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The Comintern and the Labour and Socialist International: Struggling Over Democracy and Working-Class Unity
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The article analyses the relations between the Communist International (Comintern) and the Labour and Socialist International (LSI) and the three attempts at cooperation from the 1920s to the 1940s. The debate in the LSI over the Comintern aligned with a deeper ideological struggle among socialists to define their ideology, whether to identify with democracy or to consider more revolutionary tactics and cooperation with the communists. At first socialist identity suffered from this confusion, but the actions of the Comintern and its successor pushed a clear separation, defining social democratic ideology and internationalism in the postwar era.

Keywords: Communist International, Comintern, Labour and Socialist International (LSI), Socialist International (SI), Internationalism.

Black Hole Comintern

The inter-war period saw two important organisations stake out a claim to the mantle of socialist internationalism: the Communist International (Third International or Comintern), uniting all parties following the revolutionary lead of the Soviet Union, and the Labour and Socialist International (LSI), uniting the parties that stayed loyal to socialist traditions and rejected communist methods. However, it was the Comintern that managed to capture almost all the attention of historians, like a black hole. This is not surprising; indeed, it is by design. The Comintern was born as the repudiation of the betrayal and timidity of traditional socialists, the version finally done right. In its framework, socialist internationalism in the tradition of the Second International is

at worst treasonous and at best ineffective. However, even non-communists underplayed socialist internationalism: disappointed internationalists downplayed it because they needed to lament their crushed ideals and blame their more moderate comrades; socialists seeking nationalist respectability did so because they needed to prove that transnational commitments were irrelevant[1].

Often historians have borrowed these concepts without examining them. E.H. Carr's book on the decline of the Comintern makes only sporadic references to the LSI, while Rolf Steininger sums it up with "the history of the LSI is the history of its failure"[2]. It was up to historians such as Miloš Hájek, Enzo Collotti, and Leonardo Rapone to correct the "unilateral privileging"[3] of the Comintern. First, despite its claims, the Comintern did not stand for the entire labour movement, since most workers in Europe remained loyal to their "old house", the socialist parties. Secondly, the practice of post-war social democracy was a response to the interwar period, including the activities of the LSI[4]. Finally, only by reconstructing social democratic internationalism we can highlight what was peculiar of the Comintern.

Unlike the vertical command structure of the Comintern, the Labour and Socialist International did not impose its decisions on the national parties. The assumption goes that there is little reason to investigate its resolutions and activities. The assumption is wrong. A new line of historiography—inspired by Guillame Devin and continued by Talbot Imlay, Brian Shaev, Matthew Broad and also me[5]—has done important research on socialist internationalism by treating it not as the

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[1]   See E. Costa, *The Labour Party, Denis Healey and the International Socialist Movement: Rebuilding the Socialist International during the Cold War, 1945–1951*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2018, p. 1.

[2]   R. Steininger, *Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, Bonn 1979, p. 10.

[3]   E. Collotti, *Presentazione*, in Id. (a cura di), *L'Internazionale Operaia e Socialista tra le due guerre*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1985, p. XI.

[4]   L. Rapone, *La socialdemocrazia europea tra le due guerre: dall'organizzazione della pace alla resistenza al fascismo, 1923-1936*, Carocci, Roma 1999, pp. 12-3.

[5]   T.C. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018; G. Devin, *L'Internationale socialiste: histoire et sociologie du socialisme international, 1945-1990*, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, Paris 1993; M. Broad, *Harold Wilson, Denmark and the Making of Labour European Policy*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2017; B. Shaev, *Nationalism, Transnationalism and European Socialism in the 1950s: A Comparison of the French and German Cases*, in "History of European Ideas", XLVI, 2020, 1, pp. 41-58; Costa, *Labour Party, Healey, International Socialist*, cit.

defective brother of communist internationalism but as a regular practice that actually shaped the activities and ideas of the national parties. The route was different from the Comintern but still effective.

Imlay, Shaev, and I identify a number of ways in which internationalism influenced national parties. First, there is the matter of identity and exclusivity[6]. As being part of the international socialist community is a requirement of the socialist identity, setting conditions for joining the socialist community can force applicants to transform practice and ideology—Donald Sassoon compares this to joining a club[7]. While these rules were not as formal as the twenty-first conditions of the Comintern, the post-war Socialist International was inflexible in rejecting communists and communist sympathisers. The LSI did not want to close doors to communists, thus its identity was much looser.

Socialist parties were also drawn towards similar practices and ideology because some parties acted as models to others. While no socialist party had the pull that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had over the communist movement, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) before the First World War and the Labour Party in the early post-war period were model to be imitated by socialists[8].

Imlay, Devin, and Broad emphasise the deep web of informal connections between socialists—actually stronger than legal obligations—that were strengthened or weakened by a practice of cooperation and dialogue: "Rather than a general staff, the Socialist Internationals operated as sites of interaction between parties that occurred on a voluntary basis. Internationalism was not something dictated to socialist parties; it was instead a self-imposed principle and practice"[9].

