1917, was a breakthrough for renewed transnational socialist cooperation and a peace move thought to be within reach. The International Socialist Bureau's provisional Dutch executive committee, together with the secretary of the International, the Belgian Camille Huysmans and with the support of the Scandinavian Social Democratic parties, sent out invitations to an International Socialist Conference in Stockholm.⁸ When the invitation to the conference became known, Clara Zetkin immediately announced the self-evident and fundamental claim and right of women to be allowed to participate in the conference

and straightaway appointed the Russian Angelika Balabanova, at the time still in exile in Zurich, later in Stockholm, and Dutch Heleen Ankersmit as representatives of the Women's International. This was without having first obtained the opinion and approval of the member organizations. She wrote this in her letter to Angelika Balabanova, dated 23 April 1917.

In the letter and the enclosed mandate for the two women representatives, Clara Zetkin justified her unusual decision that she had taken 'after careful consideration', and which she was sure would be approved because of 'the unusual situation' (the time aspect given the problem, for instance, with the postal service) as well as considering the crucial importance of the peace issue. 'I believe that it is simply impossible for International Socialists at this historical point in time to exclude the participation of the socialist women in this peace work by socialists of all countries for some formalistic, let alone objective reasons', she writes. In a letter to Anna Lindhagen, dated 2 July, she restated her opinions and thoughts, and again emphasized that it is 'absolutely necessary that the socialist women are involved where people are sincerely and seriously working for a peace that is in keeping with our principles'. The women's involvement in peace work is important 'precisely because we women are female people [weibliche Menschen] and not failed, botched copies of men, and represent our own spiritual and moral values with regard to dealing with and solving the present issues'. It was necessary to forward the Zimmerwald principles that were formulated at the women's conference in Berne. Moreover, Clara Zetkin, thus, wrote in a letter to Anna Lindhagen—admittedly, not entirely correct—that women were 'the first' who, after the outbreak of war, tried to re-establish the 'old' international 'ties' and formulate principles for 'joint work for the common goal: peace and the restoration of the sister federation'. She was alluding to the said conference in Berne.

There was an alternative to participating in the Stockholm Conference: an International women's conference. Heleen Ankersmit, for instance, recommended this. Clara Zetkin was sceptical because of the aforementioned fundamental outlook, but also cited practical problems (passport and journeys). In a letter to Heleen Ankersmit (dated 16 May), which she enclosed as a copy in the letter to Anna Lindhagen, she stressed that the prerequisites for 'separate individual women's conferences on peace and understanding' no longer existed. Now, it is a question 'of bringing together all the similar fundamental powers'. At present, women's 'place and our workplace' is 'the large International'. In the letter to Anna Lindhagen, Clara Zetkin again stresses that women must take

part in the Stockholm Conference, and not just the left-wing groups' conference—the third Zimmerwald Conference, which, for instance the women in Switzerland had proposed—planned for the same time in Stockholm. Each country's women's federation can, of course, decide which of the conferences it wants to participate in, but the Women's International, as an organization, must attend all conferences 'that sincerely and seriously want to work for a general International that is willing and able to act'. 'Our advice and our voice must be considered wherever people are dealing with and contending for the elucidation and support of our principles'. This also includes, among other things, 'determining responsibility' for the war and an honourable settlement, 'debunking myths'—something that, incidentally, was not generally accepted during the preparations for the Stockholm Conference. A separate women's conference is, Clara Zetkin wrote to Heleen Ankersmit, only 'appropriate, yes necessary', if the Stockholm Conference is unsuccessful.

According to the letter to Heleen Ankersmit, nor did Clara Zetkin regard Stockholm to be a suitable place, at the present moment, for a separate women's conference in conjunction with the planned Stockholm Conference. It is the peace issues that dominate in Stockholm and supersede the major women's issues that, exacerbated by the war, must be dealt with and resolved. It must be ensured that the best prerequisites, even of the practical kind, are evident, principally that there is universal participation in the conference and its preparation is thorough. According to Clara Zetkin, the best time is actually after the conclusion of peace. As a programme, she proposed the already now well-known subjects, which were also intended for the 1914 conference: women's suffrage, protective measures and legal protection for female workers, including wage issues, and social care for women and children.

