
Internationalism, nationalism and the United States of Europe: the British left and the outbreak of war in 1914

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Abstract

The advent of war tests commitments to internationalism like nothing else. Sceptics about the reality of internationalist sentiments were not unknown among socialists, but, as war broke out in 1914, both ‘pro-Ally’ and ‘anti-war’ advocates on the British Left believed that *they* were the *real* internationalists. Already by the end of that year divisions that would prove lasting in many cases had opened up among British socialists already foreshadowing post-war divides. All were, however, united in scorning ‘secret diplomacy’, and in demanding fair treatment for soldiers and dependents. All agreed, anticipating the eventual end of the conflict, in supporting a non-vindictive peace settlement and a ‘United States of Europe’ to safeguard against any future repetition of the war. Meanwhile, the *Entente* with Tsarist Russia was a grave embarrassment for supporters of British participation in the war while a major reason for opposing it by ILPers and BSP ‘internationalists’.

Key words: pro-Ally, internationalist, secret diplomacy, United States of Europe

Nothing tests commitment to internationalism more than war. It also forces consideration of what internationalism means and how those who see themselves as internationalists should respond. What is seen as the proper internationalist response can vary widely. For example, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) opposed both the First and Second World Wars on internationalist as well as pacifist grounds. Yet its fate after these conflicts was very different.

In the immediate aftermath of the first of these those associated with such opposition were ostracised in the ‘Khaki Election’ of 1918, but by 1924 the most prominent advocate of the ILP’s opposition, Ramsay

MacDonald, was leading a minority Labour government. But few on the Left saw ILP opposition to the 1939–45 war as justified, even though it was based on the same internationalist and pacifist principles that had led to the stance of 1914. True, there were many other factors in the decline of the ILP as a political force, which had set in well before 1939 – not least its disaffiliation from the Labour Party in 1932. It is also true that Hitler's attack on the USSR in June 1941 changed the way many people viewed the conflict and how they interpreted internationalism. This was particularly the case among those who saw the USSR as to at least some extent embodying the promise of socialism, a perception which went quite a way beyond members and supporters of the British Communist Party. One only has to recall how Stalin became 'Uncle Joe' for many in wartime Britain.

At any time issues of national identity, often contrasted with the notion, stated most influentially by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, that the 'working men have no country', could be a tricky subject for the Left.¹ Struggles against imperialism which socialists normally supported often took the form of demands for 'national liberation'. This was as true of struggles within the British empire as of any other with the 'Irish question' the instance most near home for British socialists. But how did you support such struggles without endorsing a nationalism abroad that you rejected at home? Distinctions might be made between the nationalism of the oppressed and that of the oppressors but that did not entirely solve the problem of how the Left should approach nationalism.

In an article in this journal a few years ago Stefan Berger made the very blunt, and essentially true, statement that 'Marx's notion that the proletariat has no fatherland was proved spectacularly and tragically wrong in 1914 ...'² Yet the equality of all human beings was a principle well established on the Left. Was it more than just an idealistic aspiration? Very occasionally, this was explicitly questioned in the socialist press in Britain. One of these rare instances can be found in the last days of the ILP's weekly paper *Labour Leader* after World War I. Katharine Bruce Glasier had resigned as editor and after the job had been done first by Tom Johnston and then Clement J. Bundock, both of whom were simultaneously editing other papers, Bertram J. Carter took over. He lasted less than a year, before the paper was replaced by the much more ambitious *New Leader* under the editorship of H.N. Brailsford. One cannot help wondering if Carter's scepticism about the commitment to internationalism in the proposals for a new ILP programme played some part in the fact that his editorship was so brief.

One proposal for the programme required the party to commit itself to the view 'that the kinship the working classes of all nations share should

be a stronger tie than the kinship of nation, creed or colour'. Carter had questioned this commitment to what he called 'Universal Brotherhood'. The 'bond of nationality' did not seem to be weakening, he wrote, and 'the "colour bar" is hard to get over'.³ It's not difficult to imagine some readers reacting to this with hostility, while inwardly admitting that, unfortunate as this might be, the bond of nationality was still an exceptionally strong force in the world and what we would now call racism far from rare. We should note the 'should be' in the programme proposal. Even in the twenty-first century there is a need to strive towards a better understanding of 'imagined communities' and perhaps of the 'civic' nationalism of movements like that of the SNP.

