

Crisis and mobilization since 1789. International Scholars' Network History of Societies and Socialisms (HOSAS) 2nd Conference. Jakub S. Beneš (Birmingham) / Giovanni Bernardini (Trento) / Kasper Braskén (Turku) / Christina Morina (Jena/Amsterdam) / Stefan Müller (Duisburg-Essen), International Scholars' Network History of Societies and Socialisms (HOSAS); International Insti, 22.02.2013-24.02.2013.

Reviewed by Giovanni Bernardini

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Grand predictions of capitalism's looming demise have fallen out of fashion since 1848, when Marx and Engels mistook capitalism's birth pangs for its death throes. Nonetheless, since 2008 and the onset of the global financial crisis, it has once again become possible to seriously contemplate alternatives and scholars have, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, returned to debating subjects like social inequality, finance capitalism, and even Marx. Yet few of the recent conferences where such matters are discussed have taken stock of the historical trajectory of capitalism's alternatives through various crises. The international scholarly network HOSAS (History of Societies and Socialisms) held its second conference in Amsterdam in late February 2013 with the aim of adding this dimension to ongoing conversations. CHRISTINA MORINA (Jena) explained that she and her co-organizers had chosen the conference's theme 'Crisis and Mobilization' to highlight research on how socialism (as an idea and a movement) has both affected or effected, and been affected by, crises.

The International Institute for Social History (IISH), a premier research institute and archive, generously hosted the conference. GEOFF ELEY (Ann Arbor) gave the keynote address, presenting a somewhat updated version of the argument in his monumental *Forging Democracy* (2002). Eley

reiterated that the Left has advanced European democratization precisely through extra-parliamentary, often militant mobilization – an assertion at odds with liberal historiography, which instead emphasizes democracy's legal-parliamentary bases. The nine panels and nearly thirty participants presented research addressing diverse aspects of socialist mobilization through, or in response to, temporally and geographically far-flung crises (understood in the broadest sense). Studies of Europe predominated, but presentations also featured work on Asia and Latin America.

Panel 1 interrogated the meaning of nineteenth-century socialism itself, reclaiming various histories of class struggle and socialism or complicating understandings of what qualifies as 'socialist' history. FRANK HATJE (Hamburg) discussed the influence of eighteenth-century Francophone intellectuals on the North German intelligentsia. Hatje cited several relatively unknown German thinkers to demonstrate that French revolutionary ideas were channeled in a German context towards education of the poor as a means of creating an egalitarian society. WILLIAM PELZ (Chicago) presented on the First International. While the historiography on this subject has revolved around the rivalry of Marx and Mikhail Bakunin, Pelz engaged with the productive ways in which

the First International attempted to affect local industrial relations on a global scale, transmitting information and funds to fortify strikes and promoting trans-border workers' solidarity. SAMUEL HAYAT (Paris) sought to inverse the common understanding of the relationship between French socialism and social sciences. It is usually thought that 'socialism' first described an emancipatory creed and then only later a social science, yet Hayat suggested the opposite on the basis of evidence from the 1830 and 1848 revolutions. Lastly, CAROLIN KOSUCH (Leipzig) offered a Freudian analysis of the literary work of anarchists Gustav Landauer and Erich Mühsam, stressing their unique, Jewish-inflected path to socialism through a revolt against the bourgeois enlightenment of their fathers.

Panel 2 addressed "mobilizations of new demographic and intellectual realms". LISA VOLLMER (Berlin) examined the creation of political subjectivities among large apartment-block tenants in Weimar Berlin. She argued that this period witnessed the emergence of a new collective identity among tenants as tenants, which allowed them to organize rent strikes and eventually achieve rent reductions. LIESBETH VAN DE GRIFT (Nijmegen) discussed a major interwar land reclamation project in the Netherlands. In this virgin land the Socialist Party was able to test its most radical policies (state ownership of land, extensive planning, etc.). Its success there allowed the acceptance of its program more broadly in Dutch politics. The last panelist, TROY VETTESE (St. Andrews), argued that Alexander Parvus, a largely forgotten German-Russian Marxist, should be remembered because of his contributions to Marxist theory (especially on permanent revolution, finance, and imperialism) and for initiating many cross-border contacts among European revolutionaries east of the Rhine.

