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The Practice of Socialist Internationalism during the Twentieth Century

ABSTRACT

This article considers a neglected aspect of twentieth century European socialism: its internationalism. After each of the two world wars European socialists devoted considerable energy to reconstituting an international socialist community, the concrete manifestation of which was the creation of the Labour and Socialist International in 1923 and of the Socialist International in 1951. Animating this community was a collective commitment to the practice of socialist internationalism—to working together to define shared responses to pressing international issues. After 1918 and again after 1945 this collective commitment would eventually wane, sapping international socialism of its dynamism. In examining the case study of disarmament after 1918, the article suggests that the practice of socialist internationalism itself was partly responsible for this waning commitment. The experience of working together fostered the nationalisation of socialist internationalism, as each party increasingly sought to define its position on its own, independently of other socialist parties.

Keywords: *socialism, internationalism, Labour and Socialist International, Socialist International, Labour movement*

Introduction

In the summer of 1951 the newly constituted Socialist International, grouping together over thirty socialist parties from Europe and beyond, held its first congress in Frankfurt am Main. While the dominant tone of the proceedings was celebratory, the delegates found time to reflect on the meaning of internationalism for socialists. Some conceived of it in the traditional language of class while others pointed to a number of general principles. Almost all delegates integrated the Cold War into their understanding of internationalism. But it was Morgan Phillips, the secretary of Britain's Labour Party as well as Chairman of the International, who offered the most revealing comments:

Many of you, like myself, have attended every international Socialist gathering over the last six years and I think you will agree with me that we understand one another infinitely better now than we did at the end of the war. We have been through great

international conflicts. There have been times when we have felt so irritated with the obstinacy of others that the whole framework of our movement seemed in danger. Yet our mutual faith as Socialists has pulled us through, and I believe that we have now more effective consultation one with another on the important issues which arise than was ever known in previous Socialist Internationals [...]¹

For Morgan Phillips, internationalism signified an ongoing practice in which socialists from different parties regularly met to discuss international issues. The practice itself could be arduous: disagreements were numerous and consensus sometimes elusive. But rather than a liability, Morgan Phillips presented the conflictual nature of relations as an asset that strengthened the bonds between parties. Indeed, conflict appears as part and parcel of a process by which socialists affirmed and renewed their common commitment to the practice of internationalism—or their “mutual faith.”

Following Morgan Phillips, this article examines the practice of socialist internationalism. More precisely, it examines the efforts of the British, French and German parties—the parties that dominated international socialism—to work out collective “socialist” positions on pressing international issues. The focus is on the two post-war periods. Whereas scholars once described the aftermath of the two world wars in terms of reconstruction, the emphasis is now on upheaval and violence, loss and mourning.² But while certainly tragic, the post-war years were also a time of hope and opportunity, especially for those eager to wrest a new and better world from the wreckage of the old one. In 1918 and again in 1945, moreover, no group was more intent on transforming politics—both national and international—than European socialists.

Exploring the practice of socialist internationalism offers new perspectives on two important phenomena during the 20th century: socialism and internationalism. Generally speaking, scholars interested in socialism concentrate on domestic politics. Whether viewed as an ideology, movement, political party or method of government, the study of socialism is largely confined within national or sub-national borders. Prominent historical syntheses reflect and reinforce this tendency insofar as they limit themselves to surveying and comparing developments across multiple national movements and parties.³ To the extent that scholars consider socialism’s international dimension, they investigate the

- 1 First Congress of the Socialist International, held in Frankfurt am Main on 30 June until 3 July 1951, see: Socialist International Information 27/28:1 (1951), in: International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Socialist International Archives, Phillips, 19.
- 2 Examples include Dirk Schumann/Richard Bessel (eds.): *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, Cambridge 2003; Jay Winter: *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge 1995.
- 3 See Geoff Eley: *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe: 1850–2000*, Oxford 2002; Donald Sassoon: *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the*

foreign policies of particular parties, the international ideas of individual socialists, or the institutional working of the different Internationals.⁴ Few studies consider more than one party, and those that do most often adopt a comparative approach.⁵ Rare are studies of the relations between two or more socialist parties⁶; and rarer still are those that broach the subject of socialist internationalism. The few scholars who accord any attention to the latter either restrict its use to the international communist or trade union (syndicalist) movements or regard it as little more than empty rhetoric. “Internationalism”, writes Donald Sassoon in the latter vein, “was just a word [...]. It was a feature of the verbal radicalism which was one of the characteristic traits of the [socialist] movement.”⁷ Donald Sassoon’s dismissal reflects an influential reading of August 1914 as a revelation: as the moment when the major socialist parties, rallying to their country’s war effort, confirmed their overriding attachment to the nation.

To view European socialism after 1914 merely as a collection of national parties, however, is to ignore a significant element of twentieth century European socialism. After each of the two world wars, European socialists devoted considerable energy and resources to building (or, more accurately, rebuilding) an international and even transnational community. Socialist parties were formally bound together by membership in the Labour and Socialist International from 1923 and in the Socialist International from 1951. But at least as important were the informal bonds between socialists and socialist parties: the friendships, mutual expectations, common understandings and traditions that animated formal relations. Underpinning this formal and informal structure, moreover, was a shared internationalist identity based on the belief that all socialists, whatever their national or party affiliations, were engaged in a joint endeavour whose ultimate success would be a collective one. Socialists conceived of themselves as internationalists and being internationalist meant working with fellow socialists from other parties to forge shared “socialist” responses to pressing contemporary problems—both at home and abroad. Just as pertinently, this collective commitment to working together weakened over time. The practice of socialist internationalism proved intermittent rather than enduring.

Twentieth Century, New York 1996; Marc Lazar/Francine Simon-Ekovich: *La gauche en Europe depuis 1945: invariants et mutations du socialisme européen*, Paris 1996.

- 4 For the Internationals, see: Guillaume Devin: *l’internationale socialiste: histoire et sociologie du socialisme international: 1945–1990*, Paris 1993; Julius Braunthal: *History of the International*, vols. 1–3, New York/London 1967–80.
- 5 Dietrich Orlow: *Common Destiny: A Comparative History of the Dutch, French, and German Social Democratic Parties, 1945–1969*, New York 2000; Stefan Berger: *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats: 1900–1931*, Oxford 1994.
- 6 A notable exception is Gerd Rainer Horn: *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s*, New York 1996.
- 7 Donald Sassoon: *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, p. 29.