In Britain since at least late Chartist times advocacy of violent revolution on the Left had become the preserve of a very small minority. Most socialists accepted that though the existing system fell a long, long way short of anything that could be described as democracy, *some* form of political participation was both possible and, moreover, the only viable way to take socialist goals forward. It is of course true that in the years before the outbreak of war in 1914 the 'political' path was rejected by syndicalists in favour of an 'industrial' one. Syndicalist ideas were influential but not many went all the way to rejecting 'politics' entirely. And even the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party, after a flirtation with Bolshevism came to the conclusion that 'If we cannot discuss our ideas in the light of day before the masses, which must vindicate the realisation of our views then we have no right to hold such ideas'. It rejected all forms of conspiratorial 'hush-hush-here-comes-the-policeman-hide-the-plans methods'.⁴

The way such sentiments and beliefs relate to the question of nationality and internationalism is that they imply some sort of concept of citizenship, some acceptance of a relationship with members of the same state that might entail a certain obligation to participate in its politics in the broadest sense, share its fate and even to defend it if necessary. It was relatively easy to be an internationalist in peacetime; the coming of war raised real dilemmas. This was never more so than in August 1914.

In this article I shall draw mainly on the three long-established socialist weeklies in Britain – *Justice*, originally the organ of the Social-Democratic Federation (SDF) founded in 1884, and since 1911 of the British Socialist Party (BSP); *The Clarion*, an independent socialist paper edited by Robert Blatchford since 1891, and *Labour Leader*, first published in 1894 as the paper of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) – during the early months of the First World War. Between them these three can be taken to represent, broadly, the conflicting stances taken by so many on the Left as war

broke out. *Labour Leader* quickly opposed Britain's participation in the war, *The Clarion*, was, after a brief moment of anguish, unequivocally supportive of it, while *Justice* tried to reflect the views of both the 'Old Guard of the SDF' which described itself as 'pro-Ally' while deploring the necessity of the conflict, and the emerging 'internationalist' opposition which would triumph in the BSP when those who supported the war left the party in 1916. Between them these three weeklies represent most of the spectrum of socialist opinion in Britain at the start of the war. It goes almost without saying that since a commitment to internationalism was so central to socialist belief, whatever position was taken on the war its proponents claimed it as the proper internationalist standpoint.

There were other papers and journals catering for the Left, or sections of it. There was George Lansbury's *Daily Herald*, widely seen by others on the Left as uncritically supporting all manner of 'rebels', which was soon vehemently opposing the war. When a letter appeared in *Justice* on 24 September 1914 under the (very premature) heading 'The Collapse of the Daily Herald' its signatory, only identified as 'Looker On', claimed that Lansbury's paper had damaged Social-Democracy by promoting successively 'Syndicalism, Guildism, Anarchism, Revolt'. Another recent publication was the Fabian-orientated *New Statesman*, launched in the year before the outbreak of war. There were also monthly publications notably *The Industrial Syndicalist* and *Plebs*, the organs of, respectively, the Industrial Syndicalist Education League and the Plebs League. And there was, of course, *The Socialist*, originally the paper of James Connolly, which promoted the De Leonist doctrines of the very small, even by the standards of socialist organisations of that epoch, Socialist Labour Party. But I have chosen to concentrate on the weekly papers of the two largest socialist organisations in Britain, the ILP and the BSP, together with *The Clarion* as the most unequivocally 'pro-war' paper of the Left.

All parts of the British socialist movement had done their best to prevent the outbreak of war, sometimes controversially as in the case of Hyndman and Blatchford who, warning of the 'German menace', had advocated taking all measures necessary to prepare for national defence in the hope of deterring aggression. The war forced everyone to make a decision about what they owed to fellow-citizens and whether this should be expressed by reluctant support for participation in the war, conscientious objection, or outright opposition. As already noted most ILPers opposed the war, but some took part in it. Clement Attlee, for example, fought and was badly wounded in the war while his brother Tom, also an ILPer, became a conscientious objector. In the light of how apparently

irreconcilable divisions on the Left began with positions taken on the war it is worth noting that Attlee's military record, which saw him end the war with the rank of major, did not prevent him from co-operating with the conscientious objector Clifford Allen in the post-war ILP, especially in the 'Allen-Attlee' draft of the party's programme.⁵ But such later events do not reduce the impact of the unprecedented dilemma that faced British socialists in 1914 when the British government declared war on 4 August.