Finally, socialist internationalism interacted closely with factional interplay, as shown by Shaev and Imlay[10] and which I have conceptualised under the name "internationalisation of domestic quarrels"[11]. Party factions often seek association with a foreign socialist party from which to draw identity, prestige, ideas, policies. Rival factions can associate with a different socialist party, expressing a different identity. For exam-

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[6] See Costa, *Labour Party, Healey, International Socialist*, cit., p. 5.

[7] See D. Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, I.B. Tauris, London 2014, p. 210.

[8] See Costa, *Labour Party, Healey, International Socialist*, cit., pp. 56-9.

[9] Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 4.

[10] See Shaev, *Nationalism, Transnationalism and European Socialism in the 1950s*, cit., pp. 41-58; Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 7.

[11] Costa, *Labour Party, Healey, International Socialist*, cit., pp. 6-7.

ple, in the 1970s the socialist parties of the new democracies in Spain and Portugal debated an alliance with the local communist party and associated with the French Socialist Party of François Mitterrand or the SPD of Helmut Schmidt, depending on whether they were in favour or against[12]. This created a division inside the international socialist community and within the socialist parties of other nations.

I propose that the internationalisation of domestic quarrels is necessary to understand how the relations between the LSI and the Comintern influenced the socialist parties, in a way that drove them away from Communism and that would bring them to finally define democratic socialism with the Declaration of Principles of the Socialist International, the Frankfurt Declaration, in 1951.

The article is going to analyse three opportunities for rapprochement and agreement between LSI and Comintern. All three occasions failed and strengthened the divisions between socialists and communists. Despite external events and some ideological commitments pushing them together, socialists and communists were pushed apart by other ideological commitments and their practice, which made the centrifugal force irresistible.

The first occasion was the foundational period of the LSI from 1918 to 1923. The war and the Bolshevik Revolution threw the Second International into a crisis, forcing social democrats to reconsider their identity and policy. As fluidity and indecision characterised the movement, there could have been the opportunity for a reconciliation. However, as the Third International took form, it closed the door for all socialists who would not accept subordination to the Moscow centre. The intransigence of the Comintern penalised the socialists who worked for the united front of all the workers and helped those who wanted a clear separation.

The second occasion came in the 1930s. The rising tide of Fascism made the case for unity of action much stronger, finding even communists and social democrats responsive. Although the Popular Front was realised in some nations and rejected in others, the plan for a general agreement between the LSI and the Comintern failed. In this case the communists' opening worked better than intransigence at weakening socialist internationalism.

Finally, the last occasion came with the Second World War. The fight against Fascism in the Eastern Front and the Resistance in occu-

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[12] See C. Salm, *Transnational Socialist Networks in the 1970s: European Community Development Aid and Southern Enlargement*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2016, p. 119.

pied countries restored the respectability of communist parties. As a sign of their independence, Stalin even dissolved the Comintern. Many socialists willingly cooperated with communists during and after the war in Western and Eastern Europe. However, the spectre of the Comintern still produced suspicions of communist subservience to the USSR. All suspicions were confirmed by the crushing of democracy in Eastern Europe, the mobilisation against the Marshall Plan in Western Europe and the birth of the Cominform. After that, the Comintern consolidated its place in socialist culture as proof of communist untrustworthiness and negative model of what the Socialist International should not be.

Separation at birth (1918-1923)

The First World War is often reduced to the "prehistory of the Komintern"[13]. In truth, all socialist parties were deeply divided. While "social-patriots" backed the war effort, minority factions demanded with increasing volume a negotiated peace and return to internationalism. The minority factions included even many socialists who would not join the communist movement. A potent mechanism in the maturation of pro-peace positions was the internationalisation of domestic quarrels: "As divisions deepened, socialists closely followed developments in other parties, with factions in one party drawing inspiration from those in others in what amounted to a struggle to define the meaning of socialist internationalism"[14].

During the war, the right-wing leadership of the French Socialist Party (SFIO) was intransigent in rejecting communications with socialists from enemy countries. Conversely, the French left-wing minority drew strength from the dramatic growth of the pro-peace faction in the German SPD, which culminated in the formation of the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD). Later peace initiatives of the Labour Party also strengthened the peace minorities[15]. Indeed, by the end of the war the French pro-peace minority had become the new majority. The new SFIO leadership confirmed its victory on the international stage by seeking to connect with the USPD, which was also more open to renewing socialist contacts than the majority-SPD (MSPD).

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[13] Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 18.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Ivi, pp. 26-37.

After the Armistice, socialists called for an international conference of labour forces to stand in opposition to the conference of bourgeois nations in Versailles, and the Bolsheviks called for world revolution. Socialists from Allied countries and Central powers met in a conference in Berne in February 1919[16]. Not only Belgians, Italians, and Russians did not attend but the conference was marked by "transfusing national squabbles into the International"[17] according to Claudio Treves.

