Aspects of Internationalism at the turn of the 19th/20th century

By Gerd Callesen
Labour Movement Library and Archives, Copenhagen

The fact that, "Labour internationalism, historically, has always been complex, partial and temporary, …"[1] is significant for understanding the Labour Movement around the turn of the 19th century - furthermore, it is of importance for the working class in general, for international solidarity, and internationalism is generally of central importance for the transformation of the working class from being a 'class in itself' into a 'class for itself'. To an influential segment of workers in the 19th century, international experience became essential for their perception of society. However, backward (agricultural) labourers, not yet affected by industrial working modes, had not made this type of experience, and thus, in a manner of speaking constituted 'the silent majority' of the working class. In this context, workers' education on international issues by means of, among other things, the labour press, gained a function for itself to the extent that it was possible to create a linkage between working-class internationalism and the immediate concerns of those workers who did not themselves have any personal international experience. In this way, educational activities do not merely constitute a superstructure phenomenon, but have become part and parcel of the multifaceted tasks of the Social-Democratic party.

General Context

The state of affairs underlying the following considerations is *the development of manufacturing industry* in most European countries, and with it the growing class of industrial workers, the class for whom international organization was to be of decisive importance. Early on, this trend was of major importance in Great Britain, but from the last third of the 19th century, most West European states were included in the process. Associated with this process, we can observe another, i.e., that of *migration* from rural to urban areas, but also internationally between countries. Emigration to the USA and some South American countries took on considerable proportions, as did large-scale migratory movements within countries, in many places from east to west. The outcome of these processes was a constantly *increasing urban working class,* which was constantly supplemented by new first-generation industrial workers. This trend continued way beyond the period here under consideration, i.e., the decades around the turn of the 19th into the 20th century.

Another important element was the fact that it had become necessary to ensure that the workers understood what they were doing within the framework of the occupational working process, a fragmented process differing from the holistically unified process characteristic of craftsmanship. It had become necessary for workers to be able to read and follow written instructions and blueprints, etc. In other words, *general education* had to be improved, and at least for male workers, illiteracy did in fact disappear in the course of the last third of the 19th century - to be sure, there were local and regional differences, in the Russian Empire, approximately 80% of the population remained illiterate, while the corresponding figure for Germany was 2%.[2] The same type of difference can also be observed in other cultural, economic, political, and social fields; for

[1] In an unpublished paper from 1986, "Some Reflections and Propositions on Workers and Internationalism" Peter Waterman has made several propositions based on a number of studies that were new at the time. One of his conclusions is the above quote, which continues, "existing more in the minds of leaders and intellectuals than in daily-life of workers or even labour activists"**.** While the former passage of the quotation is a good point of departure for a discussion, I disagree, as will become clear, with the rest of the quotation.

[2] In many cases, statistics have been calculated on a varying basis, and for this reason, figures should merely be interpreted to indicate a general trend.

this reason, *West, Central and North European* countries, in which similarities are more important than differences, form the basis of my theses.

Experience Gained by Travelling Journeymen

In continuation of the migrations of mediaeval journeymen, the 19th century saw considerable migratory activities on the part of European workers. A large proportion of these migrant workers consisted of German journeymen who went to Switzerland, London, and especially Paris where they were a considerable part of the population.[3] Immediately prior to the outbreak of the revolutions in Europe in 1848, France alone had a foreign population of 850,000 people, mainly skilled workers and artisans, if it is indeed possible to distinguish between the two groups. In the two metropolises and in several Swiss towns there was a sufficiently high number of foreigners for them to establish viable associations of radically thinking workers, partly on a national basis, partly as cross-national associations, such as, for example, 'The Fraternal Democrats' in London.

It is an established fact that this nascent radical Labour Movement gave rise to concern among the ruling classes; attempts were made to restrict or even ban migration, and certainly to prevent the setting up of workers' organizations, for which reason they had to operate clandestinely during these years. A rich literature exists dealing with these associations, particularly the documentation and analyses of 'Bund der Kommunisten', an organization that was of direct importance for the development of internationalism, must be emphasized.[4]

However, organizations for journeymen continued to exist and to play a role, albeit different from that of the clandestine ones, at least until 1914. But the existence of travelling journeymen in itself was to have an impact on the development of internationalism.[5] The emerging working class took an interest in the International Working Men's Association founded 1864 to the extent that and for as long as it was capable of managing activities to prevent the importation of blacklegs, and could actively assist the workers engaged in industrial action. For quite some time, the IWA was able to do that[6]. This development was, to a certain extent, halted by the dissolution of the IWA after 1872. Endeavours to maintain international co-operation were continued from various quarters, and several congresses were, in fact, held, but no new International saw the light of day until the newly formed labour parties and trade unions met at the Paris Congress in 1889.[7]

The theoretical position developed at the 1866 congress of the IWA determined the Marxist stance vis-à-vis the role of trade unions in the overall Labour Movement for a long time to come - as a matter of fact, this resolution has had a role to play even until the present times. It was only during the years immediately before the turn of the millennium that the ties between the trade

---

[3] See Jacques Grandjonc: Die deutsche Binnenwanderung in Europa 1830 bis 1848, in: Otto Busch et al. (eds): *Die frühsozialistischen Bünde in der Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. Vom "Bund der Gerechten" zum "Bund der Kommunisten" 1836-1847. Ein Tagungsbericht*, Berlin 1975 p. 3-20.

[4] *Der Bund der Kommunisten. Dokumente und Materialien*, vol. 1-3, Berlin 1970-1984 and Martin Hundt: *Geschichte des Bundes der Kommunisten 1836-1852* - Philosophie und Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Studien und Quellen 3 - Frankfurt/M, 1993.