At that time, the ILP's *Labour Leader* was edited by Fenner Brockway, who before the end of the year would be a key figure in launching the No-Conscription Fellowship. On 6 August, the first wartime edition of the paper appeared. Its front page was taken up with a black box, with 'Down With the War!' in large bold letters at both its top and bottom. Workers had no quarrel with each other. It was a 'quarrel between the RULING classes of Europe'. Inside the paper was an extract from Ramsay MacDonald's speech in the House of Commons which rejected foreign minister Grey's argument for war and concluded that 'this country ought to have remained neutral'.⁶

The Clarion, which together with its editor Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* had done so much to promote the socialist cause, especially in the 1890s, was published the following day. Like the *Leader*, it deplored the outbreak of war: 'Do the German people want to fight the French? Do the French people want to fight the Germans? Do the Russian peasants want to fight? Do the British people want to fight? Have any of these peoples a quarrel with any other? No!' wrote Blatchford. But any notion that the paper was going to follow a similar line to that of the ILP paper soon proved quite unfounded. For Alex Thompson, Blatchford's long-term *Clarion* partner and by that time the day-to-day editor of the paper, the war appeared one for 'the domination of Europe by the German War Lords, for the annexation of the Dutch, Danish and Belgium seaboard, and the eventual smash of the British colonial Empire'. Having 'accepted the moral and material help of French military and naval resources ever since the beginning of the *Entente Cordiale*', Britain could not 'stand by to see our friends attacked'. Not to come to the aid of Belgium and France, urged Thompson, would have been like the other unions of the 'Triple Alliance' deserting their colleagues during a dockers' lockout: 'we should have been blacklegs and scabs'.⁷ If anyone had the slightest doubt about *The Clarion's* stance the front page of the following week's issue (14 August) featured a large advertisement carrying Kitchener's now famous appeal 'Your King and Country Need You' which ended with 'God Save the King' It is not hard to imagine the shock this must have caused to many readers.

If two long-established socialist papers had taken completely opposite

positions on British participation in the war, that of *Justice*, by far the oldest weekly on the Left and in 1914 the organ of the British Socialist Party, was much more uncertain. As with *Labour Leader* the front page on 6 August was lined in mourning black with the upper-case headline: 'THE WAR: SOCIALIST EFFORTS FOR PEACE'. There had not been in Germany 'a single town of any importance where the workers did not turn out in their thousands and tens of thousands', it reported, and it estimated that 30,000 had attended the ILP/BSP peace demonstration in Trafalgar Square the previous Sunday. But it also included the appeal of the Belgian Workers' Party's general council which called for its members to 'direct efforts to stopping the invasion of our territory'. By doing so, and 'in defending the neutrality and even the existence of our country against militarist barbarians we shall be conscious of serving the cause of democracy and the political liberties of Europe', the statement concluded.

Yet the paper did not yet seem necessarily committed to the war. Since the earliest days of the BSP's predecessor, the SDF, the party programme had demanded 'the people to decide on Peace or War'. This was now recalled in *Justice's* editorial in the same 6 August issue. 'The least that could have been done, was to take a poll of our entire population as to whether they were ready to go into this terrible business without any adequate preparation, and without any knowledge whatever as to what was being done in their name'.

Divisions on the British Left became clearer the following week when both the BSP and the ILP published their manifestos. Both took up most of the front pages of *Justice* and the *Labour Leader* respectively. Both, of course, deplored the war and all-too-accurately predicted many of its horrors. Both distinguished between 'the mass of the German people' and their government. Both socialist parties were more than wary about the alliance with Russia. The BSP feared the war might lead to 'encroachments of Russian despotism'. For the ILP, Britain had 'placed herself behind Russia, the most reactionary, corrupt, and oppressive power in Europe'. Divisions became clearer when the manifestos turned to the causes of the war. The ILP explicitly ruled out trying to apportion an 'exact measure of responsibility'. It was the secret diplomacy that all the great powers had indulged in that was the real villain.

The BSP was no friend of secret diplomacy but, summarising what had led to 'the great war long threatened and feared', the party statement said that Britain had been 'drawn into the general struggle by the declaration of war upon Belgium by Germany on account of the refusal of that little state to forgo its neutrality in the interest of the attacking power'. This was very different from the way in which the ILP manifesto had

dismissed the notion that the German invasion of neutral Belgium justified Britain's involvement in the war.⁸

The editors and board of *The Clarion* could pursue their support of the war without having to consult anyone. They might make themselves unpopular with many readers and lose their influential position in British socialism but there was little or nothing any discontented reader could do apart from sending in a letter of dissent and/or stop reading the paper. The position of *Justice* was much trickier. The paper, though it acted as the official journal for the BSP was actually controlled by members of the SDF 'Old Guard'. In the end most of them – mainly people who were literally older than their BSP 'internationalist' opponents – would leave the party in 1916 and, after the war, reconstitute an SDF distinguished mainly for its intransigent rejection of Bolshevism. Meanwhile their former comrades of the BSP majority became the largest element of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920.