The question of war guilt was resolved surprisingly quickly, allowing socialists from both sides to work together again[18]. It was the question of Bolshevism that accelerated the polarisation of the socialist movement along factional and national lines[19]. The anti-communist initiative started from the Russian Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, who hoped that Western Socialists' intervention could improve their situation. Albert Thomas, leader of the French right-wing socialists, managed to put on the agenda of the conference the question of democracy and dictatorship[20]. He argued that democracy was essential for the construction of socialism and thus it was imperative to reject Bolshevik trends. A committee was set up to discuss a possible resolution, with British Labour leader MacDonald arguing for a commitment to democracy and MSPD's leader Otto Wels making the repudiation of Bolshevism explicit and at the same level of imperialism[21]. Jean Longuet, for the leadership of the SFIO, rejected any debate on democracy and dictatorship until they had better information about Russia[22].

The Swedish Hjalmar Branting composed a combined resolution, which welcomed the Soviet revolution for breaking imperialism and militarism in Russia and condemned any external intervention in Russia. At the same time, the resolution committed the socialist parties to democracy: "Fully in agreement with all the congresses of the International, the Berne Conference remains unswervingly placed on the

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[16] See J. Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. II, *1914-1943*, Nelson, London 1967, pp. 149-56; Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., pp. 52-62.

[17] C. Treves, *Soli… nell'Internazionale*, in "Critica Sociale", 1-15 aprile 1919, 7, p. 75.

[18] See Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 59.

[19] See J. Zarusky, *Die deutschen Sozialdemokraten und das sowjetische Modell: ideologische Auseinandersetzung und außenpolitische Konzeptionen, 1917-1933*, Oldenbourg, München 1992, pp. 79-85.

[20] See Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. II, cit., p. 155.

[21] See Zarusky, *Deutsche Sozialdemokraten und Sowjetisches Modell*, cit., p. 82; P. Renaudel, *L'Internationale, à Berne, faits et documents*, B. Grasset, Paris 1919, p. 131.

[22] See Renaudel, *L'Internationale, à Berne, Faits et Documents*, cit., p. 31.

ground of democracy. An ever deeper reorganization of society imbued with socialism can neither be achieved, nor above all, stabilized if it is not based on the conquests of democracy and if it does not have its roots in the principles of freedom"[23].

The "constitutive institutions of any democracy"[24] were defined as freedom of speech, free political organisation and parliamentarianism. Branting also stressed that socialisation of the means of production was a long process of democratisation. The transfer of ownership to a small group of workers simply continued exploitation under another name.

When the debate moved to the plenary assembly, MacDonald warned that revolution should not mean transition from one dictatorship to another, because socialism was constructive not destructive[25]. Arthur Henderson was particularly uncompromising: "Socialism without democracy is nonsense. We know what the situation is in Russia, we can judge. I was there during the revolution and I was able to observe that Bolshevism is oppression, violence, terror, nothing more. But we repudiate any policy of violence, whether it comes from above or from below"[26].

On the other hand, Longuet declared that it was impossible to accept Branting's definition of democracy, as it was too restrictive[27]. Longuet and Austrian socialist leader Friedrich Adler presented an alternative motion. They said that the main goal was rebuilding the united front of all the workers united by revolutionary consciousness. The Branting resolution would only weaken socialist internationalism. Indeed, it was too early to judge Soviet Russia and impossible to do so based on imperialist propaganda[28]. The French socialist Daniel Renoult—who would later become communist—warned that the condemnation of Bolshevism was a pretext to get rid of internationalism, working-class consciousness and class struggle, reducing socialism to reformism and ministerialism[29].

Already at this stage we can discern that the two blocs stood for two strategic and ideological trends within the socialist movement. On the one side, the strategy of affirming an uncompromising commitment to democracy—which included but was not limited to liberal democra-

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[23] *Les Résolutions de la Conférence internationale ouvrière et socialiste de Berne (3-10 février 1919)*, Impr. nouvelle, Paris 1919, p. 6.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] See Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 60.

[26] Renaudel, *L'Internationale, à Berne, faits et documents*, cit., p. 141.

[27] Ivi, p. 135.

[28] See *Résolutions de la Conférence de Berne*, cit., p. 7.

[29] See Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 61.

cy—and make it a defining feature of socialism, with the consequence of setting a clear distinction from Bolshevism. On the other side, the strategy of pursuing the unity of the working-class movement around revolutionary goals and class consciousness. This meant association—though not subordination—with Bolshevism, requiring to suspend any condemnation of breaches of freedom, using the relativism of national conditions.

However, no one was ready to break socialist unity. The conference refused to adopt one resolution and published both, though delegates chose to sign either. It is significant that some delegations split along ideological lines: half of the Austrian delegation and the majority of the French delegation signed the Adler-Longuet motion, half of the Austrian delegation and the French minority signed the Branting motion[30].

It was the Comintern that broke this precarious truce. Lenin had concluded that European social democracy was beyond salvation unless it purged social-patriots and even centrists. The call for the first conference of the Comintern was rushed to avoid the consolidation of the gains of Berne. Lenin would have agreed with Henderson: "It is therefore essential to make a sharp break between the revolutionary proletariat and the social-traitor elements"[31]. The twenty-first conditions to join the Comintern put into practice this wish for a clean break.