The left wing within the socialist movement, to which Clara Zetkin also belonged, likewise Angelika Balabanova and Heleen Ankersmit, was sceptical of rejecting the Stockholm Conference, also after the conference initiative of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies that was eventually merged with that of the Dutch–Scandinavian Committee. Clara Zetkin's frank and energetic attitude in favour of the participation of the Women's International in the Stockholm Conference and criticism of only taking part in the Zimmerwald Conference are, therefore, slightly surprising. This attitude must be attributed to her strong interest in achieving peace, documented, for instance, already in the said appeal from December 1914. For Zetkin, the demand for peace was 'the only basis for a meaningful integrative socialist action' after the outbreak of war that was

disillusioning, in the sense that it was not only the only opportunity to win back ‘the masses’ for the socialist action, but also for the necessary rallying of the divided International and, with that, the proletariat in all the countries. She warned the left wing of the disastrous attitude of only participating in its own conferences with like-minded people. The peace work was especially ‘preparatory work for the future’ since ‘purposeful and effective socialist mass action’ could not be productive during the war, but only after the peace. Participating in the ongoing attempt after the February Revolution to bring the International together by way of the Stockholm Conference and put the peace issue on the programme was, in other words, for Clara Zetkin a logical consequence, a necessity. I agree with Tânia Puschnerat⁹.

The conference plans were discussed on three occasions within the national executive of the Swedish Social Democratic women’s organization, with the international secretary Anna Lindhagen as the rapporteur and apparent driving force. On 23 May, she stated that she had received ‘in confidence’ a message about a proposal ‘to convene in Stockholm an Int. Soc. Women’s Congress of different trends of opinion’. It almost looks as if the question of the Stockholm Conference and a women’s conference had been mixed up. The Social Democratic women’s organization decided to wait and see: ‘to not comment about the proposal, but wait for further information’.

On 21 June, Anna Lindhagen informed that she ‘had personally been involved in sending out invites to the women’s congress with participants from different parties’. The congress was to ‘possibly’ be held at the same time as the Stockholm Conference. The peace issue, the protection of mothers, and same pay for the same work were some of the questions to be discussed—the latter items that Clara Zetkin had also mentioned, but wanted to put on the programme for a women’s conference to be held only after the war. Plans were, thus, made for an International women’s conference, which Clara Zetkin had not recommended, but which the women’s organizations had possibly demanded. Clara Zetkin seems, however, to be involved throughout, since Anna Lindhagen sent word, two weeks later, that inquiries had been sent to a number of women members of her own party ‘as if they were expected in Stockholm at the time of the eventual holding of the congress.’ And she had received replies ‘with a programme’ from, for instance, Clara Zetkin and Angelika Balabanova. The proposal ‘about a smaller preliminary conference involving Soc. Dem. women who may visit Stockholm at the time of the Soc. Dem. Peace Conference’, which was made at the same time, was shelved.

The Social Democratic women's organization, however, did not want to concern itself with the invitation to the Zimmerwald Conference in Stockholm, which Anna Lindhagen had forwarded. On this point, there were, in keeping with the ideological roots, different opinions. For instance, in a letter to Heleen Ankersmit, dated 22 July, Aleksandra Kollontay emphasized that a women's conference was to be held, and with the issues stated by Clara Zetkin, but only in conjunction with the Zimmerwald Conference. The Swiss women had adopted a similar position. In a draft letter, dated 21 July, Anna Lindhagen, on the other hand, concurred with the participation in the Stockholm Conference, suggested by Clara Zetkin, which she hoped would take place, and she also agreed with Zetkin's apprehensions about a women's conference at the present moment, but was still clearly involved in the latter's planning. Consequently, there are, here, some unclear points and unsolved questions, which there is no space for in this text to examine in more detail.

I have not been able to find much information in the source material about whether and how the question of female representation at the Stockholm Conference was further discussed and followed up. Thorvald Stauning, chairman of the Danish Social Democratic Party, who Clara Zetkin contacted on 25 April and whose opinion she sought, was ever so positive in his reply and wanted to help get women participants. However, at the same time, he recommended a separate women's conference with the female participants. The Dutch–Scandinavian Committee was apparently skeptical. According to the aforementioned draft letter to Clara Zetkin, Anna Lindhagen had asked Arthur Engberg, one of the secretaries in the committee, whether the Swedish women could send a representative to the Stockholm Conference. She also asked to be remembered to Camille Huysmans (her letter, dated 17 July 1917, in which she also reports on Clara Zetkin's involvement in the matter, is in the personal papers of Camille Huysmans in Antwerp). She had received 'the depressing reply' that women are only allowed to be represented through their parties. I do not have such a mandate, Anna Lindhagen concludes, but she hoped that several women delegates would be selected by their parties and that, at least, the mandate for Angelika Balabanova and Heleen Ankersmit would be accepted.

