Editorial

'Internationalism' has long enjoyed pride of place in socialist, labour and radical ideology in Britain as one of the principles which supposedly distinguishes it from conservative and reactionary politics. This internationalism often uses the language of 'solidarity' with people abroad resisting oppression or defending their freedoms, and takes many forms, ranging from resolution-passing, through more active measures, right up to (on occasions) direct participation in an armed conflict, as in the Spanish Civil War. When socialist parties have been in government, 'internationalist' rhetoric has sometimes been used to adorn their foreign policy initiatives, as in November 2007 when Prime Minister Gordon Brown proclaimed a 'hard-headed internationalism' in foreign affairs.

But – how do internationalists decide who should get their support? Even a cursory glance at contested foreign policy issues within British Labour since 1997, when Tony Blair became Prime Minister, shows how flexible the concept of internationalism can be. Both supporters and opponents of British participation in the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the intervention in Libya in 2011, and the air strikes in Syria in 2015 could, and did, present their preference as an expression of their internationalism. Hilary Benn MP, making his pitch in Parliament for bombing targets in Syria in 2015, said of Labour: 'As a party we have always been defined by our internationalism', before invoking the International Brigades in Spain to bolster his case further. Most recently, both advocates and opponents on the Left of the UK leaving the EU have appealed to 'internationalism' in defence of their positions, while the ructions within Labour over 'anti-Semitism', Israel and Palestine seem largely about which group should be seen as most oppressed (currently or historically) and therefore most deserving of 'solidarity'.

The articles in this issue of *Socialist History*, compiled by Duncan Bowie, look at aspects of the history of Labour internationalism since the time of the French revolution. Bowie's own article sets the scene by tracing the development of international contacts in the nineteenth century between radicals and trade unionists in Britain, and democrats, revolutionaries and nationalists overseas. Bowie shows in particular the important role played by London and other large English cities as places where exiles congregated and canvassed their causes among local political

actors. The story revealed here shows just how inaccurate the stereotype of insular British labour traditions really is.

John Partington concentrates on a specific case of international contact – the journalism of Clara Zetkin in the British labour press, in particular, the Social-Democratic Federation's paper *Justice* around the turn of the century. Zetkin was an international socialist in every sense – polyglot, widely travelled, with extensive connections to the movement not only in her native Germany, but also in Switzerland, France, Russia, and Britain. Partington explores how Zetkin used *Justice* in order to address English-speaking readers, and how *Justice* used Zetkin as a major source of information on the international movement in general, and the women's movement in particular in the period before 1914.

The year 1914 itself is the subject of Ian Bullock's analysis of the British socialist press. The wide divergence in possible interpretations of internationalism is brought out in sharp relief here – both supporters and opponents of Britain's participation and war effort were at pains to couch their attitudes in internationalist terms. Bullock notes that despite the sharp disagreements on the war itself, there was considerable consensus on the contours of a desirable post-war order, in which the notion of a United States of Europe played an important part.

Finally, Willy Buschak takes this theme forward, looking at the different ideas for European and/or international unity canvassed among British socialists – particularly Labour and ILP circles – from the end of World War I to the end of World War II. The context was decisive. The rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe in the 1930s ensured that 'European unity' lost much of its immediate relevance, but soon regained it during World War II, when once again the post-war order became a question for debate and discussion. Buschak revisits several largely forgotten schemes and proposals put forward during that period, before the post-war reality of Cold War and lasting division again changed the context.

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