[5] Claudius H. Riegler: Den farende svend and "Den skandinaviske Central-Understøttelses-Kasse i Udlandet". A periodical and a Benefit Society for Scandinavian Journeymen and Workers in Germany and Switzerland, 1902-1934, in: Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder: *The Press of Labor Migrants in Europe and North America 1880s to 1930s*, Labor Newspaper Preservation Project, Bremen 1985 p. 205-219; John Logue: Svendevandringer og internationalisme i fagbevægelsens barndom, in: *Arbejderhistorie. Meddelelser om forskning i arbejderbevægelsens historie* 20/1983 p. 3-24.

[6] Ursula Herrmann: *Der Kampf von Karl Marx um eine revolutionäre Gewerkschaftspolitik 1864 bis 186*8, Berlin 1868; Knud Knudsen: The Strike History of the First International, in: Frits van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linde (eds.): *Internationalism in the Labour Movement 1830-1940*, Leiden 1988 p. 304-322.

[7] Arnold Reisberg provides a brief survey of the various congresses: *Von der I. zur II. Internationale. Die Durchsetzung des Marxismus im Kampf um die Wiederherstellung der Arbeiterinternationale*, Berlin 1980, pp. 98-138. For the first years of the new International, see Markus Bürgi: *Die Anfänge der Zweiten Internationale. Positionen und Auseinandersetzungen 1889-1893* – Quellen und Studien zur Sozialgeschichte, 16 - Frankfurt 1996.

unions and the political components of the Labour Movement were decisively weakened even in countries where Marxism had certainly not played a prominent role as had been the case in Denmark, but where it had had an unbroken impact since the end of the 19th century, even though the functionaries of the Labour Movement had not been particularly aware of this impact.

However, international experience was to have implications for the development of the working class as a whole. As a result of comprehensive worker migration, the members of the working class had an unarticulated understanding of the nature of capitalism in some of those respects that directly affected them. They had themselves experienced that contradictions between work and capital existed throughout the industrialized world, that, universally, attempts were made to keep working hours long and wages low, that state and capital co-operated towards these ends, in short, that conditions for working people were more or less identical no matter what country they found themselves in. This basis of experience was crucial and was a determinant for the acceptance of the general Marxist theory in wide working-class circles, because Marx and Engels were able to formulate the international experience of workers into a coherent theory recognizable to these groups. This, in turn, provided a basis for a more or less profound acceptance and appropriation of the other components of the theory in the working class. Even then there were different strands of Socialist theory in the Labour Movement, but around the turn of the century Marxism had gained a predominant position. Yet, Marxism was not monolithic, but the common ground was a rcognition of the validity of the class struggle and the need for a revolutionary restructuring of society.

In the Labour movement of the various countries, different perceptions of socialism existed, which meant that there were different and often antagonistic perceptions of how the route to a not entirely precise model of socialism was to be found. Around the turn of the century, however, Marxism gained a predominant position. Yet, Marxism was not monolithic, but its point of departure was recognition of the class struggle and the need for a revolutionary restructuring of society.

The number of journeymen travelling abroad peaked in the 1860s, although the activity continued to play an important role in some trades and hardly any in others. The decline of such travels was particularly due to the falling percentage share of artisans in the overall working class - it was certainly rare for unskilled workers to travel abroad. Unskilled workers might accept employment in connection with large-scale construction project (e.g. railways). Yet such employment has hardly left any trace in working-class memoirs, and thus it is virtually impossible to assess what this experience has meant in terms of internationalism. However, during this time, i.e., the 1880s and 1890s, industrial workers accounted for a relatively modest proportion of the total population, in all countries with the exception of Great Britain and Belgium. The type of experience which led to the brand of internationalism here characterized as 'working-class internationalism' was not the only type of proletarian experience gleaned in foreign countries: for instance, the experience made by British and French, mainly sub-proletarians, as soldiers in colonial service is such a factor. The foreigners with whom they got into contact were either, by definition, antagonistic or subservient, and would therefore not be capable of generating any type of solidarity. This type of international experience has not yet, as far as I know, been studied in this context.

With the growth of the movement over the following decades leading up to the First World War, the need for co-ordinating trade union as well as political activities also grew.[8] In 1886, the first regional workers' congress took place in Gothenburg, Sweden. One result of the congress was formalized co-operation between the three Scandinavian Labour Movements - co-operation that in

[8] In the present text, bilateral co-operation between parties will not be dealt with specifically; the following references will have to suffice Katharina Keller: *Modell SPD? Italienische Sozialisten und deutsche Sozialdemokratie bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, Bonn 1994; Jutta Seidel: *Deutsche Sozialdemokratie und Parti Ouvrier 1876 - 1889*, Berlin 1982 and Jutta Seidel et al.: *Internationale Stellung und internationale Beziehungen der deutschen Sozialdemokratie 1871 - 1895/96*, Berlin 1982; Vera Lengyel: *Die Einwirkung der deutschen und österreichischen Sozialdemokratie auf die Arbeiterbewegung in Ungarn bis 1890*, Berlin 1890.

some cases led to the establishment of pan-Scandinavian trade unions, and in other cases to the transfer of considerable funds in connection with industrial action. One such example was a four-month long conflict in Denmark in 1899, another the Swedish large-scale strike in 1909, and many others. From the late 1880s, International Trade Secretariats[9] saw the light of day; the political International developed during the years after 1900, and from 1901, national federations began developing mutual co-operation which, shortly before 1914, was institutionalized in the International Federation of Trade Unions. However, at the same time, such institutionalization led to a weakening of spontaneous internationalism; this was almost inevitable in light of the fact that the Labour Movement had become a mass movement which, in order to be able to deal with its many tasks, had found it necessary to employ a number of functionaries, working for the movement in various capacities such as editors of dailies and the many different periodicals, as chairmen of trade union organizations, as statisticians, etc. The phenomenon is well known and well described by various sources, often it has been assessed in highly contradictory terms ever since, around 1910, Robert Michels evolved his initial analysis of the oligarchic trends of the Labour Movement.[10] The internationalist position did not die, but it did become less vigorous, its role was weakened as a result of its institutionalization. The First World War also constituted the end of an epoch in the development of the Labour Movement.