By the time the Second International met again in Geneva in February 1920, the USPD, SFIO, Italian, Norwegian, and Austrian socialists had already broken off[32]. The USPD rejected the Second International, but it was divided between a right-wing supporting an all-inclusive independent International and a left-wing supporting joining the Comintern[33]. The right wing rejected the Comintern because each party needed independence to pursue the best strategy, especially in Western Europe. The same factional division was present in the SFIO. Indeed, the development in one party encouraged the developments in the other. Both SFIO and USPD had left the Second International, hoping for an inclusive International, but in both parties the majority of members decided to break with the party and form a communist party, leaving a minority in charge of the "old house" with no clear international affiliation. Without ditherers, the remaining parties that attended the Geneva

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30   See *Résolutions de la Conférence de Berne*, pp. 7-8.

31   Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 63.

32   See Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. II, cit., p. 159.

33   See Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., pp. 69-75.

Conference—particularly the Labour Party, the MSPD, and the Belgian socialists—made opposition to communism a pillar of their ideology[34]. "[Socialism] cannot find its mission in the suppression of democracy; rather, its historical mission is to bring this democracy to full development"[35]. Even the new constitution of the Second International stressed the autonomy of national parties in opposition to the Comintern[36].

Meanwhile, the parties left between the Second and the Third International organised in the "International Working Union of Socialist Parties"—also known as the Vienna Union or the Two and Half International[37]. The first meetings took place in Berne in December 1920 and in Vienna in February 1921, with the participation of the British Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Austrian and Swiss socialists, and the USPD and SFIO. The majority of the USPD had already left the party and the same would soon happen to the SFIO. The driving force behind the organisation was Friedrich Adler, who conceived the Vienna Union not as an alternative International, but as a centre to promote international socialist unity. The Second International still had to purge unrepentant social-patriots, while the Third International was too inflexible regarding national conditions.

Most significantly, Adler refused to use democracy as a discriminatory factor. In line with his words in 1919, he rejected the binary opposition between dictatorship and democracy as primitive[38]. The final resolution argued that bourgeoisie exercised its power over the workers through democracy, although democracy provided a field for class struggle[39]. At the same time, Adler rejected the idea that the democracy of the Soviets was the only way: "We must be as far removed from the naive belief in democracy as the panacea as from the blind belief in dictatorship as the only option"[40]. For Adler what mattered was rejecting

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[34] See Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. II, cit., p. 160.

[35] Steininger, *Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, cit., p. 8.

[36] See Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 77.

[37] See Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. II, cit, p. 230; Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., p. 79.

[38] See Sekretariat der Internationalen Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialisticher Parteien, *Protokoll der Internationalen Sozialistischen Konferenz in Wien vom 22. bis 27 Februar 1921*, Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, Wien 1921, p. 26.

[39] See *Union des partis socialistes pour l'action internationale. Textes des résolutions prises à la conférence internationale socialiste de Vienne (22-27 février 1921)*, Impr. ouvrière Dhoossche, Lille 1921, pp. 6-7.

[40] Sekretariat, *Protokoll der Internationalen Sozialistischen Konferenz in Wien*, cit., p. 26.

a discriminatory principle that restricted the membership. To allow an inclusive International, the final resolution embraced the principle of national circumstances: no strategic or organising principle was universal and socialists had to adapt to their local context[41]. It was wrong of the Second International to impose the adoption of democratic methods, just like it was wrong of the Third International to impose the "servile imitation" of Russian methods[42].

For the Vienna Union, the defining question for socialist internationalism was action. An inclusive International needed to include all the proletarians with class consciousness. "But such international organisation cannot be a living reality except to what extent its decisions tie all sections"[43]. Adler criticised both the eclecticism of the Second International and the rigidity of the Comintern. By setting the twenty-first conditions as too strict, the Comintern had produced very small organisations with negligible influence in countries such as Austria[44].

The year 1921 saw continuous exchanges between the three international organisations[45]. Adler was pressured by some member parties to negotiate with the Comintern and by others to negotiate with the Second International. MacDonald tried to open a dialogue with the Vienna Union, wanting to exclude the communists, but Adler believed that only conversion to revolutionary socialism could bring unity. However, to counteract the rapprochement between the Second International and the Vienna Union, Adler suggested a tripartite meeting including the Comintern. The Labour Party and the MSPD were opposed but decided to set conditions for the meeting, believing they would have been unacceptable to the communists. Likewise, the Comintern was more open at the end of 1921 in line with the tactic of the United Front from below: cooperating with social democratic parties to win over their members. Trotsky hoped that a failure of the tripartite meeting could be blamed on the socialists and attract socialist activists disappointed in their leadership.

The tripartite meeting was held in Berlin in April 1922, but it was stillborn from the beginning[46]. The executives of the Second International and the Comintern manoeuvred to blame each other of intran-

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[41]   See *Résolutions prises à la conférence internationale socialiste de Vienne*, cit., p. 9.

[42]   *Ibid*.

[43]   Ivi, p. 10.

[44]   See Sekretariat, *Protokoll der Internationalen Sozialistischen Konferenz in Wien*, cit., p. 28.

[45]   See Imlay, *Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., pp. 82-91.