If the practice of socialist internationalism casts light on a neglected aspect of twentieth century socialism, it can also tell us something about internationalism more generally. Compared to nationalism, internationalism has received little scholarly attention. Most often it is used to designate any activity that is not confined within the borders of a single nation. To the extent that scholars attempt a more systematic treatment, they approach internationalism in one of three overlapping ways: as a complex process in which different regions and peoples of the world grow increasingly inter-connected and different societies increasingly similar;⁸ as a political project promoted by leading countries, organised groups and/or prominent thinkers, comprising a set of principles and institutions aimed most often at encouraging international cooperation and limiting national sovereignty;⁹ and as an individual or group identity that transcends national or sub-national loyalties.¹⁰

Socialist internationalism is relevant to each of these three approaches. As a process, internationalism is often depicted as progressing inexorably, particularly when it is conflated with globalisation; the latter, despite occasional reverses, supposedly advanced with increasing speed and strength across the 19th and 20th centuries. But international socialist cooperation resembled a fever more than a forward march, waxing in intensity in after each world war before waning and almost disappearing altogether. This suggests that internationalism is best viewed not as an inexorable force but as clusters of activity, some inter-connected and others not, occurring in multiple spaces, at various speeds and intensities, and with different durations. Far from being faceless, moreover, these clusters are directed by identifiable historical actors/agents (governments, corporations, churches, non-governmental organisations, etc.), many of whom are rooted in a particular country. Equally important, the nature and extent of their national rootedness varies not only with each case but also across time as dominant patterns of internationalism change. From this perspective, socialist internationalism belongs to a distinct and ultimately transient type of international activity in which nationally-based political parties took the lead.

As a political project, internationalism frequently denotes a set of principles, perhaps the best known example being liberal internationalism. One result is a tendency to judge an internationalist project, whether liberal or other, in terms of the perceived fidelity of

- 8 Jürgen Osterhammel: *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 2009; Christopher Alan Bayly: *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, Malden/Oxford 2004.
- 9 Glenda Sluga: *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, Philadelphia 2013; Akira Iriye: *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2002.
- 10 Barbara J. Keys: *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s*, Cambridge 2006; Leila J. Rupp: *Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888–1945*, in: *American Historical Review* 99:5 (1994), pp. 1571–1600.

its promoters to its principles. Yet the principles involved are almost always open-ended, rendering the project extremely amorphous. Accordingly, socialist internationalism is best treated not as a clear-cut goal or destination, but as a practice: as the prolonged effort by European socialist parties to cooperate with one another on international issues. Although inspired by a handful of broad principles, the practice was not necessarily determined by them. Equally to the point, socialist internationalism as a project cannot be abstracted from its practice since the latter helped to define—and continuously redefine—the project's content and meaning for socialists.

Finally, as an identity, internationalism is almost always associated with nationalism; indeed, the two are often said to be mutually dependent with the one presupposing the other.¹¹ Interestingly, much of the scholarship on identity supports the view that international and national identities are compatible. In showing that people possess multiple identities and that an individual's self and group identities are constructed through social interaction, this work points to the possibility of transcending national identity through cooperation.¹² Socialists, moreover, repeatedly insisted that no contradiction existed between their nationalism and internationalism. Yet in reality the relationship between the two proved to be more problematic than socialists allowed. The problem was not simply that socialist parties sometimes disagreed with one another; it was also that each party's position on any given issue partly reflected its roots in national politics. As a result, and pace Morgan Phillips, the practice of socialist internationalism risked sharpening each party's awareness of its national rootedness, effectively reinforcing particularist (national) identities at the expense of a shared internationalist identity. If this dynamic helps to explain why socialist internationalism eventually waned during each of the two post-war periods, it also points to a more general lesson: if identities are socially constructed, they can also be socially deconstructed.

What follows is divided into four sections. The first two sections consider the international community created by European socialists after each of the two world wars, focusing on the reconstitution of the International. The third section offers a brief case study of the efforts of British, French and German socialists to cooperate on the fraught issue of disarmament after 1918. The final section briefly discusses 20th century socialist internationalism as a promising (though unsuccessful) attempt to find a compromise between a state-dominated internationalism and a more diffuse internationalism in which non-state actors prominently figure.

- 11 Kjell Goldmann: Nationalism and Internationalism in Post-Cold War Europe, in: *European Journal of International Relations* 3:3 (1997), pp. 259–290.
- 12 Manuel Castells: *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, vol. 2, 2nd ed., Malden 2004; Karen A. Cerulo: Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions, in: *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:1 (1997), pp. 385–409; Charles Tilly: Citizenship, Identity and Social History, in: Charles Tilly (ed.): *Citizenship, Identity and Social History*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 1–17.

Socialist Internationalism Renewed I: After 1918

With the ink barely dry on the November 1918 armistice, European socialists threw themselves into the task of reviving the 2nd International. Indeed, their efforts began during the war itself as socialists on both sides of the belligerent divide sought to meet and to discuss how to end the conflict. Although ultimately unsuccessful, these wartime attempts at cooperation indicate the persistence of internationalist sentiments within the major parties.¹³ In autumn 1918, with the end of the war in sight, socialists redoubled their efforts. In early November Philipp Scheidemann, the leader of the German Social Democratic Party, declared that his party was “ready to re-establish the broken bonds of the international [socialist] community.”¹⁴ A similar appeal came from French socialists. Just one day after the armistice came into effect, the executive committee of the French Socialist Party called on Camille Huysmans, the secretary of the 2nd International’s bureau, to organise a conference of socialist parties as quickly as possible. Announcing this initiative, an editorial in *Le Populaire de Paris* insisted that all socialist parties—and not just those from Allied and neutral countries—be invited. The editorial rousingly concluded that the International represented the “sole hope for the future [and] the only basis possible for a new world.”¹⁵ But if the initiative for a conference came from the French Socialist Party, it was the British Labour Party that took the lead in its realisation. During 1917–1918 Arthur Henderson, Labour’s secretary, had striven to rally socialist parties around a statement of war aims that could serve as a basis for a negotiated end to the war. Following the armistice, he quickly committed his party to reconstituting the International and, as a first step, to convening an international conference of socialists. “I am impressed with the urgency of this matter”, Arthur Henderson wrote a French comrade in December 1918. “The working-class of Great Britain are looking forward to the meeting of the Conference [...]. There must be no more delay.”¹⁶ Arthur Henderson had an eye on the upcoming peace conference in Paris: only if international socialism