Migration by journeymen and others was interrupted in Europe by the outbreak of the First World War and was, subsequently, hampered by frontiers being closed, by different types of labour-market regulation which all prevented lively mobility across national and language frontiers. Regulations were, of course, determined by the cyclical needs of the labour market/capitalist system to which the working class is subject. Furthermore, technological developments during the period under review have, at times, lead to capitalist concentration on either national or international markets. Economies are tendentially either open or closed, and either trend will, of course, affect the working class in every aspect of its life.

The Diachronous Development of the Working Class

In the assessment of internationalism in the working class it virtually goes without saying that the aspirations and motivations of the working class must form part of the analysis. The pronouncements and perceptions of leaders and theoreticians will not suffice; although there is a linkage and a co-incidence between the rank and file of a labour party and its leadership, the two are not identical. Workers have articulated their notions in many ways (e.g. as Social-Democrats, as Syndicalists, or as Christians), and there are many ways in which their ideas have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by historians, especially in not taking into consideration the disparate interests manifesting themselves in the different strata of the working class. The working class has never constituted *a single progressive mass*, but has, on the contrary, been characterized by constant change and reconstitution. Correspondingly, the strategies of the socialist Labour Movement to develop coherent political tactics for the entire class have been misunderstood and misinterpreted. One reason for the need for such coherent tactics was the conflicts between, for example, skilled and unskilled workers, men and women, etc.

---

[9] Compare for instance Charles Hobson: *International Metalworkers' Federation*, Birmingham 1915, and more recently a number of books, e.g., Hartmut Simon: *Die Internationale Transport Arbeiter-Föderation*, Essen 1993, Bob Reinalda, (ed.): *The International Transportworkers Federation 1914-1945. The Edo Fimmen Era*, Amsterdam 1997, Karl Georg Herrmann: Die *Geschichte des Internationalen Bergarbeiterverbandes 1890-1939*, Frankfurt 1994, and other studies, among these special mention should be made of the *series "Fremdarbeiterpolitik des Imperialismus", Schriftenreihe der Wilhelm-Pieck-Universität Rostock*, 1974-1988 vol. 1 -20 of which several volumes are decidedly relevant for this subject.

[10] Robert Michels: *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie. Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens*, Leipzig 1910 (many subsequent editions and translations). On Michels, see: Joachim Hetscher: Robert Michels: *Die Herausbildung der modernen politischen Soziologie im Kontext von Herausforderung und Defizit der Arbeiterbewegung*, Bonn 1983.

Additionally, the ruling classes have in many different ways attempted to influence workers, not just ideologically through churches, schools, the military, but also politically through social reforms and similar measures. Establishing an independent Labour Movement was hampered through state repression of various kinds, frequently escalating into manifest and brutal oppression, as was the case in Germany with the ”Anti-Socialist Laws”, in most Eastern European countries through direct bans, and in the USA in other ways through the suppression of free trade unions in, at times, fairly brutal ways, including Pinkertons, the military, the National Guard, etc., some of which are employed to this very day.

The Gender Question

My insight into the gender question in the Labour Movement is limited despite the fact that the available literature on this issue is growing. More often than not, gender problems are discussed from the point of view of the dual exploitation of women workers. At the time here under review, the question of the forms and the tactics to be chosen to achieve the emancipation of women workers was a contested issue. Naturally this dispute is mirrored by the scholarly literature. I am not going to go into further detail concerning this set of problems; suffice it to say that internationalism did play an important role in, for example, discussions concerning maternity leave, which began by the turn of the century. Maternity leave was debated at international socialist women's conferences, and these conferences provided national sections of the Labour Movement with inspiration; this was not a one-way street by any means, as national discussions and results also had an impact on international discussions.[11]

At the turn of the century, organized socialist women did not agree on whether occupational safety measures were to be for women exclusively or should be extended to all workers to the same degree. This dispute did not, however, prevent an international discussion, it rather came to form the point of departure for the discussion and for a materialist assessment of internationalism independently of the disparate solutions reached for the different organizations and countries.[12] For women as well as for trade unions in general, social issues and occupational safety measures were of crucial importance, and this, together with other issues, as already indicated in connection with the IWA of the 1860s - was what the Social-Democratic parties had attempted to integrate into a coherent and comprehensive theory of social change. This endeavour did, at least, to some extent counteract tendencies towards differentiation within the class.

Countermeasures through Social Reform

One factor that was to become fairly important, especially in the years after WW II**,** were the activities of the International Labour Organization, which has a history dating back to about 1890. In connection with the clash between Bismarck and Wilhelm II, Wilhelm II attempted, at least for a time to take up working-class problems and to ensure international rules for industrial safety. This was a breakaway from the existing German policy in the field, which had till then largely consisted in sabotaging any initiatives taken by the governments of other countries in this field. However, an international industrial safety conference was convened to be held in Berlin in March 1890.[13] The conference achieved only few, if any, concrete results. It is true that new conferences were held in

---

[11] My colleague Anette Eklund Hansen is carrying out research into this question, and I am only quoting her findings. Her early findings are published as "Arbejderkvindernes holdning til den første lovgivning om barselsorlov 1901-1913", in: Arbejderbevægelsens bibliotek og arkiv. *Årsskrift 2001*, p. 34-40.