The implacable irreconcilability of 'internationalist' and 'pro-Ally' were clearly evident well before the end of 1914. The first issue that galvanised the 'internationalist' opposition to Hyndman and the 'Old Guard' was not long in coming. The government launched a recruitment campaign and urged all political parties to participate in promoting it. Dated 15 September, a party statement advising members to accept if invited to take part appeared in *Justice* two days later – although the advice to participate in recruitment was contingent on BSP speakers being 'permitted to speak from a common platform in support of the party's national programme and policy'.

The statement was signed by all eight members of the executive and by Albert Inkpin as general secretary. Besides the future first secretary of the CPGB, Inkpin, the signatories included E.C. Fairchild who soon became a leading figure on the 'internationalist' wing of the BSP in opposition to most of his erstwhile executive colleagues, and for some time the editor of *The Call* which after the 1916 split replaced *Justice* as the BSP paper. The statement began by rehearsing the party's pursuit of peace, and the threat to 'the national freedom and independence of this country' of 'Prussian militarism'. It looked for 'a speedy and successful issue' to the war. But the rest of it was very critical of the government's approach and policies. It must abandon 'methods of cajolery and starvation' to secure recruits. Those enlisting must be 'offered proper rates of pay', guaranteed employment or insurance against disablement on their return and 'adequate provision' must be made for their dependents.⁹

Despite these provisos, the effect was to galvanise opposition within

the BSP. Under the title of 'The B.S.P. Executive Manifesto', brief reports began to appear in *Justice* such as the one from the Pollokshaws branch at the beginning of October, which said that it repudiated the manifesto. It was followed by a similar announcement from the Central Hackney branch.¹⁰ Meanwhile, G. Moore Bell, who later played a role of some importance in the post-war SDF, had stood down from the BSP's national executive committee as he was 'now on active service'. This resignation necessitated an election for a representative of the London and Home Counties branches. *Justice* provoked much criticism by publishing a letter the following week by Fred Gorle, who was one of those who would leave the BSP with Hyndman and most of the 'Old Guard' in 1916. Gorle made his position quite clear. 'I think that the working classes of Belgium and of France had every moral and political right to expect our support', he declared. He claimed that this position was 'in accordance with the principles of Social-Democracy and the resolutions of International Socialist Congresses'. Soon there were seven candidates to replace Moore, some of whom had a very different view of the war and the responsibilities of socialists.¹¹ These divisions in the BSP are evident in the two letters from other candidates which appeared in *Justice* a little later. J. Fineberg was standing, he explained, because 'no provisos or conditions can justify our associating ourselves with those who must be regarded as part authors of the war'. Furthermore, 'Gorle supports the action of the Government in declaring war. I condemn that action'. While 'calling upon the people to make the most extreme sacrifices' many of the 'governing classes' were making fortunes out of the war. 'With the cry of "Capture Germany's Trade", on their lips, employers are taking advantage of the present situation to force down wages'.

F. Victor Fisher's letter could hardly have been more different. Walter Kendall, in his account of this election describes Fisher as 'the party's most chauvinistic propagandist'.¹² He declared himself an 'Internationalist' but not an 'Anti-Nationalist' and in agreement with his friend Moore. 'Despising the spirit of Jingoism, and detesting the buccaneering expeditions of capitalistic Imperialism, I have to declare that at this moment nothing but the British Navy stands between this country and a German invasion, accompanied by all the hideous atrocities inflicted on Belgium and France'. The socialist struggle against secret diplomacy and militarism could only succeed 'if Socialism continues to maintain and increase its influence with the masses of the people'. This would be 'shattered, and rightly so, if at this supreme crisis our movement renders itself suspect of treason to the Commonwealth'.¹³ Which way BSP opinion was shifting, at least in the London area, emerged decisively when the results of the election were

announced in November. The clear winner was Fineberg with twenty-five votes. None of the other candidates achieved even double figures.¹⁴