- 13 David Kirby: *War, Peace and Revolution: International Socialism at the Crossroads 1914–1918*, New York 1986.
- 14 Philipp Scheidemann: *Der Frieden und die Internationale*, in: *Vorwärts* 302, 2 November 1918.
- 15 *Et l’Internationale*, in: *Le Populaire de Paris*, 15 November 1918; Oscar Frossard (French Socialist Party) to Joris-Karl Huysmans, 15 November 1918, reproduced in: Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.): *Die II. Internationale 1918/1919: Protokolle, Memoranden, Berichte und Korrespondenzen*, vol. 2, Berlin/Bonn 1980, p. 744.
- 16 Arthur Henderson to Oscar Frossard (French Socialist Party), 19 December 1918, in: *Labour and Socialist International Papers 3/146*, in: *Labour History Archive and Study Centre*.

spoke with one voice, he insisted, could it help to shape the post-war order.¹⁷ But if the ambition to influence international developments provided an important spur, so too did Labour's understanding of itself as internationalist—as belonging to a larger transnational socialist community.¹⁸

The immediate upshot of these efforts was the international socialist conference held in Berne in early February 1919. Assessments of Berne differed depending on one's perspective, but, as one participant justly remarked, the simple fact that previous enemies met "face to face" so soon after the war was itself a considerable achievement—and one that distinguished Berne from the peace conference in Paris.¹⁹ Unity, however, proved difficult as wartime divisions within and between parties spilled over into peacetime. As a result, by 1921 there existed three Internationals: the pre-war 2nd International; the 3rd (or Moscow) International founded in March 1919; and the Vienna (or 2.5) International created in February 1921. Paradoxically, the plurality of Internationals highlights an important element of unity among socialists: everyone agreed that an International was needed, just not on what kind. With debate raging over the structure and goals of an International, the 3rd International forced the issue in 1920 with its demand that socialist parties approve a highly centralised and hierarchical organisation committed to sparking revolution. While the German Social Democratic Party and Labour overwhelmingly rejected Moscow's demands, preferring to remain in the 2nd International, both the Independent German Socialists and French Socialist Party split into two, with the majority in each case voting to form a new (communist) party and to join the 3rd International. Much reduced in strength, the Independent German socialists and the French Socialist Party, along with the Independent Labour Party, a small body affiliated with Labour, answered the Austrian socialist Friedrich Adler's call for a "grouping of parties" that would form the kernel of a truly revolutionary and international proletarian organisation; in the meantime, Friedrich Adler was determined to keep the

- 17 For Arthur Henderson's desire to influence the peace conference, see: Arthur Henderson to Emile Vandervelde, 6 December 1918, in: Camille Huysmans Papers I 650, Letterenhuis, Antwerp.
- 18 For a valuable discussion of Labour's interwar internationalism, see: Christine Collette: *The Internationalist Faith: Labour's Attitudes to European Socialism: 1918–39*, Aldershot 1998.
- 19 For the participant, see: *The Berne Conference 1919*, in: Charles Roden Buxton Papers, in: Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House: MSS Brit. Emp.s 405 2/5. For the conference proceedings, see Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.): *Die II. Internationale 1918/1919: Protokolle, Memoranden, Berichte und Korrespondenzen*, vol. 2, pp. 133–570.

Vienna International independent of the other two Internationals.²⁰ With some justice, it seems, a British Foreign Office report could conclude that the war had “finally destroyed the original ideal [of international socialist unity].”²¹

Damning assessments like these, however, overlooked the fact that an international socialist community continued to exist across institutional boundaries. Member parties of the 2nd and Vienna Internationals in particular remained in touch with one another—an early affinity that quickly strengthened as negotiations between the three Internationals underscored the chasm separating socialists from communists.²² Befitting its leadership ambitions, Labour played a pivotal intermediary role in this process, remaining in frequent contact (both directly and indirectly through the Independent Labour Party) with the Independent German socialists and the French Socialist Party among other parties. But the French party’s contribution was no less important. With party unity fragile following the communist scission in December 1920, French Socialist Party leaders sought to fuse the two Internationals in order to overcome lingering divisions between French socialists. Accordingly, the French Socialist Party not only committed scarce financial resources to cultivating ties with other parties; but, more ambitiously, it also seized upon the concrete issue of reparations to foster cooperation between the Vienna and 2nd Internationals. In April 1921 and again in February 1922 the French Socialist Party organised conferences on the subject at which parties from both Internationals were represented. The immediate result was a common programme aimed at internationalising and depoliticising reparations—a programme that can be seen as a precursor to the 1925 Dawes Plan arrived at by governments and bankers.²³ But more important than the details of the programme is that it fulfilled its purpose of pointing the way towards greater international socialist unity. A first step came in October 1922 with the reintegration of what remained of the Independent German socialists into the German Social Democratic Party, soon followed by the merger of the 2nd and Vienna Internationals to form the Labour and Socialist International, whose founding congress was held in Hamburg in May 1923.

The Labour and Socialist International was a voluntary organisation in which member parties retained a great deal of autonomy. Although some socialists voiced dissatisfaction with this loose structure, it was one that all the parties could accept. Everyone agreed, in any case, that the Labour and Socialist International was only a start: the International,

20 On the Vienna International, see André Donneur: *Histoire de l’union des partis socialistes pour l’action internationale, 1920–1923*, Geneva/Sudbury 1967.

21 A Note on the Berne Conference, 25 February 1919, in: The National Archive, Kew Gardens: FO 608/237.

22 See Robert Sigel: *Die Geschichte der Zweiten Internationale: 1918–1923*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 1986.

23 For the programme, see: *Die Fünfländer-Konferenz*, in: *Die Freiheit* 100, 28 February 1922.

a joint appeal by the parties declared, will be constructed not in “one fell swoop” but by “long and tireless work”.²⁴ Still more to the point, much of this work would focus on practical cooperation between socialists.

Socialist Internationalism Renewed II: After 1945

By the end of the 1920s the sense of solidarity among socialist parties was visibly weakening. One important reason for this, as we shall see in the next section, stemmed from the practice of socialist internationalism, which proved divisive. The onset of a global economic depression, together with the political problems it fostered in numerous countries, only exacerbated matters. By the mid- 1930s, with the German Social Democratic Party dispersed in exile and with both Labour and the French Socialist Party preoccupied with domestic problems, socialist internationalism became the preserve of a small and increasingly marginalised minority within each of the major parties. By early 1939, with Europe on the verge of war, the Labour and Socialist International—and what Friedrich Adler more broadly called the “spirit of real internationalism”—appeared moribund.²⁵

