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**'Thinking Globally': Internationalism and Workers' Identity.  
A Comparison of Workers in Liverpool, Hamburg and St  
Petersburg / Petrograd / Leningrad, 1910-1925.  
Research Project**

'The working men have no country'<sup>1</sup> Marx and Engels pronounced in the Communist Manifesto. Internationalism was central to a Socialist ideology that gave a class basis to the idea of brotherhood transcending national boundaries. Fused together through the development of international capitalism, socialist revolutions were expected to start in one or another country, but inevitably would become a world affair. World revolution would eventually render nations and thus nationality a redundant part of peoples' identity – globalisation à la Marx.

Ideologies exist at the junction between theory and practice, grounded in abstract ideas and everyday political reality. It is thus a real shortcoming that the historical study of internationalism has generally taken the form of intellectual and political history focusing on great personalities and institutions. Even the recent boom in the study of 'transnationalism' and 'globalisation' with its emphasis on diaspora and transcendence of borders has done little to remedy this deficit.<sup>2</sup>

This project, thus, sets out to shift this focus. Its originality lies in tackling the meaning of internationalism at rank-and-file levels of the Socialist/Marxist movement. It will examine the divergent ways in which internationalism was understood and their expression in the social practices in working-class communities. It focuses on a momentous period and on three countries: Germany, with the largest and strongest radical socialist movement in Europe; Russia/Soviet Russia, about to become the first Communist state; and Britain with an established but less militant labour movement. Given their distinctive political, social and cultural developments, and importance in the theoretical evolution and practical pursuit of international revolution, this trio provides a valuable basis for comparative analysis.

This approach utilises case studies of Liverpool, Hamburg and St. Petersburg as a prism. Each was a major port; and a large-scale industrial complex; and each generated militant workers' movements which were heavily, though unevenly, influenced by Socialist/Marxist ideas, that have left sufficient records for rank-and-file perceptions and identities to be reconstructed. Workers in these cities were part of the prime constituency for Socialist ideology, yet at the same time they were the product of their own national culture.

The destruction of World War I saw mass nationalism in Europe mobilised, the tensions between internationalism and the idea of patriotism laid bare, and the Second International

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The Communist Manifesto*, London, Penguin Books, 1985, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> The still prevailing emphasis on institutions, political thought, and leading cadres is highlighted in one of the most recent collection of articles of some of the leading scholars in the field. Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan, Matthew Worley (eds.): *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern. Perspectives on Stalinization. 1917-53*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

torn apart. Yet within the Socialist movement the idea was not abandoned and instead was brandished in the multiple upheavals of 1917-19. Three main research questions will explore the extent and consistency of revolutionary and reformist internationalism among radical workers c.1910-1925. First, the issue of tensions between class consciousness/allegiance and national identity/allegiance. Which had priority? Second, how intensely was this balance influenced by the major events and developments of the period? How far did internationalist attitudes ebb, flow and change? Third, was there a difference between theory and practice, between preaching or endorsing internationalism and living it at the local level? In sifting the evidence, the focus will be placed on two dimensions of internationalism, the 'domestic' dimension and the 'foreign' dimension. So far as the first is concerned, each case-study provides the opportunity to test the extent to which internationalism shaped radical workers' perception and treatment of ethnic minorities and foreign immigrants within the workforce of their own working-class community. It will also be possible to explore the attitude of labour activists and rank-and-file workers towards empire, the colonial rule exercised by their own nation and the colonial peoples over whom their own nation exercised imperial dominion. The 'foreign' dimension of internationalism will be explored by scrutinising, comparing and contrasting perceptions of and attitudes towards workers' movements abroad and responses to war and revolution, strikes and uprisings, violence and repression in other countries. The depth and extent of internationalism among radical workers and the labour movement in general will be measured in part by their reactions to national calls to arms and to highly controversial political positions such as that of revolutionary defeatism.

The study will explore how far internationalism was 'lived' by rank-and-file workers within formal and semi-formal organisations, and how it was communicated to their constituency. The discourse on internationalism in local newspapers, leaflets, and debates of communist and socialist parties, trade unions and workers' clubs will be examined. The analysis will further explore whether and how this discourse created collective criteria for articulating an internationalist interpretation of events; and the extent to which this was transformed into social practices or real political actions expressing solidarity across national and state boundaries. In January 1920, for instance, the creation of Councils of Action in Liverpool opposing any British intervention against the Soviet Union became an active expression of working-class solidarity. It is at this point that the interplay between events, on the one hand, and social circumstances and ideology on the other, will come to the fore and that the nature and extent of collective internationalism among radical workers will be analysed in the wider historical context. Careful reconstruction and comparison of the varying perceptions of internationalism will give texture and depth to the portrait of collective attitudes within the three workers communities. It will allow exploration of the salience, relevance and consistency of internationalist attitudes in daily life. And it will provide insight into the extent to which internationalism was or was not correlated with differences in age and gender. Ultimately, fresh insight into the 'picture from below' afforded by a comparative approach will facilitate a broader reassessment of early twentieth-century internationalism, integrating existing intellectual and institutional histories with grassroots attitudes, perceptions, practices and actions.

The project can build upon a huge literature on workers' identity, the Socialist/Communist movement, and working class reactions to the First World War in all three countries. Furthermore, in all three countries, local and national archives, Socialist/Communist and trade unions archive records will be trawled for new primary material.

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