This issue, however, was not put to the test. The Stockholm Conference never took place despite more than six months of preparatory work. The organizing committee's manifesto of 15 September 1917 stated this fact. With that, the question of an International women's conference also fell by the wayside; it was postponed until a general socialist conference could be convened. The Dane Nina

Bang, who was part of the Dutch–Scandinavian Committee, and Luise Zietz, who was part of the German Independent Social Democratic Party’s delegation in one of the separate preparatory conferences, were the only women who participated in the Stockholm Conference’s preparatory work.

In September, however, two conferences took place in Stockholm; two separate conferences, which, in other words, Clara Zetkin had not recommended. Five women participated in the Third Zimmerwald Conference: Angelika Balabanova who was one of the members of the organizing committee and the secretary of the conference, Käthe Duncker (Germany), Rosa Bloch (Switzerland), Therese Schlesinger and Madame Luzzato (Austria). In conjunction with the Zimmerwald Conference, a separate women’s conference was also held on 14 September, chaired by Angelika Balabanova, with participants from Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, Russia, Rumania, Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden. In a statement, they ‘profoundly’ regretted that Clara Zetkin could not attend. They talked about the need for a new international journal like *Die Gleichheit*, since Clara Zetkin had, on 16 May 1917, been dismissed as editor by the executive of the German Social Democratic Party because of her leftist approach. Moreover, it was declared that the war had acted as a ‘great leveller’ regarding women’s work and lives, even having a ‘positively internationalizing effect’, which the submitted reports from the various countries showed. In that way, women and the working class would work for peace in accordance with the resolutions passed in Berne in 1915 and at the Zimmerwald Conferences. The war, however, was eventually concluded with a peace based on the terms of the victorious Great Powers, not those of the socialists and women.

Clara Zetkin was a central figure in the early socialist women’s movement. She has always been topical as a research object and her letters are sought after; for example, this was most recently demonstrated at the conference in Berlin in July 2007 to mark the 150th anniversary of her birth. That should be reason enough to present the letters from her that are kept in the Labour Movement Archives and Library in Stockholm. The letters reflect some of the women’s transnational cooperation, including both the committed work that Clara Zetkin and others carried out and the difficulties and obstacles which the transnational cooperation encountered, in normal times and intensified during the war period. The letters reveal interesting glimpses of the transnational work of

the Social Democratic women's organization, which, for the early period, has hardly been researched.

LIST OF ARCHIVES

ARAB Angelika Balabanova

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Angelika Balabanova, 23 April 1917, with the enclosure: Mandat för Heleen Ankersmit och Angelika Balabanova, vol. 1

ARAB Hjalmar Branting

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Hjalmar Branting, 17 March 1906

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Hjalmar Branting, 26 June 1906

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Hjalmar Branting, 31 October 1906 (postcard)

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Hjalmar Branting, 8 November 1907

Letter from Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Clara Zetkin to Social-Demokraten, 10 September 1914.

ARAB Kata Dalström

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Kata Dalström, 20 November 1911.

ARAB Hulda Flood

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Ruth Gustafson, 10 May 1910, with the enclosure: Überblick über die deutsche sozialistische Frauenbewegung.

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Ruth Gustafson, 6 June 1910, with the enclosure: Einladung zur 2. Internationalen sozialistischen Frauenkonferenz.

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Ruth Gustafson, 29 July 1910.

ARAB Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Kvinnoförbund

Minutes of the Executive

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Anna Lindhagen, 28 March 1914

Letter from Clara Zetkin to Anna Lindhagen, 2 July 1917, with the enclosure: Avskrift Clara Zetkin till Heleen Ankersmit, 16 May 1917.

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¹ Ulla Plener (ed.), *Clara Zetkin in ihrer Zeit: neue Fakten, Erkenntnisse, Wertungen: Material des Kolloquiums anlässlich ihres 150. Geburtstages am 6. Juli 2007 in Berlin*, Berlin 2008. See also Horst Lademacher (ed.), *Die Zimmerwalder Bewegung: Protokolle und Korrespondenz*, vol. 1 Den Haag/Paris 1967, 538–39.

² For published documents on the Socialist International see <http://library.fes.de/si-online/index-dt.html> accessed 19 August 2010

³ *Morgonbris* no. 6 1910, 5–6, and no. 8, 2–3.

⁴ *Morgonbris* no. 7 1910, 3.

⁵ *Morgonbris* no. 8 1910, 4–5.

⁶ *Morgonbris* no. 9 1910, 1–3, 6–7, and no. 10, 1–4, 6–8.

⁷ *Morgonbris* no. 2 1911, 4.

⁸ See also www.labourhistory.net/stockholm1917 accessed 19 August 2010

⁹ Tánja Puschnerat, *Clara Zetkin: Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus: eine Biographie*, Essen 2003, 218–21.