Ironically, if the approach of war weakened socialist internationalism, the war itself provided a fillip. As Allied victory began to appear likely, socialists turned their attention to the post-war period. While domestic reforms occupied a central place in their thinking, foreign policy issues also figured in discussions since socialists remained committed to recasting international politics. Significantly, thinking about the post-war order occurred not only within each party but also between parties. Here, the upheavals of war proved beneficial since the presence of a diverse exile community in London from 1940 greatly facilitated the renewal of contact among European socialists. To be sure, exile politics are notoriously factious, and inter-socialist relations in wartime Britain were hobbled by mutual recriminations, most notably concerning the German Social Democratic Party’s role in the rise of Nazism in Germany.²⁶ But such tensions notwithstanding, regular

- 24 For the appeal, see: *An die sozialistischen Arbeiter aller Länder!*, issued by the Labour and Socialist International’s organisation committee in January 1923, reproduced in: *Protokoll des ersten Internationalen Sozialistischen Arbeiterkongresses*, Hamburg, 21–25 May 1923, Glashütten im Taunus 1974, pp. 3–5.
- 25 Friedrich Adler, see: *La Situation de l’I.O.S.*, *Mémoire de Friedrich Adler*, Secrétaire de l’I.O.S., reproduced in: Herbert Steiner: *l’internationale socialiste à la veille de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, juillet-août 1939: Documents de Friedrich Adler, in: *Le Mouvement Social* 58 (1967), pp. 97–102, emphasis in original.
- 26 See Anthony Glee: *Exile Politics During the Second World War: The German Social Democrats in Britain*, Oxford 1982; Isabelle Tombs: *Une identité européenne assiégée?: les exiles socialistes à Londres: 1939–1945*, in: *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 46:2 (1999), pp. 263–279.

exchanges between socialists continued throughout the war, thanks in part to the early impetus provided by Labour whose leaders sought to coordinate (and steer) socialist debates about the post-war world.

As the ties between socialists grew closer, moreover, a common commitment to reconstituting the International soon crystallised. In September 1944 the Inter-Allied Consultative Committee, which included representatives of various exile parties, asked Labour to establish a multi-party body to examine “the problems associated with the organisation, principles and policy of the future international association of democratic Labour and Socialist Parties.”²⁷ In response, Labour organised a conference of European socialists in March 1945 to discuss post-war issues, including the “future of Labour and Socialist International relations”.²⁸ Reporting on the conference, the French socialist Vincent Auriol insisted that, despite disagreements among delegates, the three-day event did “achieve something” in terms of socialist solidarity, adding exuberantly: “[w]e drew up precise texts, we sowed ideas, we showed the people there [participants] the usefulness of the International.” More concretely, the conference created a small “preparatory commission”, chaired by the Belgian socialist Camille Huysmans, to prepare proposals for a new International.²⁹

Although the preparatory commission held its first meeting in Autumn 1945, the founding of the Socialist International would have to wait another six years. This delay, however, cannot be attributed to the weakness of socialist internationalism. On the contrary, each of the major parties emerged from the war more determined than ever to rebuild an international socialist community. At the French Socialist Party’s first post-Liberation congress in November 1944, Daniel Mayer, the secretary general, announced his support for a new International—a pledge the party reiterated at its 1945 congress. If anything, Daniel Mayer’s successor, Guy Mollet, was even more committed to this goal. French socialists, Guy Mollet instructed the party’s foreign affairs commission in 1947, must “affirm very clearly our desire to reconstitute the International because it is for us a vital necessity.”³⁰ The French Socialist Party’s internationalism, moreover, was not merely verbal. During the early post-war years French Socialist Party leaders

27 Labour Party, Inter-Allied Consultative Committee, minutes, 8 September 1944, in: Labour History Archive and Study Centre: Labour and Socialist International Papers: LSI 27/1/5.

28 For the agenda, see: International Sub-Committee, 1945 file, minutes, 20 February 1945, in: Labour History Archive and Study Centre: Labour Party Archive.

29 La conférence internationale de Londres des 3, 4 et 5 March 1945, Auriol, undated, in: Carton: Conférences socialistes internationales 1945–1948, in: Office universitaire de recherche socialiste Paris: Archives du Parti Socialiste.

30 Congrès national extraordinaire, 9–11 November 1944, Mayer, 83, in: Office universitaire de recherche socialiste Paris: French Socialist Party; For Guy Mollet, see: Commission des affaires étrangères, minutes, 27 May 1947, French Socialist Party, in: Office universitaire de recherche socialiste Paris: Archives du Parti Socialiste Carton: Conférences socialistes internationales 1945–1948.

strove not only to develop bilateral relations with other socialist parties, but also to strengthen multilateral relations, lobbying for greater institutional links as well as for *ad hoc* exchanges on international issues.³¹ As for the post-war German Social Democratic Party, although scholars often portray a party imbued with nationalism, German socialists were deeply attached to socialist internationalism. Resurfacing in Germany after twelve years of brutal dictatorship, the German Social Democratic Party looked to socialist parties abroad for much-needed material and moral support. Recently returned from exile in London, Erich Ollenhauer, the party's deputy leader, confided in 1946 that "[w]hat we miss most politically and personally is contact with our friends in the social-democratic parties abroad [...]." For German socialists, he added, such ties were a "question of survival."³² Carefully cultivating relations with foreign parties, particularly Labour and the French Socialist Party, the German Social Democratic Party gained readmission into the international socialist fold in December 1947. Afterwards, the party would work to forge what one prominent German socialist described as an "international socialist *Kampfgemeinschaft*."³³

Unlike the French Socialist Party or the German Social Democratic Party, Labour bore some responsibility for the delay in establishing a new International. In power from 1945 to 1951, the Labour government was preoccupied with implementing an ambitious social-economic programme at home and with managing Britain's great power interests abroad. For many government ministers socialist internationalism was at best a distraction and at worst a nuisance. Yet Labour's internationalism during this period cannot be reduced to the policies of the Labour government, for after 1945 (as after 1918) the party assumed a leadership role in the world of international socialism. As early as 1944 the party approved in principle the reconstitution of an International; the question afterwards became not whether but how. From the start, party officials argued for a gradualist approach in which socialist solidarity would develop organically through

- 31 For example, see: German Social Democratic Party, Internationale Abteilung; French Socialist Party circular to parties, 17 November 1947, in: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Bonn: Archiv der sozialen Demokratie; Geoges Brutelle (SFIO) to the Committee of International Socialist Conferences, 23 August 1949, in: Socialist International, 605, in: International Institute of Social History.
- 32 Erich Ollenhauer to Hans Hedtoft-Hansen, 20 June 1946, in: German Social Democratic Party: Bestand Kurt Schumacher 65, in: Archiv der sozialen Demokratie. More generally, see Talbot C. Imlay: The Policy of Social Democracy is Self-Consciously Internationalist: The German Social Democratic Party's Internationalism after 1945, in: Journal of Modern History 86:1 (2014), pp. 81–123.
- 33 German Social Democratic Party: Protokoll der Verhandlungen des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands, congress held in Düsseldorf from 11 to 14 September 1948, Glashütten im Taunus 1976, Willi Eichler, p. 70.