[12] *Protecting Women. Labor Legislation in Europe, The United States, and Australia, 1880-1920*. Edited by Ulla Wikander et al., Urbana and Chicago 1995.

[13] Ulla Wikander: Some "Kept the Flag of Feminist Demands Waving": Debates at International Congresses on Protecting Women Workers. In: *Protecting Women*, p. 29-62. Hans-Jörg von Berlepsch: *"Neuer Kurs" im Kaiserreich? Die Arbeiterpolitik des Freiherrn von Berlepsch 1890 bis 1896*, Bonn 1987.

1897 and 1900, respectively, but not until 1905 was the second intergovernmental conference held. As a result of these various conferences the predecessor of the ILO was established in 1901.

Despite the fact that the initiative of Wilhelm II was aimed at taking the wind out of the sails of the Labour Movement - at least August Bebel maintained that the socialist Labour Movement had caused the attempt to be made[14] - the immediate results did not make any special impact on the international Labour Movement. Consequences might be felt in the field of domestic policies in Germany, as Friedrich Engels outlined in a letter to August Bebel, "…William the Younger was better suited to the task of undermining the ostensibly stable system in Germany, destroying the philistines' faith in the government and stability and causing a general state of confusion and uncertainty… What will come of this confusion, seeing how craven our bourgeoisie is, we cannot possibly say. At all events the old order has been smashed for good … Things are livening up again, and that's all we require…".[15] Here we cannot provide an answer to the question of whether Engels' assessment corresponds to the subjective wishes of the working class. Obviously, workers did want a general safety net, old-age pension schemes, and other imaginable welfare-state measures, but were the representatives of the ruling class correct in their observation that the working class could be satisfied and pacified through a few social reforms? Subsequent developments seem to indicate that this was so. The ILO has certainly taken over significant functions that national trade union confederations had previously had to carry out as part of their international tasks. Because of the tripartite structure of the ILO, international co-operation in the field of labour-market conditions changed its nature, and this weakened insights into working conditions abroad and the need for concrete international action. This, however, are developments that gain significance after the period here under review.

Methods of the Labour Movement

This is not the place to go further into the details of the pertinent societal developments. Instead an outline is provided of the methods used by the Labour Movement to develop a broader and deeper understanding in the entire working class of internationalism as based on the experience of the central strata of that class. An essential factor in this policy is the Labour Movement press - and this makes it clear that literate workers did not only read instructions and blueprints, but were quite capable of understanding socialist books, brochures, papers, and periodicals, although this had certainly not been the intention behind the introduction of obligatory school attendance.

We have several studies of the reading habits of workers; similarly the scope of international discussion in the Labour Movement has been examined. In a letter addressed to Bebel in which he criticized the Gotha Programme of the German party, Engels had stressed the importance of this particular aspect. He wrote "…the German workers' party is …conscious of its solidarity with the workers of all other countries and will, as before, always be ready to meet the obligations that solidarity entails. Such obligations … consist for example in aid, abstention from blacklegging during strikes, making sure that the party organs keep German workers informed of the movement abroad, agitation against impending or incipient dynastic wars…".[16]

The problem arising in connection with several studies of the reading habits of workers (and other aspects of their cultural behaviour) is the limited material available on which to base an assessment of what these population segments did in fact read. This is not the place to undertake any criticism of the studies, and they do provide clues for an assessment, but only in part do they take into consideration the majority of the workers. In those countries where the movement could operate legally, the central means of recruitment was the Labour press. It is evident that from the

---

[14] August Bebel: Die *Frau und der Sozialismus*, Stuttgart 1913, s. 482.
[15] Letter to August Bebel of 17 February 1890, in: Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: *Collected Works* vol. 48, Lawrence & Wishart, London 2001, p. 452.
[16] Letter to August Bebel 18-28 March 1875, in: Karl Marx/Frederick Engels: *Collected Works* vol. 45, Moscow 1991 p. 62.

last third of the 19th century, the Labour press became an important factor, circulation figures increased during the period under review, i.e. prior to the First World War, although the Labour press did not reach the majority of workers. This failure was not compensated for by the trade-union press, which was, in part, read by other segments of the working class, but which only to a limited extent had a political function - if Danish trade-union journals are in any way representative, internationalism and working conditions abroad did, however, take up a great deal of space in trade-union journals.[17]

In a somewhat dated study - which as far as I know has not been followed up for other papers - it was established that information on international matters was given prominence in the principal organ of the Danish Social-Democratic Party, the *Social-Demokraten*.[18] The newspaper was first published in 1871, and in the years around the turn of the century it was the Danish newspaper with the highest circulation figures. The coverage of international matters effected by this newspaper points to a significant development in the historical circumstances: as the movement grew and gained some control over factors of immediate relevance to workers, such as the regulation of the labour market through the trade unions, including their sickness and unemployment benefit funds and other social security measures, and its emerging presence in local government, it became necessary to inform workers more thoroughly of national events and conditions. In our evaluation, we must, however, keep in mind that the newspaper grew in volume, i.e. in the number of pages, that the fact that international information fell to a lower *percentage* of the overall information did not imply a corresponding drop in *information volume*. The study showed that coverage of foreign news was considerable, that the information volume on the international Labour Movement was extensive, that the paper translated important contributions by international socialist theoreticians (often issued as separate publications afterwards), but that the percentage dropped from about 18% in the 1870s to a little under 10% in the time before 1913. Gradually, in addition to the *Social-Demokraten*, a network of local newspaper had sprung up in provincial towns. However, no corresponding examination has been made for any of these, but other types of studies in which these newspapers have been included show that in them international news does not feature with the same prominence.