For those like Fineberg who condemned British participation in a capitalist conflict, all states involved whether ‘enemies’ or ‘allies’ were equally responsible and their capitalist classes should be equally and unequivocally opposed. The ‘internationalists’ had the intellectual advantage of a clear position, though the practical difficulties of maintaining it in wartime can easily be imagined. But for the ‘pro-Ally’ people there were huge problems about exactly who they were supporting. When they described themselves as ‘pro-Ally’ they had in mind France and – even though it had been neutral and therefore not an ally before war broke out – Belgium. But even those who saw it as a moral obligation to come to the aid of Belgium and France had real problems with the alliance with Russia. The Triple Entente had been pretty well universally criticised across the entire Left. Imperial Russia was the most reactionary, and most oppressive, of all the great powers. All British socialists had backed the revolutionaries in 1905 and most hoped for a renewal of what seemed promised then – something that would come about and be enthusiastically welcomed in February/March 1917. In 1914 itself ‘pro-Ally’ advocates could base their claim to be true to internationalism on their responsibility, as they saw it, to support Britain coming to the aid of Belgium and France which had been invaded. But Russia was not invaded at the start of the war. Fear of Russian invasion had, it was universally recognised, much to do in explaining the compliance with their government of most of the Social-Democratic Party in Germany. And soon it was Russia that was invading East Prussia. To be sure, this ended in disaster for the invaders – but how could Britain’s new ally not be seen as the aggressor at this early stage before the battle of Tannenberg at the end of August 1914?

Labour Leader and the ILP often centred their objection to Britain taking part in the war on the shame and hypocrisy of it finding itself fighting as an ally of such a regime. ‘Russia. For Whom We Fight’ was the *Labour Leader* headline of an article by Clement J. Bundock in the second wartime edition. He had no doubt that Russia was ‘responsible for the European conflagration’ and that Britain was ‘fighting to support that tyranny’. The Tsarist regime had acted tyrannically in Finland and in Persia without British opposition. When the Russians had brutally intervened in Persia, as Iran was then generally known, in 1911, Grey had fended off questions from Labour and Radical MPs as to whether their action was compatible with the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 which was supposed to guarantee Persian independence. Bundock now reflected:

Persia is broken. When Russia crushes a small nation under her heel Britain has no word to say, though Britain is solemnly pledged to guarantee integrity and independence. When Germany marches her troops across the soil of a small nation and promises to acknowledge its independence at the conclusion of the war Britain must strike 'in defence of principles the maintenance of which is vital to the civilisation of the world'.

With such an ally as Russia how could Asquith, the Liberal prime minister, maintain that 'no nation ever entered upon a great conflict with a clearer conscience?'¹⁵

Yet if there was implacable hostility in the pages of *Labour Leader*, Russia got no more support from the more-or-less 'pro-war' *Justice*. On 20 August 1914 the lead article of *Justice's* front page – now firmly established as regularly devoted to 'The War' – was by Rosalind Travers Hyndman. She attacked what she called 'Our pro-Russian Press'. 'It was', she wrote, 'naïvely expressing delight at the bribe of autonomous government which the Tsar offers to the three Polands (Austrian, German and Russian) if the two first will rise and throw of the Teutonic yoke in order to bear the Slavonic one'. She recalled the 'powerful and rather sinister part played in the government of Austria' by the 'Polish Club' of representatives in the Viennese Reichstag and the 'successful struggle against Polish influence of the Ruthenians or Ukrainians in the eastern part of Galicia'. The latter might identify more with the Russians than with the Poles but would 'think twice of joining the Tsar's empire' in the light of the oppression of the Ukrainians under Russian rule. As for the current Tsarist offer: 'Look at Finland if you would see how imperial promises are kept!'¹⁶

This last point was bound to resonate with anyone with knowledge of the recent history of that part of Europe. Finland could very plausibly be seen as a good test of Russian intentions. Compared with other parts of the Russian Empire, the Grand Duchy of Finland had enjoyed considerable autonomy. In the 1905 Revolution the Finns had won the *Eduskunta*, a unicameral parliament, elected on the basis of universal and equal suffrage. Finland became the first European country where women achieved the right to vote. Between 1899 and 1905, the Tsarist regime had pursued a policy of Russification in Finland. After 1908, once the Tsarist regime felt more secure again, this policy returned with a vengeance.

Yet there were those on the Left who attempted to show Tsarist Russia in a more favourable light. On 7 August 1914, H.G. Wells published an article in the *Daily Chronicle*, a paper which normally supported the more radical wing of the Liberal Party, entitled 'The Sword of Peace' with the

subtitle 'Every sword that is drawn against Germany now is a sword drawn for peace'. Wells was attacked a few weeks later in the *Labour Leader* after his critic, known as Vernon Lee, had apparently been refused publication in the Liberal press. Vernon Lee was the pseudonym of the writer Violet Paget (1856-1935), a pacifist who was soon to be a member of the Union of Democratic Control (UDC). In the *Leader*, in August, she had forcefully expressed her outraged surprise that someone hitherto 'a denouncer of war' could have taken such a position. His apostasy' was 'all the worse because it is sincere'.¹⁷ She quoted Wells's contention that 'The defeat of Germany may open the way to peace and disarmament throughout the earth'. That was what was always said by all sides in a war, she concluded.