efforts at practical cooperation among parties, rather than by institutional fiat.³⁴ If this approach would leave the Labour party and government relatively unconstrained, it did not serve as an excuse for inaction as the party sedulously expanded its wartime relations with continental parties, encouraging regular meetings and even providing financial aid. The impulse for this activity came partly from various backbench members of parliament and militants who agitated for a more “socialist” foreign policy on the government’s part, which included closer ties to European socialist parties.³⁵ But an even greater contribution came from those relatively obscure Labour officials responsible for day-to-day relations with foreign parties. Although easily overlooked, their patient efforts, combined with those of their counterparts abroad, helped to knit together the transnational socialist community. Quietly, almost inattentively, socialist internationalism developed into an important aspect of Labour’s policy and identity.

In the end, Labour did not decisively hinder the creation of a new International. With its backing, the various socialist parties in 1946 created a small secretariat, the Committee of the International Socialist Conference along with a Socialist Information and Liaison Office, both based in London. Two years later, both were replaced by the Committee of International Socialist Conferences, consisting of a newly-created executive committee and a reinforced secretariat. If the French Socialist Party pushed for stronger institutional structures from the start, Labour soon set aside its initial reluctance as the growing habit of inter-party consultations on concrete issues pointed to the potential benefits of closer relations. In June 1948 Morgan Phillips could inform continental socialists that his party supported “a strong international socialist organisation, armed for combat, democracy and socialism.”³⁶ Meanwhile, the exclusion of the Eastern European parties from the Committee of International Socialist Conferences in the wake of the Marshall Plan also had a unifying effect, increasing the commonalties between the remaining parties while removing an important cause of hesitation on Labour’s part: the desire not to exacerbate the deepening Cold War division of Europe.³⁷ Once assured that a new International would impose few formal constraints on member parties, Labour leaders overcame their remaining hesitations, clearing the way for the Socialist International.

34 For a gradualist approach, see Morgan Phillips’ comments in: Procès verbal de la première réunion de la Commission internationale désignée à Zurich pour examiner les moyens et les méthodes de la reconstruction de l’Internationale, 19 August 1947, in: Institut Emile Vandervelde Brussels, Max Buset Papers 64.

35 See the resolutions in: Labour Party, Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Party [Harvester microfilm], fiche 198, minutes, 10 April 1946.

36 Conférence de Vienne, 14 June 1948, in: Institut Emile Vandervelde Brussels: Max Buset Papers 76.

37 See Peter Heumos (ed.): *Europäischer Sozialismus im Kalten Krieg: Briefe und Berichte 1944–1948*, Frankfurt am Main 2004.

Although its loose structure makes it tempting to dismiss the new International, it is worth emphasising that after 1945 Socialist International (as after 1918) amounted to far more than its institutional expression. In the wake of war, European socialists were drawn together by a shared determination to contribute to a new post-war order both at home and abroad. This determination fuelled joint efforts to reconstitute a transnational community, efforts which gave meaning to internationalist claims. For European socialists, being internationalist meant working with other socialists on international issues. The Socialist International is thus significant as a collective affirmation by socialist parties of their commitment to socialist internationalism. As the head of Labour's International Department commented, though unlikely to "register many dramatic successes", the International nevertheless "creates a permanent moral obligation on its members to exploit their areas of agreement and to minimise their disagreements."³⁸

A Case Study: Rearmament After 1918

As mentioned in the introduction, the collective commitment of socialists to work together eventually waned after 1918 and again after 1945, draining the transnational socialist community of much of its vitality. Ironically, the practice of socialist internationalism was partly to blame. Rather than solidifying the bonds between parties, the concrete experience of cooperation convinced each party to work out its position on international issues on its own, independently of other parties. The practice of socialist internationalism, in other words, became nationalised. Although space constraints make it impossible fully to explore this process, this section highlights this process of nationalisation by looking at one issue—that of disarmament after 1918.

Disarmament was a central issue of international politics after 1918. The peace treaties imposed significant reductions and restrictions on the armed forces of the defeated powers, measures presented as a first step towards a more general limitation of armaments. During the 1920s a series of inter-governmental negotiations occurred, culminating in the World Disarmament Conference that opened in Geneva in February 1932 under the auspices of the League of Nations. From the outset, socialists supported disarmament—a position rooted in their anti-militarist traditions and in their genuine horror at the recent bloodbath. An urgent post-war task, the 1919 Berne conference resolved, was to "abolish standing armies and [...] to bring about complete disarmament."³⁹ Yet despite

38 Report on International Socialist Conference, Frankfurt am Main, from 30 June until 3 July 1951, Healey, undated, in: Labour History Archive and Study Centre: International Sub-Committee, 1951 file.

39 Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.): Die II. Internationale 1918/1919: Protokolle, Memoranden, Berichte und Korrespondenzen, vol. 2, p. 295.

this early agreement, disarmament would divide socialists. One problem stemmed from the inherently complex nature of the issue: as inter-governmental negotiations would demonstrate, even to define disarmament proved difficult. Yet the efforts of socialist parties to grapple with disarmament did not simply mirror those of “bourgeois” governments, for socialists framed their efforts in direct opposition to the latter. Indeed, socialists took it for granted that non-socialist governments would sabotage disarmament: lacking socialism’s internationalist vision, these governments would be unable to escape from a narrow and competitive conception of national interests. Accordingly, the role of international socialism was to point the way forward—to offer concrete proposals for disarmament that national governments would then be pressured to adopt.

At the end of 1925 the League of Nations created a Preparatory Commission whose members began working in early 1926 on a draft disarmament convention. Socialists were not slow in responding. In an effort to fashion a distinct international socialist policy on disarmament, the Labour and Socialist International’s executive committee in April 1926 created its own commission, chaired by the Dutch socialist Johan Willem Albarda.⁴⁰ At the commission’s first meeting in August, the participants agreed to begin with what Otto Wels, the German Social Democratic Party leader, termed “practical measures” of disarmament. To aid the commission in its work, each party would be asked to express its views. Despite or perhaps because of the failure of several parties to do so, the commission submitted a lengthy report to the Executive the following year that discussed disarmament more in broad strokes than in detail. In addition to stressing the links between disarmament and the arbitration of international disputes, the report broached the issue of national military organisation, suggesting that militias based on short-term service were preferable to professional armies based on long-term service since the former were supposedly less suitable as an instrument of aggression.⁴¹ Although this suggestion reflected traditional socialist hostility towards professional armies, it triggered heated exchanges at the Labour and Socialist International’s executive committee meeting in September 1927, with sharp criticism coming from the parties of the defeated powers. The peace treaties having imposed small professional armed forces on their countries, German and Austrian socialists balked at the claim that conscript armies were necessarily

40 For the commission, see: Sitzung der Exekutive der S.A.I. am 11. und 12. April 1926 in Zürich, in: Bulletin der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale, April 1926, pp. 3–4; Labour and Socialist International circular to parties, 22 April 1926, signed Friedrich Adler, in: International Institute of Social History: Labour and Socialist International, 1665.