A supplementary bibliographical study of the foreign socialists whose writings were published in the *Social-Demokraten* from 1871 to 1913, also yields relevant results as regards what the Danish reader was introduced to: there was a considerable preponderance of German-speaking socialists, followed by English-speakers, and French and Russian speakers.[19] Many of these texts were subsequently published as books in the series Socialistisk Bibliotek, most of them, however, as low-cost brochures in the series Socialistiske Skrifter. The circulation figures for these were comparatively high. In 1887, the first volume of *Capital* was published in Denmark, the same year as in Great Britain. Whereas the English version was published in two editions of each 500 copies, the Danish was only published in one, but of 6-800 copies - considering the population basis of the two countries, the Danish edition was extremely large - on the other hand, it took nearly 30 years before the edition was sold out. Other authors represented in the series and in the in the newspaper were August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, N.G. Tschernischewski, John Stuart Mill, S. Krawtschinski, H. Taine, W. Bracke, F. Lassalle, Robert Ingersoll, B. Malon, Max Nordau, C.A. Schramm, Friedrich Engels, Lawrence Gronlund, P. Grottkau, Johan Most, Peter Krapotkin, Maxim Gorki, Adelheid Popp - several of them in several translations, especially Wilhelm Liebknecht was frequently published. As already mentioned, some of the newspaper articles were subsequently

---

[17] Palle Qvist: Den socialdemokratiske Fagpresse - ved århundredskiftet og i dag, i: *Meddelelser om forskning i arbejderbevægelsens historie*, nr. 17, p. 5 - 21.
[18] Gerd Callesen and John Logue: *Social-Demokraten and Internationalism. The Copenhagen Social Democratic Newspaper's Coverage of International Labor Affairs, 1871-1958*, Gothenburg 1979.
[19] Hans Dam Frandsen: Fortegnelse over indlæg fra udenlandske socialister og udenlandske socialistiske blade i "Socialisten" og "Social-Demokraten" 1871-1913, Ms., København 1976.

published as brochures, but the series also included original texts, for instance Paul Lafargue's/Jules Guesde's draft proposal for a socialist programme, and Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis' summary of *Capital* which was reprinted several times.

However, if you compare these translations to what was published in the South European languages[20] and in Russian[21], they do not seem so very impressive. The publishing activities of these relatively small, semi-illegal movements appear nearly unreal in their impressiveness. One possible explanation might be that under the political conditions in Eastern Europe, it was possible to produce separate publications, but not continually published newspapers. Again, the tendency in these translations shows a common feature: the central texts were written by authors who were perceived to be Marxists.

The Model Party

There is no doubt that the SPD was a very prominent party in the International from 1889 to 1914; this is not tantamount to saying that it had total predominance, but the SPD enjoyed opportunities which other parties did not. None of the parties - including the SPD - however, had major political influence, they were too small, not organized well enough, and too uncertain about their political course to constitute any real threat to the ruling class. In none of the large countries were more than 25% of the workers unionized; only in a very few countries did Labour/Socialist parties obtain more than 20% of the votes cast. Keeping the position of the SPD in the International in mind, it seems relevant to try to clarify whether the party lived up to Engels' demand to keep members informed of the international Labour Movement - 'our party in France, in the Netherlands, in Italy, etc., which was the terminology used in the Danish party press. A number of studies (Diplomarbeiten) have been completed at the Leipzig University during the years 1982-1986 furnishing us with one answer to this question. The studies cover the principal organ the *Vorwärts*, the theoretical periodical edited by Kautsky, the *Die neue Zeit*, and the theoretical organ of the revisionist wing, the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. The findings were summarized by Harald Koth, and confirm some of the chief trends found in the Danish *Social-Demokraten*; there are, however, some very characteristic differences between the three German publications.[22]

For the years 1903-1904, on an average, the *Vorwärts* allotted 5% of its available space to information concerning non-German matters - a corresponding count has not been made for the previous years. However, a study has been made of which countries were at the centre of attention of the *Vorwärts*; this study covers the years 1891-1895 and 1901-1904, with a verification study for the years 1903-1904. An overwhelming interest was taken in France, followed by Austria-Hungary and Italy, while countries like Great Britain and Belgium, which had been in lead during the former period, had in the latter been replaced by the Netherlands and Russia. During the former period, the *Vorwärts* contained articles on 29 countries, while 30 were found in the latter. But between the two periods, there had been a considerable increase in the overall number of articles. During both

---

[20] Georges Haupt: Model party: the role and influence of German social democracy in South-East Europe, in: Georges Haupt: *Aspects of International Socialism 1871-1914. Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986, p. 48-80. See also the bibliography of Karl Kautsky's works, as well as a list of contributions to *Die neue Zeit* on South Eastern Europe in: Georges Haupt et al. (eds.): *Karl Kautsky und die Sozialdemokratie Südosteuropas. Korrespondenz 1883-1938*, Frankfurt/M. 1986.

[21] Moira Donald: Karl Kautsky and Russian Social Democracy before the First World War. In: Jürgen Rojahn et al. (eds.): *Marxismus und Demokratie. Karl Kautskys Bedeutung in der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung*, Frankfurt 1992, S. 251-273, covering 253 translations of Kautsky's works into Russian.

[22] Harald Koth: Kontakterne mellem det danske og det tyske socialdemokrati omkring århundredskiftet, i: *Arbejderhistorie. Meddelelser om forskning i arbejderbevægelsens historie*, 39/oktober 1992 s. 39-50. The tables of the study are annexed to this paper. In his article Koth provides further information on contemporary support action. The article can be downloaded from www.aba.dk (historier). For an overview of the development of the Labour Movement since 1870 see Marcel van der Linden/Jürgen Rojahn (red.): *The Formation of Labour movements 1870-1914. An international perspective*, Leiden 1990

periods, articles about Denmark and Danish conditions were in the 10th place, which during the first period corresponded to 90 contributions, while during the second it took 260 articles to achieve the same ranking. Overall, the number of articles on international matters grew from 3801 to 4944.