[46]   Ivi, pp. 91-3; Braunthal, *History of the International*, vol. II, cit., pp. 245-54.

sigence. Adler proposed to create a committee of three members from each international organisation to set the conditions for further discussion. The nine-person committee met in Berlin in May 1922. The executive of the Second International submitted a memorandum to the Comintern, stressing different conceptions of socialism and demanding the liberation of imprisoned Russian social democrats. The Comintern accused the Second International of sabotage and withdrew, blaming the Vienna Union.

After the meeting, Adler blamed the Second and Third International, but by then MacDonald argued it was high time for the socialists to act by themselves[47]. The SFIO was coming to accept the merger between the Second International and the Vienna Union, with left-wing socialists like Longuet wanting to attach conditions to the fusion in order to keep a revolutionary character. The most important factor was the evolution in Germany, where the MSPD and the USPD came to work together to face the threat against the republic. The parties reunited in September 1922. The merger in Germany anticipated the international merger.

Adler conceded defeat and the Vienna Union asked the Second International to organise a common socialist conference. In May 1923, the Hamburg Congress gave birth to the Labour and Socialist International. In the negotiations, Adler and Longuet extracted a commitment to class struggle and a commitment to grant the LSI authority to make binding decisions in foreign affairs. Despite the statute, in practice the LSI was run on the principle of voluntary coordination: "Unlike what was happening at the same time in the communist camp, the international relations between the socialist parties did not imply a hierarchical order, but were based on the principle of voluntary membership: a supranational dimension of socialist politics could exist only if the socialist parties were willing to join it"[48].

The Hamburg congress blamed the communists for breaking working-class unity, which could only be restored by a change of strategy of the communists or the extinction of some of the weaker communist parties[49]. The Comintern was directly blamed for the failure of the tripartite conference. Thus, socialist internationalism was reborn under an anti-communist shadow.

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[47] See Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, cit., pp. 90-6.

[48] Rapone, *La socialdemocrazia europea tra le due guerre*, cit., p. 37.

[49] See *Protokoll Des Internationalen Sozialistischen Arbeiterkongresses Im Hamburg Vom 21. Bis 25. Mai 1923*, J.H.W. Dietz GMBH, Berlin 1923, p. 4.

The 1914-1923 period was a period of experimentation for social-ist internationalism. Through the trauma of war and the challenge of the Comintern, some socialists were already maturing an ideological revision that made explicit their reformism and the rejection of revo-lutionary violence. The Geneva Conference already hinted towards the identification of socialism as fully realised democracy. However, equally important was the delegitimization of reformism due to the war effort, the vague revolutionary aspiration, the desire to preserve working-class unity, the suspicion towards liberalism and the bourgeois state. Some delegates identified socialism and democracy, but the Hamburg confer-ence did not take this step[50].

The International Popular Front (1932-1934)

Despite the failure of 1922, the idea of cooperation with the communists did not disappear, although it was found mostly in the marginal parties such as the ILP. However, by the beginning of the 1930s, the disastrous government experiences of SPD and the Labour Party—unable to find a solution to the economic crisis and to halt reactionary forces—seemed to prove the bankruptcy of reformism. For Adler, now secretary of the LSI, this was an opportunity to return to his 1921 position: rejecting bourgeois democracy as the only political regime[51]. Different national context allowed different political strategies, sometimes outside parlia-mentarianism and involving revolutionary action. A pluralist vision of democracy opened the door to cooperation with the communists, pro-moting an ideological revision of both the Comintern and LSI.

The context was less than favourable. The Comintern still con-demned socialists as "social-fascists". More importantly, the Labour Par-ty and the Swedish social democrats were not open to abandon their democratic commitment[52]. The two parties were in the middle of an ideological revision that accentuated their inclination in the direction opposite to Adler. Far from reformism being exhausted, the socialist governments in Sweden in 1932 and in Britain in 1945 set the golden standard for European social democracy.

Events precipitated with Hitler's rapid rise to power: cooperation with the communists becoming the first point on the agenda. In Feb-

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[50] Ivi, pp. 11, 37, 53.

[51] See Rapone, *La socialdemocrazia europea tra le due guerre*, cit., pp. 236-7.

[52] Ivi, p. 246.

ruary 1933 the LSI Bureau made an appeal not to repeat the German tragedy and to have high-level negotiations with the Comintern to restore working-class unity[53]. The Comintern responded positively about agreements at the national level, but it rejected high-level negotiations. However, Adler's proposal met resistance, so a LSI conference was convened in Paris in August 1933.

The LSI conference was divided between the supporters of the crisis of democracy and those who insisted on the defence of parliamentary democracy. Adler rejected once again a binary opposition between dictatorship and democracy. Each country had its own peculiarities that required different forms of democracy[54]. Adler hoped that strategic rigidity would be abandoned by the LSI and the Comintern. Adler criticised the tactic of the United Front from below as deceitful[55]. Defeating fascism required true unity of action of the working-class, based on the recognition of multiple roads to socialism.

For left-wing socialists such as Pietro Nenni and Adler, the rise of the working-class had provoked an authoritarian reaction in the bourgeoisie, making the transition from bourgeois democracy to socialism a traumatic step requiring emergency actions to re-educate the masses and destroy the economic power of Capital. In this conception, the unity of the working-class and alliance with the communists were an absolute necessity. Otto Bauer blamed the split of the working-class for all the defeats of socialism: "The dispute between the Communist International and us has determined the whole history of the international labour movement since 1918"[56]. The social democrats also had to recognise that it was not simply a matter to transitioning from democracy to socialism. Saving democracy required socialism.