41 For the commission meeting, see: Labour Party, International Department, Report on Labour and Socialist International meetings in Zurich, 26–29 August 1926, in: Labour and Socialist International Papers 14/22/1/1, in: Labour History Archive and Study Centre; for the commission’s report, see: Rapport de la Commission pour la question du Désarmement à l’Exécutif de l’I.S.O., undated but September 1927, in: International Institute of Social History: Labour and Socialist International, 762.

less threatening. Rather than continue the debate, the executive committee instructed the commission to reconsider the issue, which the latter duly did: in a second report ready in February 1928 the commission now asserted that each country should decide for itself the most appropriate military organisation.⁴² Six months later the delegates to the Labour and Socialist International congress in Brussels unanimously approved a resolution that left the nature and extent of national armed forces—and thus of disarmament policy more generally—to the individual parties to determine.⁴³

Referring disarmament policy back to the parties certainly made some sense. The Labour and Socialist International was not the Comintern, and its national sections could not be dictated to. The complexity of disarmament, in any case, rendered the task of reaching a consensus on a well-defined policy extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the Labour and Socialist International's decision meant that each party, in working out a position on disarmament, would struggle on its own to balance domestic political and intra-party pressures with its commitment to the practice of socialist internationalism. In the process not only did disarmament become a subject of growing dispute between the parties, but each party's understanding of socialist internationalism was increasingly refracted through the particularist lens of national and party politics. The unintentional result was to weaken the internationalist identity of the major parties.

What can be termed the nationalisation of socialist disarmament policy was clearly evident with the German Social Democratic Party. German socialists initially welcomed their country's enforced disarmament, casting Germany as a pioneer in the march towards universal disarmament.⁴⁴ At the same time, the German Social Democratic Party sought to contribute to a constructive disarmament policy for the International. Its leaders thus accepted that disarmament must be treated not in isolation but as part of a larger peace policy that included security guarantees and provisions for compulsory arbitration—a position that aligned the party with Labour and the French Socialist Party. But this cooperative attitude quickly shifted in the wake of the *Panzerkreuzer* affair, triggered by the German Social Democratic Party led government's decision in August 1928 to approve the construction of a battle-cruiser. Although the warship fell within the limits

42 See: Protokoll der Sitzung, Executive committee meeting, 11–12 September 1927, Zurich, in: International Institute of Social History: Labour and Socialist International, 291; Rapport de la Commission du Désarmement, undated but February 1928, in: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv: II. Internationale, RY 14 I 6/2/30.

43 Der Militarismus und die Abrüstung, reproduced in: Dritter Kongress der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale: Brüssel 5. bis 11. August 1928: Berichte und Verhandlungen, 2 vols. (Abteilungen I-IX), pp. 7–12.

44 Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, NL Hermann Müller, N 2200/194, Hermann Müller-Franken: Völkerbeziehungen und Internationale, in: Programmentwurf der S.P.D., Ein Kommentar 1921, Berlin 1921, pp. 77–78.

set by the Versailles Treaty, the decision contradicted recent German Social Democratic Party electoral promises, provoking stiff opposition within the party. The ensuing political crisis has been told before, but the affair also had an important international socialist dimension.⁴⁵ In a bid to deflect attention from the affair, the German Social Democratic Party leaders established an internal commission to examine the party's military policy. As part of its deliberations, the commission solicited the opinion of four "experts", two of whom, the Austrians Otto Bauer and Julius Deutsch, emphasised the value of continued collaboration within the Labour and Socialist International on disarmament. Yet in its December 1928 report the commission paid little more than lip-service to such collaboration, focusing instead on Germany's right to possess military forces for defence.⁴⁶ Determined to affirm the party's support for national defence, a majority of commission members were prepared to undermine the German Social Democratic Party's internationalism in order to defeat their critics, many of whom were outspoken advocates of international socialist solidarity.⁴⁷ Significantly, irritation with foreign (and especially French) socialists for encouraging the party to disavow the German Social Democratic Party-led government's decision helped to ensure the report's approval at the party's annual congress in May 1929.⁴⁸ For the German Social Democratic Party the national task of forging a political reliable army had supplanted the internationalist

45 See Heinrich August Winkler: *Der Schein der Normalität: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1924 bis 1930*, Berlin 1985, pp. 521–55, 629–35; and Richard Breitman: *German Socialism and Weimar Democracy*, Chapel Hill 1981.

46 For expert opinions, see: Wilhelm Dittmann circular to commission members, 29 October 1928, in: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, German Social Democratic Party: RY 20 145/II/14. This includes two papers entitled *Gutachten über ein Wehrprogramm der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, one by Otto Bauer and the other by Julius Deutsch. The other two experts were Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky. For their opinions, see: *Die Sozialdemokratie und die Wehrfrage: Ein Gutachen von Eduard Bernstein*, and: *Zusammenfassendes Schlußkapital aus Kautskys Gutachen zur Wehrfrage*, in: *Archiv der sozialen Demokratie: NL Paul Levi: NY 4126/23*. For the December 1928 report, see: *Richtlinien zur Wehrpolitik*, in: German Social Democratic Party: *Protokoll Sozialdemokratischer Parteitag*, held in Magdeburg from 26 to 31 Mas 1929, Berlin 1929, pp. 288–289.

47 For two commission members who viewed the report as a defeat for international socialism and disarmament, see Heinrich Ströbel's untitled memorandum, in: *Archiv der sozialen Demokratie: NL Paul Levi: NY 4126/23*; and Toni Sender: *Kritik an den Richtlinien zur Wehrpolitik*, in *Die Gesellschaft* 1 (1929), pp. 113–24.