The *Die Neue Zeit* has been examined for the period 1892-1912. During this period there were 632 articles on international matters (serialized articles were only counted once, an important factor for, e.g. the USA, as in addition to a number of topical articles, F.A. Sorge wrote long series on the American Labour Movement and its development). Of course, the number of articles for individual periods of time would differ: more than half the 83 articles on Russia were published between October 1904 and September 1908, so obviously the revolution gave rise to considerable interest. In all, articles on 34 countries were published, and again we can establish an increase in terms of percentage, viz., from 41% to a little under 50% of the total number of articles. During the period up to 1904, the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, which was first issued in 1897, published a total of 348 articles on 15 countries. France was in the lead as far as coverage is concerned, followed by Great Britain, Austria, Russia, Italy, and Belgium.

International Solidarity for Industrial Action

Different in nature, articles covered economic as well as political matters. Economic matters normally meant industrial action, i.e. strikes and lockouts. It is well known that the turn of the century saw large-scale industrial action in several European countries, in Denmark, thus, the abovementioned Great Conflict of 1899, which involved more than half of all organized workers. The unionization rate in Denmark in 1900 for workers employed in manufacturing industry, commerce, and transport was 43% including women and unskilled workers. The conflict lasted from May to September, about 4 months. The outcome of the conflict was a compromise, which by some is described as a victory, by others as a defeat for the working class. But no matter what the assessment is, it is still manifest that what prevented the Danish trade union movement from being crushed was international solidarity.[23] Here too, of course, there were differences. According to an anecdote, French labour organizations sent revolutionary greetings, while their German counterparts sent a considerable sum of money. The Confederation of Danish Trade Unions attempted to organize this assistance in that the organization seconded members of the Trade Union Centre to provide information and to collect money abroad. They were in fact successful in Germany, although some of them were deported back to Denmark - this did not happen to those who had gone to Great Britain. According to another anecdote, the British workers found it difficult to understand why it was necessary to collect money abroad, if the Danish Labour Movement was capable of publishing the country's largest newspaper. Collecting money in Great Britain was problematic, but at the end of the day, Britain managed to be the runner-up in the money collection race. Money came in from most European countries, though obviously amounts varied as, for instance, Milan and Hamburg had themselves been through recent large-scale strikes; but money also came from South Africa and the USA. From both places money was mainly contributed by Danish immigrants; for the USA, by the foreign-language sections of the labor unions and by the Socialist Labor Party. The purely American labor unions did not contribute.

The campaign was organized from Denmark, and contacts grew very intensive, especially with Germany and Great Britain, where during the last two months of the struggle Danish representatives were present giving speeches and travelling around to call on local trade unions. In Germany activities were organized in close co-operation with the German trade union centre, which initiated a public campaign in Southern Germany, and made the Danish representatives appear in as many places as possible before they went to Prussia, whence one of the Danish agitators was, in fact, swiftly expelled. Another result of the conflict - but one that is more difficult to quantify - was

[23] Asger Rabølle Nielsen: Storlockouten 1899 og den internationale solidaritet, i: *Arbejderhistorie. Meddelelser om forskning i arbejderbevægelsens historie* 27/1986 p. 3-16.

that many Danish workers went abroad to try to find work there; it is estimated that about 20% of the workers affected by the conflict went abroad. Agitation efforts abroad also prevented blacklegs from going to Denmark to any appreciable extent. In addition to centrally organized aid, which is estimated to have accounted for 25% of the costs generated by the conflict, aid was also provided bilaterally through foreign sister organizations of the national Danish unions.[24]

At the subsequent International socialist congress in 1900 the Danish report included a detailed description of the conflict, and an attempt was made to initiate a discussion of international assistance schemes in the event of situations similar to the Danish arising in other countries. International assistance was perceived to be and was in actual fact - something which the *Social-Demokraten* made its readers aware of every day - of decisive importance in preventing this industrial conflict from resulting in devastation of the Labour Movement, an outcome which would have meant a setback for many years to come. Reports of demonstrations abroad, the daily collection lists showing how much international aid was growing reinforced the perception of internationalism as an essential factor. However, the International Congress did not succeed in establishing a common understanding of the importance of institutionalizing such a mutual aid function in the International.

At the 6th Scandinavian Workers Congress in 1901, in which also representatives of other European trade union confederations participated, a (rather meagre) International Secretariat for trade union confederations/trade union centres was established. The Danish Confederation of Danish Trade Unions' attempts to strengthen international trade union co-operation fell foul of the German counter-position, and was drowned in the fairly severe conflicts being played out between the different lines existing within the trade union International.[25]

In 1909, a major industrial conflict broke out in Sweden. The outcome was a serious defeat for the Swedish trade union movement, despite the fact that, among others, the Danish unions made large contributions to their Swedish partners. This large-scale conflict has been examined in detail, but the conflict per se is not of interest here - even though in connection with events taking place prior to the conflict, chauvinistic Swedish claims of imported workers being used to act as blacklegs were made. But seen from a Danish perspective, there is a characteristic difference between these two large-scale industrial conflicts. 1899 had led to a mass mobilization of Danish workers who had warmed themselves in the sun of international support as expressed in demonstrations held in other countries. As far as I know, no solidarity demonstrations with the Swedish workers were held in Denmark. The general meetings of local and national trade unions allocated large amounts. No negative attitudes were expressed - but money was not collected, and no mass mobilization in support of the Swedish workers was carried out. Such measures would most likely not have helped them in any case, but the omission of any mobilization was fatal for internationalism: internationalism was demoted into a resolution adopted at trade union general meetings. It was not a matter of failing your comrades or betraying your fellow workers, but it was a matter of active mobilizing activities in favour of international solidarity being preempted.