For leaders like Hugh Dalton, fascism and communism were indications of the weakness of democratic traditions and thus not a danger to truly democratic nations[57]. It must be noted that the Labour Party was in the middle of an ideological struggle, with the majority identifying more strongly with democracy and anti-communism and the minority around the Socialist League—led by Stanford Cripps and Harold Las-

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[53]   Ivi, pp. 249-50.

[54]   See *Protokoll. Internationale Konferenz Der Sozialistischen Arbeiter-Internationale, Paris, Maison de La Mutualité, 21–25 August 1933*, DetlevAuvermann KG, Glashütten 1933, p. 11.

[55]   Ivi, p. 13.

[56]   Ivi, p. 286.

[57]   Ivi, p. 79.

ki—expressing doubts about parliamentary democracy[58]. Stopping the
LSI from cooperation with the communists and approving extra-parlia-
mentary tactics avoided legitimising the internal minority.

The Danish social democrat Alsing Andersen—a president of the So-
cialist International after World War II—also rejected an alliance with the
Comintern. Socialists did the most important work at the domestic level,
since it was impossible for the International to invent the cleverest way to
defeat fascism and to enact it remotely, as if by pushing a button[59]. An-
dersen rejected Nenni's argument that reformism was in crisis. Winning
back the workers and not an alliance with the communists was the way
towards working-class unity. To do this, social democrats had to stand firm
in defence of democracy, rejecting any contamination with dictatorship.
Only fusing socialism with democracy would convince the middle class
and small land-owners to join the anti-capitalist front: "We believe that
the watchword must be an unequivocal commitment to democracy. What
we want is not the current democracy, but an improved democracy, a real
democracy. We also want to fill this vigorous democracy with ever deeper
anti-capitalist, socialist content by drawing in ever more popular masses"[60].

The Paris Conference revealed how different attitudes towards co-
operation with the Comintern rested on two different conceptions of
democracy. Thus, no decision on common action was taken. In 1934
French, Italian, Austrian, and Spanish socialists agreed to form a popu-
lar front with the communists[61]. They pushed the LSI to open a high-lev-
el negotiation with the Comintern, which had made an invitation of
cooperation. In November 1934, the LSI debated two draft resolutions,
one accepting the invitation of the Comintern and the other rejecting it.
Since any decision would have irremediably split the LSI, it was decided
to approve neither and leave the invitation of the Comintern without an
answer. This meant the final paralysis of action for the LSI. By refusing
to take a stance and leaving the decision to the national parties, it aban-
doned its task of coordinating the actions of the socialist movement.

The situation suited the communists well. The LSI would have want-
ed a high-level agreement with the Comintern, setting some conditions
such as the acceptance of democracy and ceasing hostile propaganda
against the social democrats. As long as national parties agreed on prac-

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[58] See Rapone, *La socialdemocrazia europea tra le due guerre*, cit., p. 249.
[59] See *Protokoll. Internationale August 1933*, cit., p. 203.
[60] Ivi, p. 207.
[61] See Rapone, *La socialdemocrazia europea tra le due guerre*, cit., pp. 314-8.

tical cooperation with the communists, the communist identity and strategy was not at risk.

The outcome of 1933 was very different from 1922. In 1922, the communist intransigence had worked in favour of anti-communist socialists, robbing left-wing socialists such as Adler of any option but to form a new International without the communists. In 1934, the Comintern's greater flexibility broke the unity of the socialist family and paralysed international coordination. However, in both occasions the ultimate ideological question of socialist identity was left unanswered. Preserving some unity in the LSI was not compatible with a clear definition of socialism and thus strict conditions for membership. This would have to wait another World War.

Reunification in sight (1941-1946)

The war meant the death of both LSI and Comintern. After 1934, the LSI proved incapable of action. The inability to take a clear stance became even more evident and farcical against the background of the Munich agreement and the start of the Second World War. Contemporarily, the Comintern became irrelevant to Soviet foreign policy until Stalin put it out of its misery in 1943. For Rapone this meant the end of the age of internationalism[62], but from catastrophe the Labour Party led a renovation. The war-time and early post-war period saw the last attempts to reach cooperation between socialists and the Comintern. Indeed, the third attempt went the farthest.

In London, socialists from occupied nation discussed the future of socialism. Even there, divisions between right-wing and left-wing socialists cut across parties, with socialists from Allied countries rallying around the Labour leadership and International Secretary William Gillies and left-wing socialists and socialists from Germany and Austria rallying around left-wing Labour leaders such as Laski[63]. Gillies demanded to postpone any discussion of reconstituting the Socialist International and post-war aims, while also blaming German people, including their socialists. Austrian socialist Julius Braunthal—later to become first secretary of the post-war Socialist International—organised the publication "International Socialist Forum", published as an appendix to "Left News". Here,

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[62]   See Id., *La crisi finale dell'Internazionale Operaia e Socialista*, in "Socialismo Storia. Annali Della Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini e della Fondazione di Studi Storici Filippo Turati", 1989, pp. 37-68.