48 See Hermann Müller's remarks in German Social Democratic Party: *Protokoll Sozialdemokratischer Parteitag Magdeburg 1929*, p. 85.

project of disarmament. As for the party's commitment to socialist internationalism, this increasingly amounted to lecturing foreign socialists on the need to pressure their governments to disarm to Germany's level.⁴⁹

A similar nationalisation of disarmament policy occurred with the French Socialist Party. Initially, the party strove to distinguish its policy from that of successive French governments which subordinated disarmament to the obtainment of additional security guarantees. This effort on the French Socialist Party's part helps to explain the controversy surrounding the activities of Joseph Paul-Boncour, a French socialist who, as member of France's delegation to the League of Nations, was involved in disarmament negotiations. Following complaints by Otto Bauer that Paul-Boncour's public statements contradicted Labour and Socialist International resolutions, the Labour and Socialist International's Bureau discussed the matter in August 1926 only to decide that it was up to the French Socialist Party to act. One result of the Labour and Socialist International's decision is that the question of Paul-Boncour's presence in Geneva grew entangled in the ongoing debate over French Socialist Party participation in non-socialist governments.⁵⁰ But if Paul-Boncour's case provoked disarray among French socialists it was also because many of them shared their foreign comrades' growing unease with his forceful advocacy of France's security needs (including the need for military preparedness) and, more generally, with his espousal of a "patriotic" perspective on international politics.⁵¹ No one, moreover, was more uneasy than Léon Blum, the French Socialist Party's parliamentary leader, who in September 1928 kicked off a pro-disarmament campaign by openly repudiating Paul-Boncour's priority on security over disarmament. Coming just one month after the

- 49 A good example is Rudolf Breitscheid, the German Social Democratic Party's foreign policy spokesman and longtime advocate of international socialist cooperation. See his speech in May 1932 at a joint Labour and Socialist International Federation of Trade Union conference on disarmament, in: International Institute of Social History, Labour and Socialist International, 910: "Rede gehalten durch's Radio an der Gemeinsamen Konferenz der S.A.I. und des I.G.B. für die Abrüstung [...] am 22. Mai 1932 [...]", undated.
- 50 Paul Boncour et la Société des Nations: Correspondance entre le Secrétariat de l'I.O.S. et le Parti Socialiste français (S.F.I.O.), 21 July 1926, in: International Institute of Social History: Labour and Socialist International, 249.
- 51 For the unease of foreign socialists, see: An die Mitglieder des Parteivorstandes der Sozialistischen Partei Frankreichs, draft letter from German Social Democratic Party to French Socialist Party, undated but early 1928, in: Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, NL Hermann Müller, N 2200/87. Paul-Boncour himself described his perspective as patriotic. See: Paul-Boncour to Jean-Baptiste Séverac, undated but December 1931, in: Archives nationales Paris: Papiers Joseph Paul-Boncour: 424/AP/14.

Labour and Socialist International Congress and at the height of the *Panzerkreuzer* affair, Léon Blum's initiative represented an attempt to push French Socialist Party policy closer to that of other socialist parties and of the German Social Democratic Party in particular.⁵²

Léon Blum's efforts, however, back-fired. One reason is that Léon Blum, loyal to the party's Jaurèsian legacy, insisted on the merits of militia armies, thereby irritating both the German Social Democratic Party and Labour which rejected the principle of universal (male) military service.⁵³ But a more important reason is that, in calling on France to begin disarming unilaterally, Blum inflamed the simmering debate within the French Socialist Party over national defence, with the result that disarmament became confused with the question of whether French socialists should ever support a French war effort. Mounting tensions culminated in a lengthy and heated debate at the party's May 1931 congress, producing a compromise resolution that affirmed the French Socialist Party's commitment to national defence and its rejection of war. Despite Paul-Boncour's dissatisfaction, the outcome marked a defeat for Léon Blum's socialist internationalist approach to disarmament as those who favoured a more security-oriented and narrowly French perspective exploited the issue of national defence to tar their opponents as impractical idealists. Tellingly, at the Labour and Socialist International's congress three months later the French Socialist Party's principal spokesman on disarmament policy was not Léon Blum but Pierre Renaudel, a vigorous defender of Paul-Boncour.⁵⁴

Labour's disarmament policy evolved along similar lines to those of the German Social Democratic Party and the French Socialist Party. Prodded by the Independent Labour Party, Labour officials during the early 1920s searched for an approach to disarmament that would appeal to "foreign labour" by combining concrete proposals for comprehensive arms reductions with sensitivity towards French security concerns and German demands for equality of treatment.⁵⁵ The Geneva Protocol, negotiated in 1924 during Labour's brief

52 Léon Blum: À Genève: Le discours de Paul-Boncour, in: *Le Populaire de Paris*, 27 September 1928, reproduced in: Léon Blum: *L'Œuvre de Léon Blum: Réparations et désarmement: Les problèmes de la paix: La Montée des fascismes: 1928–1934*, Paris 1972, pp. 95–97.

53 For Léon Blum's support of militia armies, see French Socialist Party: XXVIIIe Congrès national tenu à Tours le 24, 25, 26 et 27 mai 1931, *Compte rendu sténographique*, Paris 1931, pp. 331–33.

54 For Léon Blum, see: *Il faut un coup d'audace*, in: *Le Populaire de Paris*, 10 September 1930, p. 1. For the French Socialist Party congress debates, see French Socialist Party: XXVIIIe Congrès national [...] mai 1931, pp. 237–358, 401–46; for the Labour and Socialist International congress, see: *Labour and Socialist International: Vierter Kongreß der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale*, Vienna, 25 July until August 1931, *Glashütten im Taunus* 1974, VI, pp. 71–74.

55 Draft Report for the International Socialist Conference: The League of Nations and Disarmament, Leonard Woolf, 25 July 1922, in: Labour History Archive and Study Centre: Labour History and Archive Centre Manchester Papers: Labour Party Archive: file memoranda 1922–1924.

minority government, was meant to be a first step. In addition to making compulsory arbitration the test of aggression and hence of the applicability of League sanctions, the Protocol imposed as a pre-condition of its coming into force the signing of an international disarmament agreement. Although the subsequent Conservative government rejected the protocol, Labour leaders vigorously promoted it both at home and within the Labour and Socialist International as the keystone of a socialist peace policy. The protocol, Arthur Henderson proclaimed at the Labour and Socialist International's 1925 congress, must become the "guiding principle of the international activity [of the Labour and Socialist International] as well as that of individual parties."⁵⁶ If the Labour and Socialist International gave its official blessing to the protocol, another—and unintended—result of Labour's lobbying was to raise expectations within the international socialist community that a Labour government would act decisively to break the apparent logjam at Geneva.