Internationalism - from Reality to Ideology

As late as 1911, Parvus could still speak of, ”the international solidarity of workers which is automatically generated by the trade-union struggle will become a fundamental precondition for successful trade-union activities as a result of the creation of cartels, the internationalization of the

[24] The years around 1890 saw several instances of large-scale industrial action primarily on the part of unskilled workers. Thus, the strike of the British dockers in 1889 had been won by means of the £30,000 collected by Australian workers. Such money collections to show solidarity were not unknown in the Labour Movement of the 1890s, and led to the establishment or expansion of the International Trade Secretariats.

[25] Søren Federspiel: Fagforeningsinternationalen og DsF til 1914, in: *Årbog for arbejderbevægelsens historie* 8, 1978 p. 6 -54: Susan Milner: *The Dilemmas of Internationalism: French Syndicalism and the International Labour Movement 1900-1914*, Oxford 1991.

money market, the increasing cohesion of the world market, and production on a global basis. Thus, precisely in the field of trade-unionism, nurturing internationalism is no mere theoretical principle, but an imperative and topical requirement for the struggle."[26]

However, it is debatable whether this assessment was not already getting, albeit temporarily, obsolete at the time it was made. The nation state imposed boundaries on the nationally organized Labour Movements: to what extent was it, in fact, possible for these to act in community? National borders often reflect language and cultural boundaries (which also, of course, exist within states where they sometimes can reflect or camouflage class conflicts), differences in behaviour patterns, in legislation, differences in industrial structures (= the sizes of enterprises) - such differences cannot be overcome by means of 'proclamations'. Certainly, before 1914 national borders were relatively open; it was possible for the travelling journeymen to move around, but how large a percentage of workers was still directly involved in this type of migration? At the time when the Labour Movement began, artisans were the most important segment, but in the meantime a new industrial class of workers had arisen, the Labour Movement had become a mass movement (although it still only constituted a minority of the population) so how decisive should we consider this phenomenon to be in comparison with the other phenomena mentioned? In some respects, some of the national movements had achieved a number of mechanisms to influence things, which, in turn, made them inclined to look for purely national solutions. Internationalism continued to exist, but increasingly, it was turning into an ideological concept, especially as it was not nurtured sufficiently, as Parvus had considered necessary. Was it not nurtured sufficiently, then? The example of reactions in Denmark to the large-scale strike in Sweden seems to indicate that it was not. However, a more pertinent question is whether internationalism could continue to exist independently of workers own experience, or at least the experience of their most advanced strata, or whether making propaganda in its favour through the means indicated above would suffice.

A Framework of Support

Parvus' analytical conclusion was formulated against the background of contemporary realities, the realities of the class struggle. He did not attribute to it any "powers of salvation", but saw it as a force that had arisen out of the day-to-day struggles in the past and the present. Possibly, international solidarity had undergone a change turning it into a less important factor. Susan Milner indicates that trade-union internationalism had developed into a question of what practical benefit could be reaped by the individual national Labour Movement, so that internationalism only entailed the protection of the national interests of trade unions at an international level.[27] This is one of the shapes internationalism may assume under certain conditions, its genuine functions do not, however, contradict Parvus' assessment. But it is very different from the assessment made by a modern-day historian.[28] This assessment has it that, "the construction of the Socialist International" … "was a timely attempt to recreate Marx's idea of an international community of socialists, with the broad aims of both promoting peaceful relations between peoples, and providing a framework of support and international co-operation between national socialist parties" (p. 178). Of course, different motives existed for resurrecting the International in 1889, of course not every single affiliated organization and party had a clear understanding, and a more profound appreciation of 'Marxism' was only developed in the course of the following decade. But to the Marxists - and they were to dominate the International for quite some time - the considerations quoted were of no relevance whatever. Nor did they resurrect the International in order to keep the peace between

[26] Parvus [Alexander Helphand]: *Der Klassenkampf des Proletariats*, Berlin 1911, p. 22.

[27] Milner op.cit.

[28] Moira Donald: Workers of the World unite? Exploring the Enigma of the Second International, in: Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (eds.): *The Mechanics of Internationalism. Culture, Society and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War*, London 2001, p. 177-203.

France and Germany. They were sufficiently realistic to see that the influence of the working class on the policies pursued would not be strong enough to prevent the ruling classes from waging war in the course of the next decades.[29] It appears that Donald finds that internationalism is a beautiful idea, not a necessity engendered by realities, as did the Marxists. She has - presumably on this basis, it is not really stated clearly - reached the conclusion, "that the rank and file of party and trade union members were never much touched by the internationalist phraseology of their movements" (p. 180).

In ”The Force of Labour”, it is pointed out that the national Labour Movement in Western Europe (in this context, this means Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany, Britain, Italy, Spain, France) share central experiences.[30] The very fact, Berger points out, that their history began in the 19th century and cannot artificially be made to begin by the turn of the century is a symptom of this. A prominent trend in political history writing is to focus on 'exceptionalism', 'Sonderweg', 'the peculiarities', to explain deviations from a norm that is not determined with any degree of precision. The conclusion drawn by Berger of the seven country studies is that the similarities are far more predominant than the differences - the reactions of the national movements to events in the world around them are, to some extent, determined by their immediate historical situation, but by and large, and seen over the developments of nearly a full century, it becomes clear that tendentially developments are identical. Other literature has shown that this similarity is also apparent in extreme situations like the outbreak of the First World War. [31] The fact that, essentially, developments are identical also goes to stress that internationalism is part of a common heritage.