Panel 3 focused on mobilizations in aesthetics and print to crises of the interwar years. SABINE HAKE (Austin) used Sergei Tretyakov's notion of

'operativity' to present an original reading of the 1932 film *Kuhle Wampe* – a collaboration between Bertholt Brecht and Slatan Dudow, showing that art, rather than merely reflecting political life, could constitute it in important ways. MEGAN TRUDELL (London) examined the revolutionary potential that Antonio Gramsci saw in Turin immediately after the First World War and how he steered the newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* to take advantage of that moment. Highlighting American socialists' overconfidence in the revolutionary potential of printed texts, JASON MARTINEK (New York) argued that books "do not make revolutions" in any direct sense, but the importance socialists attributed to them calls for historical studies of print culture.

Panel 4 examined cases of progressive political groupings mobilizing nationalist policies for their own purposes. ERIN HOCHMAN (Dallas) explained that both Austrian and German socialists of the interwar period espoused a *Großdeutsch* nationalism committed (until 1933) to *Anschluss*. Looking to the progressive aspects of the 1848 revolution, socialists sought to claim German nationalism as a usable tradition – in contrast to militarist and reactionary *Kleindeutschland* of the Hohenzollerns – and to deflect attacks from the Right. ROBIN DE BRUIN (Amsterdam) designated the Portuguese *Estado Novo* as a 'projection and projection screen' for progressive Dutch Catholic intellectuals in the mid-twentieth century. Salazar, seen as a benign dictator, offered a corporatist model that seemed to be an alternative path for the Netherlands, which was, like Portugal, a small divided country with a large maritime empire.

Panel 5 dealt with the legacy of World War I. STEFAN NYZELL (Malmö) argued that historians have failed to appreciate the tumultuous transition to democracy in Sweden because it contradicts the country's peaceful self-image. When wartime food shortages led to bread riots and eventually 'revolutionary conditions', the Social

Democratic Party played the threat of political violence as a trump card in its dealings with the establishment, paving its way to power for the first time and to dominance of Swedish politics for much of the past century. RUDOLF KUČERA (Prague) also discussed hunger riots during WWI, turning the spotlight on Habsburg Bohemian munitions factories. Class solidarity and ethnic nationalism (emphasized heavily in previous historiographical traditions) motivated rioters less than a more deep-rooted desire to restore the moral economy of labor relations, which manifested itself in high participation of women and youth as well as in carnivalesque ways of upsetting power relationships. THOMAS MACKAMAN (Wilkes-Barre) presented research on the 1920s US strike wave in which recently immigrated Europeans played a leading role, and proposed viewing this episode through the lens of global labor history. The ambivalent legacy of this strike wave included an anti-immigrant and anti-labor backlash, but also the beginnings of the Fordist social contract.

Panel 6 explored global strands of socialisms, with special focus on anti-imperialism during the interwar era. IVAN SABLIN (Heidelberg) presented his research on the shifting visions and endeavors of indigenous socialist revolutionaries in Mongolia (1910s-1920s) that led to the creation of the first socialist state outside the Soviet Union. FREDRIK PETERSSON (Turku) analyzed the creation of the League against Imperialism and its role as a radical socialist node in the global anti-imperialist movement. Especially interesting was the ambivalent, even non-existent, role of social democratic leaders and thinkers in the anti-imperialist mobilization during the interwar era. Stephen Fein (London) addressed the 1931 anti-imperialist exhibition organized by communists in Paris and queried reasons for its embarrassing failure to mobilize support. Kasper Braskén (Turku) underscored the prominence of war scares during crises, and how such scares have galvanized socialist mobilizations, with evidence from the 'Workers International Relief' (1929-32)

that mobilized international solidarity against a feared imperialist war.

Panel 7 investigated how women's issues and mobilizations figured in twentieth-century socialism or social reformism on the basis of diverse case studies. SONYA MICHEL (College Park) looked at tensions in the early twentieth-century discourse of American women social reformers between maternalism, advocating the advancement of women based on their traditional role as child-bearers, and socialism that long remained ambivalent toward women's rights. On the basis of this discussion, she pointed to some long-term continuities in women's rights discourse. ÅSA LUNDQVIST (Lund) presented the largely unknown case of Swedish 'activating inspectors' in the 1960s and 1970s – a grassroots social democratic campaign that featured women calling at households throughout Sweden in order to get housewives into the labor market. DONGXIAO LIU (College Station) compared broad trends in how women's rights figure in established state discourses in China and India, and how these are changing under the stress of neoliberal policies.