Labour, however, would bitterly disappoint these expectations during its second stint in power beginning in May 1929. Appearing to abandon the protocol and with it the pursuit of general disarmament through the League, the Labour government initially focused on naval arms limitations. Although party officials justified this choice as a concrete step towards general disarmament, the French Socialist Party reacted angrily: at a January 1930 meeting of the Labour and Socialist International's disarmament commission, Pierre Renaudel accused Labour of national selfishness while Léon Blum warned that the latter was "in a bad position as regards disarmament." Clearly frustrated, William Gillies, the head of Labour's international department, replied that the Labour and Socialist International's duty was to "give the fullest support" to Labour.⁵⁷ But Gillies' frustration paled beside that of Labour's leader, Ramsay MacDonald, who increasingly railed against the "French mentality" (socialist and non-socialist alike), remarking that "France becomes the peace problem of Europe."⁵⁸ The upshot is that Labour leaders lost all interest in working with the Labour and Socialist International on disarmament. If the burdens of government partly explain this reaction, so too does growing resentment at the refusal of socialist parties to accept Labour's definition of their internationalist obligations. "[C]ontinental comrades [...]", Gillies testily remarked, "do not fully realise what the

56 Labour and Socialist International: Zweiter Kongreß der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale. Marseille, 22. bis 27. August 1925. Bericht des Sekretariats und Verhandlungsprotokoll, Glashütten im Taunus 1964, 238–39.

57 For angry reactions, see Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Labour and Socialist International minutes 1921–1937, Labour International Department, Meeting of the Disarmament Commission of the Labour and Socialist International, William Gillies, undated but January 1930; also see William Gillies, Labour International Department: Joint Meeting of the Bureau of the Labour and Socialist International and the Executive of the International Federation of Trade Unions, Paris, March 7, 1930, undated.

58 Labour Party Archive, James Ramsay MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/1/1753, diary, 12 and 14 February 1930.

Labour Government is doing, and hopes to do.”⁵⁹ Following the Labour Government’s fall in October 1931 and in anticipation of the upcoming World Disarmament Conference, party officials began discussing a return to a more internationalist approach that would be sensitive to the views of other parties. But by then events in Germany and elsewhere were rapidly making disarmament a moot subject.⁶⁰

By the early 1930s, then, the leading socialist parties were far more divided over disarmament than they had been earlier. Emerging from the First World War with a renewed commitment to socialist internationalism, European socialists were determined to cooperate on pressing international issues, not least disarmament. Reflecting their common internationalist identity, each of the major parties was sensitive to the differing needs of their counterparts. Paradoxically, however, the effort to work together undermined the collective commitment to the practice of socialist internationalism by inducing German, French and British socialists to view disarmament more from the perspective of their own particularist (national and party) needs. And what was true for disarmament was also true for numerous other issues after 1918 and after 1945.

Conclusion

Socialist internationalism was a significant and often overlooked dimension of 20th century European socialism. In 1918 and again 1945 the experience of war galvanised socialists, producing a shared determination to reconstruct the International in order to facilitate inter-party cooperation on international issues and, more ambitiously, to serve as an instrument for influencing post-war international relations. Equally pertinent, this commitment to cooperation declined over time as socialists increasingly approached issues from a particularist more than socialist internationalist perspective, thereby strengthening the national rootedness of each of the major parties. This nationalisation of socialist international policy, however, was not the result of a birth defect of socialism; nor did it simply reflect the ongoing transformation of socialist parties from interest groups to modern, mass-based governing parties. Instead, as the case study of disarmament suggests, it was the paradoxical outcome of efforts by socialist parties to work together to formulate

59 Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Labour and Socialist International minutes 1921–1937, Labour International Department, Meeting of the Disarmament Commission of the Labour and Socialist International.

60 Labour History Archive and Study Centre: Labour History and Archive Centre Manchester: Labour Party Archive: memoranda 1924–1936; Disarmament: Resolution, no. 429(a), December 1932, in: Labour History and Archive Centre Manchester; also see Arthur Henderson: *Labour’s Foreign Policy*, London 1933, pp. 17–24.

common policies on pressing international issues. In the end, the practice of socialist internationalism eroded the collective internationalist identity of the parties—the very identity that encouraged socialists to cooperate in the first place.

Although socialist internationalism has all but disappeared today, it nevertheless represented a unique form of international activity. Recently, the transnational links between nationally-based political parties have become a subject of research. In addition to new studies of the Comintern, scholars are investigating the international dimension of European Christian democracy. Wolfram Kaiser, for example, retraces the informal network of leading Christian democratic politicians after 1945, a network, he maintains, that played a significant role in pushing forward the project of European integration.⁶¹ Yet Wolfram Kaiser arguably exaggerates the influence of this informal network, for what is striking about the latter is its amorphous character, especially when compared to that of the socialists. Indeed, for Christian democrats international socialism served both as a goad and a reminder of their own organisational weakness.⁶² After 1945 (as after 1918) socialists reconstituted an International whose formal and informal structure provided the institutional basis of a transnational community. At the same time, unlike with the Comintern, the obligation of Labour and Socialist International and their members to cooperate with one another remained voluntary, something which strengthened their commitment to internationalism—at least initially.

This combination of structure and liberty not only distinguished socialist internationalism from its communist and Christian democratic rivals, but also made it an interesting experiment in reconciling national and international identities. Because socialist parties were rooted in a particular nation, they remained deeply attuned to national and sub-national politics, an important point in a world in which the nation-state commanded (and still commands) considerable loyalty. A lack of rootedness is arguably a weakness of many international non-governmental organisations, and it is a weakness that either an increase in the number of INGOs or the development of closer connections between INGOs can overcome. Equally pertinent, the internationalism of socialists made their international community something more than an international governmental organisation such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund or even the European Union, whose purpose is to mediate between competing national interests. Instead, socialist internationalism was something different: a nationally rooted and voluntarily internationalist community. And as such it offered a potential means not of doing away with the nation but of internationalising the latter. Ultimately, socialist

61 Wolfram Kaiser: *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*, Cambridge 2007. For the Comintern, see Tim Rees/Andrew Thorpe (eds.): *International Communism and the Communist International*, Manchester 1998.

62 See Konrad Adenauer's comments in: *Genfer Kreis*, 22. December 1948, *Protokoll Koutzine*, in: Michael Gehler/Wolfram Kaiser (eds.): *Transnationale Parteienkooperation der europäischen Christdemokraten: Dokumente 1945–1965*, Munich 2004, p. 149.

internationalism largely failed in this purpose, but this does not mean that the promise it embodied is necessarily chimerical. But if we are to tap this promise, we need to understand the strengths as well as weaknesses of socialist internationalism, which requires taking the phenomenon seriously.

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