Wells replied in the next edition of the *Labour Leader* claiming that 'No one who remains sane can suppose we have any other alternative before us now but victory or destruction'. He accused ILP leaders MacDonald and Hardie of 'misrepresenting the negotiations that preceded the war' and 'suggesting that we are in some way cheats in defending the neutrality of Belgium'. What did they want Britain to do – sue for peace? They should answer this question. But instead all they offered was a 'whining criticism of the acts of Sir Edward Grey'. Wells's own position on Russia had been made clear in a *Nation* article that had been published immediately before the *Leader* issue in which Vernon Lee's 'reply' appeared. This, Wells now claimed, 'knocks the bottom out of all this nonsense which represents Russia as a kind of worst devil and Kaiser-Krupp Prussian system as the clean white fabric of a delightful yet disciplined civilisation, which not only aspires but deserves to dominate the world'.¹⁸

This was followed by Bundock's critique of Wells's *Nation* article. He quoted Wells's contention that 'the day of the unintelligent, common soldier' was past and consequently 'Russia can only become powerful enough to overcome any highly-civilised European country by raising its own average of education', a process which could only be done by 'liberalising on the Western European model'. But how seriously could such an argument be taken, asked Bundock. 'Why should we believe that Russia, if it can be effective in hurling Prussian militarism from its seat, will, when the work is done, be stricken suddenly with ineffectiveness?' Fear of Russian despotism, concluded Bundock, was well grounded.

But – apart from Wells's own letter – Bundock did not have it all his own way. Also in the *Labour Leader* of 3 September was a letter from R.C.K. Ensor, at this time a journalist on the *Daily Chronicle* and a Fabian socialist though best known much later as the author of the 1870-1914 volume of the *Oxford History of England*. He protested against

Hardie's 'ill-timed attempt to revive anti-Russian prejudice'. The Russian 'democratic and constitutional movements' had seen in the war 'a unique opportunity of securing at once two things that can only be secured together – the liberalising of Russia and the creation of a permanent Anglo-Russian friendship'. He felt sorry, on opening *Labour Leader*, 'to see every reference to Russia in a key of stale and sterile carping'.¹⁹

The 'carping' may have been less but front page of the same day's *Justice* was barely less apprehensive about Russia than its ILP rival. It claimed that Russia would have the 'easier part' in the war with the danger that war might end with 'a beaten Germany, an exhausted France, a crippled England, with Russia fresh and strong' and able to impose its terms. Nor could an eventual realignment in the form of a deal with Germany be ruled out. The same page reported that 'The reply of the Russian Government to the general demand for political amnesty' had been 'more in keeping with its general policy than the recent wonderful manifesto of the Grand Duke Nicholas to the Poles'. The secret police had been active and among the arrested was the lawyer 'who defended the workers prosecuted in connection with the Lena massacres' after the strikes in the Siberian goldfields.²⁰

The division on the British Left between those who believed their obligations as internationalists were met by their 'pro-Ally' stance and those of the self-declared 'internationalists' who opposed them was very real and already quite clear in the final months of 1914. The 'pro Ally' stance illustrated the fact that many Social-Democrats, especially those who referred to themselves as 'the Old Guard of the S.D.F.' took the existence of national ties and a sense of community with those they lived among as simply a normal state of affairs. It did not exclude a belief in the primacy of class or class conflict, but the nation and nation state had to be accepted as part of current reality. Supporters of the 'pro-Ally' position would claim that the very word 'international' accepted the reality of 'nations' and would reiterate almost *ad nauseam* that they were 'internationalists rather than anti-nationalists'. But while the formulation is trite it is not without some validity. The argument had been laid out in a *Justice* article by Harry Quelch, a key figure in the SDF in 1912, the year before his death. The article was reprinted by the paper during the war.²¹