Panel 8 extended the panel 5's focus on wartime crises to the 1940s. JENS SPÄTH (Rome) illuminated the similarities between German and Italian socialist leaders of the immediate postwar period – specifically Lelio Basso, Willy Brandt, Wilhelm Högner, and Pietro Nenni – who shared broad commitments to democracy, emphasized the long continuities that produced democratic socialism in their countries, and were committed to commemorations of anti-fascism. TRACY CAMPBELL (Lexington) argued that the circumstances of World War II produced a powerful (and today almost unthinkable) American political consensus oriented toward social justice and egalitarianism. Similarly emphasizing how the wartime crucible created large-scale political consensus, ANNE-MARIE MREIJEN (The Hague) presented research on how Dutch social democracy became a mass-political force after 1945 and had some success in

integrating people from the various ‘pillars’ of Dutch society. CAMILO ERLICHMAN (Edinburgh) answered a question first raised by Charles Maier – why was the aftermath of WWII so stable? – by arguing that wartime political repression, aerial bombardment, and loss of solidarity through political favoritism had effectively de-politicized the working class in the *Ruhrgebiet*, producing their purely materialist-driven mobilization and subsequent dispersal. His conclusion stood in contrast to Eley’s argument that WWII had created inter-class solidarity and provided an interesting rejoinder to the findings presented by the other panelists.

The last panel problematized the ‘New Left,’ its divergent trajectories and possibilities, since the 1970s. SAMI OUTINEN (Helsinki) portrayed Sweden as the avant-garde, in a perverse sense, of the European Left because it embraced a rightist agenda before the SPD or UK Labour. The Social Democratic reaction to the 1970s economic crises was to reduce inflation, increase labor market flexibility, and create a ‘business-friendly’ environment. According to WIM DE JONG (The Hague), four distinct trends have characterized Dutch students’ political education, each ushered in by a different crisis and responding mobilization. These attempts to inculcate citizenship stem from the perennial worry of elites in democracies – that is, can ordinary people be trusted to be responsible citizens? – but have, in de Jong’s analysis, stagnated recently in the neoliberal preoccupation with ‘individual responsibilities.’ Taking the discussion beyond Europe, ANDREA OÑATE (Princeton) offered a novel explanation for the success of the FMLN during El Salvador’s civil war. Rather than looking at the actions of superpowers or local conditions, Oñate showed that the FMLN led an effective non-ideological campaign to win international diplomatic support, thus exploiting Cold War dynamics to further their own goals, rather than being passively shaped by them. SPYROS MARCHETOS (Thessaloniki) concluded the conference with a discussion of the

current Greek crisis, which is simultaneously a deep crisis of Europe and the EU. The situation presents Leftist critics of capitalism with a major opportunity, yet Marchetos remained pessimistic that the Left can currently muster a coherent program or successfully mobilize its organic intellectuals (in the Gramscian sense) to seize it.

With its second conference successfully completed, the young HOSAS network looks forward to maintaining a forum for scholarly discussion on the history of societies and socialisms and aims to organize another conference in two years.

Conference Overview:

Welcome by the HOSAS committee and Marcel van der Linden (IISH)

Panel 1 – Social Justice as political cause: historical and theoretical foundations of mobilizations

Frank Hatje (Univ. of Hamburg): Educating a ‘new mankind’. Enlightenment, revolution, and the concepts of an egalitarian society among the bourgeoisie of the North-German mercantile metropolises around 1800

William A. Pelz (Institute of Working Class History, Chicago): Marx, Engels, Bakunin and the Socialism(s) of the International Working Men’s Association

Samuel Hayat (Univ. of Paris 8, CRESPPA): From social science to working class struggle: 1830 and 1848 revolutions in the history of French socialism

Carolyn Kosuch (Univ. of Leipzig): Anarchism as counterpart of mobilization: the case of Gustav Landauer and Erich Mühsam

Key note by Geoff Eley & discussion

Panel 2 – Into the age of extremes: mobilizations of new demographic and intellectual realms (1870s-1940s)

Lisa Vollmer (Technical Univ. Berlin): Tenant Mobilization and the Left – Berlin 1872-1932

Liesbeth van de Grift (Radboud Univ. Nijmegen): 'Land Free From History and Tradition': Reforming Agriculture on Reclaimed Lands in the Netherlands, 1918-1940