The development of internationalism on the basis of specific experience was initially strengthened by the emerging Labour Movement. But this Movement turned into an institution within a rigid framework, spontaneous internationalism became institutionalised, that is to say the basis of actual experience was reduced, while, at the same time the working classes grew considerably in terms of number. The organisations attempted to counteract this trend by means of newspapers, periodicals, and leaflets, however in vain. The interactivity - the dialectic - between spontaneous and organised internationalism managed to maintain internationalism as an ideology, but not as a reality.

Labour internationalism played an important role in the development of the Labour Movement in the period from the first beginnings of the Movement up to say World War I. Historically this proces has always been complex, partial and temporary. But for the decisive segments of the working class it was a reality, something they experienced in their everyday life. Artisanal workers who often had been journeying as journeymen formed the decisive segments of the working class. They had experience of other countries or knew journeymen in their own country. For these reasons they knew that the contradictions between Capital and Labour were the same all over Europe. They also knew that the conflict between the classes was the deciding societal contradiction - not the one between nations. This experience allowed the majority of the industrial workers to develop an active solidarity with workers in or from other countries. Through the experience of internationalism they gained an understanding of the realities behind the theories

---

[29]Moira Donald refers to an opinion propounded by the Dutch historian Bert Altena to the effect ”that the main aim in setting up [the Second International] was containment of Franco-German hostility" - this opinion does not seem to have been published in writing.

[30] Stefan Berger and David Broughton: *The Force of Labour. The Western European Labour Movement and the Working Class in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford 1995.

[31] Jürgen Rojahn: Arbeiterbewegung und Kriegsbegeisterung. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie 1870-1914, in: Marcel van der Linden and Gottfried Mergner (eds.): *Kriegsbegeisterung und mentale Kriegsvorbereitung. Interdisziplinäre Studien,* Berlin 1991, p. 57-71; Wolfgang Kruse: Die Kriegsbegeisterung im Deutschen Reich zu Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges. Entstehungszusammenhänge, Grenzen und ideologische Strukturen, in: idem p. 73-87. Unlike Moira Donald both articles point out that German workers were not thrilled to go to war - Kruse quotes a French study reaching the same conclusion with regard to French workers.

propounded by Marx and Engels. The Movement furthered this understanding through its press and other means of communication.

The mobilisation through the press and through educational work had only a limited effect for a time and only as long as the international experience was an integral part of everyday life. Idealism did not suffice to maintain internationalism as a real force.

Beginning about 1890 a new major structural and compositional change took place in the working class. Until then artisans/skilled workers had been dominant, now unskilled, industrial workers came to be the mass basis of the Movement. This new situation had consequences for the perception of internationalism. The personal international experience still played a role but only for a diminishing part of the class. The consequence of this can be seen in the comparison of the two mass conflicts in Denmark and Sweden in 1899 and 1909.

The growing number of women in the Labour Movement put new elements on the agenda: security at the workplace as exemplified in the discussions of maternity leave. This was discussed at international conferences and these discussions influenced national decisions. But they did not have an invigorating effect on Labour internationalism before World War I. The measures taken by the ruling classes did not immediately lead to an integration of the working class into the nation state; in the longer term, however, they did have an effect.

Internationalism is multifaceted - an ideal, a policy, and a method. Its basis is societal developments which, at times, foster international understanding and solidarity within the working class, at others, reduce it into an ideological notion or concept. During the period considered here, it was not a beautiful idea, but a reflection of a reality of importance to large segments of the organized working class, and not just for its leadership; on the contrary, with very few exceptions and faced with the extreme situation of the outbreak of the First World War, these leaders capitulated to the pressures around them. It looks as if the importance of internationalism was slowly declining in the course of the decade after the turn of the century; however, it did continue to play an active role during the inter-war years, for example, in the anti-fascist struggle, and in this capacity it gains an independent role.

It goes without saying that internationalism is not a constant factor whose nature is forever firmly fixed. In other words, internationalism is no constant, nor is it a mere ideal, it is a political fact behaving in accordance with dialectical materialism. It is an insight based on experience, an insight that might fade if it is no longer based on actual experience of the type originally made by migrating journeymen, or on other types of equally relevant experience. Together with the various phases of capitalist development, internationalism also undergoes changes during which it can deteriorate into a purely notional position void of any practical implications. This does not mean that it will have lost all meaning in the working class, something which became clear e.g. during the interwar years vis-à-vis refugees from Fascism, who were aided by other working-class and Labour organizations. In spite of the prevailing high rates of unemployment in the 1930s, comprehensive xenophobia or racism did not afflict the working class. These phenomena were typical of middle-class strata, but unlike what was to be the case in the 1980s and 1990s, they were not echoed in the working class.

However, today activities based on working-class solidarity seem to have been replaced by activities more orientated by humanitarian considerations, but nevertheless there is still a fundamental attitude in the traditional Labour Movement concerning the importance of internationalism. In the 1970s, at least, an upswing in international solidarity activities could be observed, finding expression, for example, in connection with the reestablishment of Social-Democratic mass parties in Portugal and Spain, in the support given to the Sandinist movement in Nicaragua, in the support allocated to the liberation struggle in southern Africa and elsewhere.[32]

[32] Cif. for the activities of Danish Social-Democratic organizations in this field the survey in Claus Larsen-Jensen (ed): *Vi forandrer verden ... - dansk arbejderbevægelse og internationaliseringen*, København, 1999.