[63]   See Costa, *Labour Party, Healey, International Socialist*, cit., pp. 21-39.

key socialist leaders from Belgium, Italy, France, Germany, and Austria discussed the future of socialism and the Socialist International.

Relationship with the Comintern was one of the questions. In the first number of "International Socialist Forum"—published just before operation Barbarossa—Belgian veteran socialist Louis de Brouckère blamed the disruptive tactics of the communists for some of the failures of socialist internationalism[64]. The tone changed with the German invasion. In March 1942, Laski demanded that the National Executive of the Labour Party took a stance on relations with the communists, since tension between socialists and communists at national level could threaten the cooperation of the three great powers in the post-war era[65]. Since national agreements were undesirable, Laski wanted to send a delegation to the Soviet Union to reach a high-level agreement between the Labour Party—representing all socialist parties—and the Soviet government[66]. In January 1943, Laski stressed the urgency of labour unity. He had little trust in the Comintern—"The Third International remains a pale wraith of the Soviet Foreign Office"[67]—but was also highly critical of the impotency of the LSI. It was time for an agreement between socialists and communists, which included "ending the schism between the internationals"[68].

"International Socialist Forum" started a debate on the topic. Hans Vogel, leader of the SPD in exile, agreed that division of the working-class had produced the victory of fascism[69]. However, the reason was that national communist parties were not independent but followed the instructions of Moscow. Future cooperation required that the Soviet government should not treat the Comintern as an instrument of foreign policy. Negotiations were not to be left to national parties and the Comintern needed to accept the principle of co-operation with the socialists in the whole world.

Laski concluded the debate by arguing that unity of the working-class was essential for the safeguard of the Soviet Union and the new

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[64] See L. de Brouckère, *The Crisis of the International*, in "Left News", June 1941, 60, p. 1772.

[65] See Labour History Archive and Study Centre, People's History Museum, Manchester (hereafter LHASC), Labour Party Archive (hereafter LPA), International Subcommittee, 1942, *Minutes of the joint meeting of the Policy and International Sub-Committee*, 31 March 1942.

[66] Ivi, Harold Laski, *Report to the Conference*, 28 May 1942.

[67] H. Laski, *The Need of International Labour Unity*, in "Left News", January 1943, 79, p. 2358.

[68] Ivi, p. 2359.

[69] See H. Vogel, *International Labour Unity: A Symposium on Harold Laski's Suggestions*, in "Left News", February 1943, 80, p. 2391.

socialist governments in post-war Europe[70]. However, suspicions and misunderstanding were so great—the Soviet Union still murdered social democrats such as Viktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich—that only negotiations could dispel them. Laski welcomed the dissolution of the Comintern as an opportunity to fully cooperate with the Communists[71]. The question of democracy was once again relevant: against the argument that communists could not be trusted because of their embrace of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Laski answered that the Labour Party could face a future in which its enemy would abandon constitutional democracy and so it would have to rely on more revolutionary methods. However, national agreements were not enough: "I think, therefore, that the real solution will come by achieving that agreement with Moscow by the Labour Party out of which there can emerge, with victory, a single International once more for the whole of the socialist working-class"[72].

De Brouckère noticed joy for the dissolution of the Comintern: "Few decisions have been so universally acclaimed as that which has put an end to the official existence of the Comintern"[73]. Communists welcomed the dissolution, because they trusted that international coordination would be achieved by other means, and the Allied governments welcomed it because they believed national communists would become less disruptive. De Brouckère said that the socialists could not rejoice, because the split in the working-class continued and a new communist International could emerge again. For this reason, socialists had to work to create an inclusive International. The success of the working-class depended on the unity of its militants and it had to be international unity, because only international actions could determine economic and political decisions. De Brouckère argued that the lack of ideological unity was not a problem, since common ideals would emerge from working together and building mutual trust. Communists and socialists had both erred in believing that their respective strategy—socialism in one country and compromise with the national ruling class—would be enough. De Brouckère again criticised the reformist limited conception of democracy—specifically a conception bound to the nation state.

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[70] See H. Laski, *Conclusions of the debate*, in "Left News", May 1943, 83, pp. 2482-4.

[71] See Id., *The Labour Party Conference — and After*, in "Left News", July 1943, 85, pp. 2515-9.

[72] Ivi, p. 2516.

[73] L. de Brouckère, *After the Dissolution of the Third International*, in "Left News", August 1943, 86, p. 2562.

In August 1943, Laski proposed to the Labour leadership to send a delegation to the USSR. The Labour Party and the CPSU needed to agree on a set of principles: eradication of fascism, mutual exchanges, a foreign policy defending the security of both nations and especially a commitment from Moscow that communist parties would abandon the tactics of splitting the socialist parties. Laski's plan for the new International deserves to be quoted extensively:

The British Labour Party and the CPSU agree that the future of the working classes of the world is jeopardised by the present divisions. They therefore propose that, immediately after the victory is won, steps should be taken to summon an international socialist conference with the view, if possible, of building a single international once more. […]
The British Labour Party and the CPSU agree that any future International must be an organ of consultation and not of direction, each nation being left free to carry out its directives in terms of its own special national conditions.
 The British Labour Party and the CPSU agree on the desirability of a single socialist Party in each country so far as candidatures to local and national legislative assemblies are concerned. Any other socialist organisation shall receive recognition only through this single socialist Party and shall have no power either to run political candidates or to be directly represented in the new International, if the latter can be formed[74].