Troy Vettese (New York University): Parvus: the Inexcusable Forgetting of an Irreplaceable International Political Intermediary (1890-1920)

Panel 3 – Mass grievances, mass politics: democratic mobilizations in the interwar years

Megan Trudell (Birkbeck Coll., London): Antonio Gramsci, the "L'Ordine Nuovo" and Italian interwar mass politics

Sabine Hake (Univ. of Texas, Austin): Weimar Culture and Proletarian Modernism

Jason D. Martinek (New Jersey City Univ.): Do Books Make Revolutions?: The Example of the American Socialist Movement, 1897-1920

Panel 4 – National(ist) socialisms? The social questions between left and right wing politics

Erin Hochman (Southern Methodist Univ., Dallas): Socialism, Großdeutsch Nationalism, and the Defense of the Weimar and First Austrian Republics

Robin De Bruin (University of Amsterdam): Estado Novo as 'Projection and Projection Screen' for Progressive Dutch Catholic Intellectuals in the 20th century

Panel 5 – Facing the "Urkatastrophe": The social costs and political legacies of World War I

Stefan Nyzell (Malmö Univ.): "We Demand Bread, Peace and Suffrage": The Role of the Political Left in the Swedish Protest Cycle of 1917

Rudolf Kučera (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague): Beyond the Nation and Party: Cultures of Protest in the Bohemian Lands during World War I

Thomas Mackaman (King's Coll., Wilkes-Barre/Pennsylvania): Transatlantic Radicals and the Crisis of the Nation-State, 1914-1924

Panel 6 – Global strands of radicalism: anti-imperialist movements and transnational interconnections before World War II

Ivan Sablin (Heidelberg Univ.): Liberating Mongolian Steppes: Indigenous Socialist Revolutionaries in East Central Asia, 1910s-1920s

Fredrik Petersson (Åbo Akademi Univ., Turku): In Dire Need of a Colonial Agenda? The Mobilization and Responses of the Labour Socialist International on the Emergence of the League against Imperialism, 1927-29

Stephen Fein (LSE, London): The Anti-Imperialist Exhibition in Paris, 1931: Political Mobilization as a Measure to Counteract the Image of Empire

Kasper Braskén (Åbo Akademi Univ., Turku): Cultivating War Anxiety? Mobilising the European Left against the Rising 'Imperialist Threat', 1929-1932

Panel 7 – From social to gender issues (and back): women's movements, socialism, and social policies in the 20th century

Sonya Michel (Univ. of Maryland, College Park): Between Maternalism and Socialism: Women Social Reformers in the Early Twentieth Century United States

Dongxiao Liu (Texas A & M Univ.): Navigating Socialism and Neoliberalism: Experiences of the Indian and Chinese Women's Movements

Åsa Lundqvist (Lund Univ.): Feminism and Activation Policies: Swedish Activating Inspectors and Women's Entrance in the Labour Market

Panel 8 – The Left's baptism of fire? Administrative, political and ideological responses during and after World War II

Tracy Campbell (Univ. of Kentucky, Lexington): Squandered Opportunities: Lessons From 1942 in the United States

Jens Späth (DHI, Rome): The Crisis of 1945: Antifascism and Mobilization of German Social Democrats and Italian Socialists

Camilo Erlichman (Univ. of Edinburgh):
Whatever happened to German labour in the
post-war era? The case of the British Zone of Ger-
many, 1945-1949

Anne-Marie Mreijen (Research School Political
History, The Hague): Dutch Social Democracy af-
ter 1945

*Panel 9 – New lessons of a “New Left”? Recent
and current mobilizations in a globalized world
(1970s-today)*

Sami Outinen (Univ. of Helsinki): The Chang-
ing Concepts of Social of Swedish Social
Democrats under the Challenge of Neoliberal
Globalization from the 1970s to the 1990s

Wim de Jong (Research School Political Histo-
ry, The Hague): Democratic crises and political ed-
ucation in the Netherlands (1945-2012)

Andrea Oñate (Princeton Univ.): Malleable So-
cialists: the pragmatic revolutionary politics of the
FMLN during El Salvador’s Civil War, 1980-92

Spyros Marchetos (Univ. of Thessaloniki):
Mass Mobilization in the Current Greek Crisis,
2008-2012

Final discussion

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
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