Yet when it came to considering what should follow the horrific conflict there was something approaching unanimity about aspirations for the post-war world. Hardly had the conflict begun when Hyndman, in a *Justice* editorial, was hoping that 'the war of 1914 may secure for England the beginnings of a Co-operative Commonwealth'. A week later MacDonald was a better predictor of the actual future when, in *Labour Leader*, he dismissed

hopes of the war bringing an end to militarism and a lasting peace as ‘moonshine’. A ‘new military despotism in Europe’ was far more likely. The war was ‘the beginning of a dark epoch dangerous, not merely to democracy, but to civilisation itself’.²² Whether optimistic or pessimistic about the post-war world there was general agreement that any peace settlement should be impartial and just, and that any notion of punishing Germany should be avoided. Even that unequivocal supporter of the British participation in the war, A.M. Thompson of *The Clarion*, agreed. When there were demands for what he called ‘a vindictive smashing of German unity’ after the war and ‘even worse’ in the *Daily Mail*, he hastened to reject them.²³

One organisation determined to avoid any such thing and any further ‘secret diplomacy’ was the Union of Democratic Control. A letter announcing its formation appeared in *Labour Leader* late in September 1914. It was signed by three Liberal MPs – all of whom would be in the Labour Party by the 1920s – and three Labour ones including two future leaders of the party, Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson. Among the four principles for the future peace that were proposed in the letter was that Britain should pursue not alliances but the creation of a ‘Concert of Europe’ whose business would be conducted publicly.²⁴ This was not so very different from the idea, popular throughout the British Left among both ‘internationalists’ and ‘pro-Ally’ people, of the ‘United States of Europe’.

Early in July 1914, when a war involving Britain still seemed an unlikely distant nightmare, we find Thompson musing in *The Clarion* that ‘If the United States of Europe were established – if the peasants of the Danube could appeal straight to the democracies of Italy, Austria, Germany and Russia, regardless of big financial interests, how different it would all be’.²⁵ After the outbreak of war the ILP manifesto included a section under the title ‘Our German Comrades’ which looked forward to the ‘suppression of militarism and the establishment of the United States of Europe’. On 14 August 1914 the term again featured in one of Thompson’s *Clarion* editorials. ‘The German War Lords’, Thompson wrote, had ‘scorned Sir Edward Grey’s “Utopian” offer of a British guarantee against French or Russian attack on Germany which would have formed the basis for the establishment of the United States of Europe’.²⁶ He would use the term again in the editorial on 18 September outlining the ideas for a peace settlement in Europe already noted.

For its part, on 20 August 1914 *Labour Leader* hoped that ‘the black night of fratricide’ would give way to the ‘dawn of fraternity’ and when the ‘scheming Chancelleries of Europe’ were replaced by ‘a permanent federation of interdependent states’. A month later, on 17 September, the

Cambridge philosopher G. Lowes Dickinson contributed an article to the *Leader* on 'The War and the Way Out. Preparing the Path to Peace'. He rehearsed the necessary objectives of an equitable peace settlement – no vindictive deprivation of German territory and no nations under 'alien rule', concluding: 'We must aim at a permanent League of Europe which will control and limit national armaments while leaving every nation free to accomplish its own internal development'.²⁷ The following week, on 24 September, Brockway took up the call on the front page of the *Leader* in the second of two articles under the headline 'After the War – What? Towards a United States of Europe'. Peace, he insisted, must 'denote the triumph not so much of the Allies or of Germany as of Europe'. A 'League of Europe' should be able to grow into a United States of Europe. 'The United States of America is composed of the peoples of every nation in Europe. Why should not those peoples, before they cross the Atlantic, form a United States of Europe?' Perhaps it was the wider perspective of someone born in India – and who four decades on would chair the Movement for Colonial Freedom – that accounts for the way Brockway then went on. Beyond a Europe with a 'European Parliament' and a 'European police force' he caught a glimpse of 'a federation of nations in which America and the British Dominions are part, and, more dimly, of a still larger federation including the peoples of Asia, Africa and South America'. Early in October *Labour Leader* published what it called 'A United Platform for European Socialists'. This summarised the paper's aims for the post-war world. There were six points, the final one stating 'The goal ever before us should be a United States of Europe (ultimately of the world), in which national armies and navies are replaced by an International Police Force'. The same paper called for 'A United States of Europe, without dynasties, secret diplomacy, feudal castes, or standing armies' the following month.²⁸ A 'United States of Europe' was supported by both opponents of the war and those who took a 'pro-Ally' position, and was by no means confined to the ILP. The Christmas Eve 1914 edition of *Labour Leader* featured a number of 'Messages of Goodwill from Across the Battlefields'. These included statements of international solidarity from leading German socialists Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein and, among several others, the Swedish socialist leader Hjalmar Branting.