The National Executive Committee agreed on the spirit of the proposal, but Gillies delayed the sending of the delegation. Laski finally came to an agreement with a key Labour leader, Hugh Dalton[75]. Dalton wrote the document *International Post-War Settlement*, which set the future policies of the Labour Party. Because of Laski, there was a more explicit commitment to international socialist cooperation and to sending the delegation to the Soviet Union. The ambition to reach a global agreement with the Soviet Union and the communist movement still drove Labour Policy up to 1947—though it was not the only strategy[76]. Hope persisted that a global agreement with the communist movement would allow the creation of popular fronts at national level without creating disruption for the socialist parties. Laski finally met Stalin in 1946

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[74] LHASC, LPA, International Subcommittee, 1942, *The Labour Party Delegation to the USSR – Suggestions by H.J. Laski for the Consideration of the International Sub-Committee*, August 1943.
[75] See Costa, *Labour Party, Healey, International Socialist*, cit., p. 52.
[76] Ivi, pp. 139-44.

and he succeeded in extracting from him a recognition that there were different roads to socialism, including democratic ones like in Britain. This verbal promise would prove false.

As right-wing socialists had argued since 1919, the conception of democracy for socialists and communists was too different to work together. Even the Comintern was restored—as de Brouckère had feared—in a diminished form. The Cominform was born with an explicit ideological commitment to rejecting bourgeois democracy and cooperation with right-wing social democrats. The Labour Party and the International Socialist Conference—the provisional Socialist International—still worked together with left-wing socialists who cooperated with the communists in Eastern Europe and Italy. In the end, the Prague Coup of February 1948 dispelled the last illusion of cohabitation and forced socialists to fully embrace anti-communism. Almost all parties were on board: this time there was no great party such as the SFIO, USPD or Austrian socialists to form a Vienna Union and keep an open door to the communists. After social democrats went extinct in Eastern Europe, only the Italian Socialist Party kept its pro-communist strategy. For the rest of the socialists, it was not much of a problem to expel it and go their own way. In 1951, Western socialists restored the Socialist International, with a full commitment to anticommunism and parliamentary democracy.

Conclusion: the Spectre of Comintern

In the end, none of the attempted agreements between the LSI and the Comintern succeeded. This is not surprising, as both organisations were sectarian Internationals, meant to define clearly the identity of their members by excluding others. There was no return to the 1889-1914 International—and even the Second International had been born by excluding anarchists. Indeed, socialists and communists came closest to an international agreement between 1943 and 1946, when both LSI and Comintern were actually dead. The LSI had always been the weaker organisation because its criteria for membership were loose and the identity it granted was vague. Only with the Frankfurt Declaration in 1951, socialism found a definitive definition as the full realisation of democracy[77]. This allowed to exclude left-wing socialists who envisioned alternative ways to parliamentary democracy.

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[77]   Ivi, p. 287.

COSTA

If the Comintern had any impact on socialist internationalism, it was a negative impact. First, the Comintern served to focus the anti-communist discourse that social democrats developed after 1948. The publication of a resolution against the Cominform in December 1949 was a turning point in the ideological development of the International Socialist Conference[78]. Socialists accused the Cominform of returning to the devious tactics of the Comintern to split the socialist parties. Individual communist parties were denied dignity, as they took orders from the Cominform, just like they used to from the Comintern. Besides propaganda, the negative effect of the Comintern was subtler.

As I noted elsewhere, the Comintern acted as a negative model for the practice of socialist internationalism, the thing a Socialist International could not and should not be[79]. Socialist leaders and intellectuals rejected the idea that social democrats could have a central organisation dictating orders to national sections. Indeed, this a pillar of Laski's plan for an inclusive International. International cooperation could only be achieved willingly through unanimous decisions and respect for others' independence. When the Belgian socialist leader Victor Larock asked to restore the Socialist International, he reassured the British that the Comintern was not the model: "Nothing is more alien to the Socialist movement than to pretend that it could – like the Comintern in 1920 – impose an 'iron discipline on military lines' upon its adherents. […] The method adopted so far must indeed be retained. The system of conferences, of resolutions *proposed* and not *imposed*, must continue"[80].

In the end, Lenin was right that breaking with traditional socialists and forming the Third International were points of no return in the history of world socialism. What would have surprised him—and others—was that this was not the end neither of social democracy nor social democratic internationalism.

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[78]   Ivi, p. 276.

[79]   E. Costa, *Not Giving Up Sovereignty: The British Labour Party's Alternative Vision of International Cooperation, 1933–1951*, in M. Broad, S. Kansikas (eds.), *European Integration Beyond Brussels: Unity in East and West Europe Since 1945*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020, pp. 117-39.

[80]   Ivi, p. 129.