The following week in the last issue of the BSP's *Justice* for 1914, Fred Gorle, the unsuccessful 'pro-Ally' candidate in the earlier election for the party's national executive, quoted Branting's enthusiasm for a future 'vast association of a United States of Europe, uniting the different nations, each free and sovereign in its own entire self-government'. The next part of Branting's statement, also approvingly quoted by Gorle, went on: 'But I

should be lacking in candour if I did not add that so splendid an aim must remain fatally chimerical if we are not determined to put forth against the expansive force of capitalism the force of nationality when threatened and anxious to preserve its entire liberty'. For Gorle, this was 'an effective endorsement of our position'. In Gorle's presentation, Branting was arguing 'that Internationalism is not a vague abstraction, signifying in some far distant time the blending of all nationalities into one nation. It is rather the correlation of nationalities; the giving to every nation the fullest possibility of development'. Such notions would not have gone down well either at *Labour Leader* or among the growing 'internationalist' group in the BSP but this did not prevent Gorle from making a New Year plea for unity which ended with the call 'Workers of the world unite. Yes, let us begin with the Socialists, and begin it with the year that now opens before us'.²⁹ Clearly, it was a great deal easier to express idealistic aspirations for the peaceful future than to cope with the awful problems and appalling stark choices of the war. But it is at least interesting that even as divisions centred on the latter grew, these aspirations took the form of the wish for a 'United States of Europe'.

I have concentrated on the divisions which opened up on the Left in the early months of the war with all fervently convinced that their version of internationalism was the only correct interpretation of the concept. But British advocates of a United States of Europe were not confined to the socialist movement nor to 1914. The businessman and philanthropist Sir Max Waechter was the most prominent promoter of the idea both before and after the war. Born in Stettin, then in Germany, he had lived in Britain since in 1859 and was naturalised in 1865. While serving as High Sheriff of Surrey, a ceremonial role, he was knighted in 1902.

In its May Day edition of 1924 *Justice*, by then the organ of that largely neglected component of the British Left, the reconstituted Social-Democratic Federation, published an article by Waechter under the title: 'How to Make War Impossible. The United States of Europe'. In it he urged that the crucial question was how to avoid another war. Europe had been devastated by the Great War and had the greatest need and greatest incentive to pursue a way of avoiding a repetition. 'It is in Europe, then, that a beginning should be made as soon as possible for a federation of nations for peace and security'. What was needed was to unite 'all the European Great Powers in one federation on the model of the United States of America and binding them by a system of Free Trade and free intercourse throughout the continent'. He recalled that in 1913 he had founded the European Unity League. Its council had included 'our present Prime Minister, Mr James Ramsay MacDonald'.

But neither Waechter nor *Justice* had much time left. Waechter died in October 1924, as ill-fortune would have it, on his eighty-seventh birthday while the SDF paper would go out of publication early the following year. And all too tragically the course of a united Europe was not to be practically revived until after yet another horrific conflict.

Notes

1. Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York, 1948, p28.
2. Stefan Berger, 'Communism and the Nation: the Failure to Accommodate Nation Under Class' in *Socialist History*, 52, *Legacies of October*, pp26-27.
3. *Labour Leader*, 5 January 1922.
4. *The Socialist*, 9 February 1922. For how the SLP's position evolved see Ian Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution*, Edmonton AB, 2011, Chapter 10.
5. For 'Allen-Attlee' see Ian Bullock, *Under Siege*, Edmonton AB, 2017, chapters 4 and 5.
6. *Labour Leader*, 6 August 1914.
7. *The Clarion*, 7 August 1914.
8. *Labour Leader; Justice*, 13 August 1914.
9. *Justice*, 17 September 1914.
10. *Justice*, 1 October 1914.
11. *Justice*, 17, 24 September 1914.
12. Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900–21. The Origins of British Communism*, London, 1969, p89.
13. *Justice*, 8 October 1914.
14. *Justice*, 5 November 1914.
15. *Labour Leader*, 13 August 1914.
16. *Justice*, 20 August 1914.
17. *Labour Leader*, 27 August 1914.
18. *Labour Leader*, 3 September 1914.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Justice*, 3 September 1914.
21. *Justice*, 18 May 1912, 15 March 1917.
22. *Justice*, 20 August 1914; *Labour Leader*, 27 August 1914.
23. *The Clarion*, 22 October 1914.
24. *Labour Leader*, 24 September 1914.
25. *The Clarion*, 3 July 1914.
26. *The Clarion*, 14 August 1914.
27. *Labour Leader*, 17 September 1914.
28. *Labour Leader*, 8 October 1914; 19 November 1914.
29. *Justice*, 31 December 1914.