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Article Review 161

Ettore Costa. "From East-West Balancing to Militant Anti-Communism: The Socialist International and the Beginning of the Cold War, 1947–1949." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 24:2 (Spring 2022): 95–131.
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Ettore Costa wrote his dissertation and book on the UK Labour Party's contribution to the re-founding of the postwar Socialist International (SI) from 1944 to 1951.¹ He returns to examine international socialism after completing a postdoctoral project on socialist reactions to technological change and the Moon landings in the 1950s-1960s.² In his new, highly welcome piece in the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Costa presents a microhistory of *Socialist World* (SW), a transnational publishing endeavor by Comisco, the postwar organization that preceded the founding of the SI in 1951. This ill-fated journal premiered in early 1947 but struggled to reach an audience. With a low circulation and stockpiles of unpurchased copies, it published seven editions before closing shop by early 1949. Why bother to study such a short-lived, unsuccessful publishing project? While the journal is unremarkable in itself, Costa's microhistorical approach allows him to use the journal as a 'vantage point' into the vagaries and evolution of early postwar international socialism and to identify a crucial ambiguity within it that afflicted socialists' success in mobilizing internationalism for their broader political goals.

Until recent years few historians took postwar socialist internationalism seriously. Bland resolutions, circuitous debates, and contemporary disappointments made socialist internationalism appear "meaningless," as Costa tells us (96). For a long time, such neglect was not unique to the history of socialist internationalism: it was reflective of a mid- to late twentieth century contempt for the study of international organizations and international civil society. The 'failure' of the League of Nations to prevent a Second World War cast a long shadow until Susan Pedersen's 2007 review article "Back to the League of Nations" in the *American Historical Review* helped shift the paradigm back towards an appreciation for the role and development of

¹ Ettore Costa, *The Labour Party, Denis Healey and the International Socialist Movement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

² Costa, "The West European Left and the First Moon Landing: The Fall of Scientific Enthusiasm and the Ebb of Socialism," *The International History Review*, First view (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2022.2046129>; Costa, "Whoever Launches the Biggest Sputnik has solved the Problems of Society? Technology and Futurism for Western European Social Democrats and Communists in the 1950s," *History of European Ideas* 46:1 (2020): 95-112 Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2019.1703855>.

internationalism in modern history.³ This historiographical turn was accompanied by a methodological turn towards studying transnational networks, ideas, and exchanges between national and international levels.⁴ A flood of new, innovative scholarship on the League of Nations and United Nations ensued and the study of internationalism entered new grounds both at global and regional scales. Some highlights of this trend are the founding of the *Journal of Global History* in 2006 and Wolfram Kaiser's study of the role of transnational networks of Christian Democracy in the inaugural period of European integration.⁵

In the 2010s, this shift in scholarship inspired a whole-scale revision of the historiography of international socialism, which had been a largely dormant area of research in previous decades. The pioneers are historians Talbot Imlay and Daniel Laqua. Imlay's series of articles and 2017 book, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960*, reinterpreted the histories of the interwar Labour and Socialist International and postwar Socialist International, highlighting socialist commitments to transnational cooperation and international successes.⁶ Laqua, meanwhile, demonstrated how the League of Nations in the 1920s mobilized socialist internationalism in the interwar Labour and Socialist International in an extended dialogue with liberal internationalism.⁷ As with the work of Patricia Clavin,⁸ Kaiser, and Pedersen, Imlay and Laqua were influenced by constructivist and sociological approaches to the study of international cooperation.

While Imlay was writing his book, a group of doctoral students from Europe and North America, who had come to their topics on their own, prepared dissertations that, like Imlay's work, restored the meaning, purpose, and contributions of socialist internationalism to twentieth-century European history. In conferences and in private correspondence, Imlay (and for a number of us, Kaiser as well) generously mentored this younger generation of scholars who shared his interests and much of his methodological approach. The result was an outpouring of new research on postwar socialist history, examining the influence of Danish social democrats on the UK Labour Party's policy towards European integration in the 1960s,⁹ a comparative and transnational history of Eastern and Western socialists during the early Cold War,¹⁰ a comparative history of socialist party programs and revisionism,¹¹ the development of transnational socialist development policies towards the Global South and towards the Portuguese and Spanish democratic

³ Susanne Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *The American Historical Review* 112:4 (2007): 1091-1117 Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.112.4.1091>.

⁴ Patricia Clavin, "Defining Transnationalism," *Contemporary European History* 14:4 (2005): 421-439 Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777305002705>.

⁵ Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶ Talbot Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁷ Daniel Laqua, "Democratic Politics and the League of Nations: the Labour and Socialist International as a Protagonist of Interwar Internationalism," *Contemporary European History* 24:2 (2015): 175-192 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777315000041>

⁸ Clavin, *Securing the World Economy: The Reinvention of the League of Nations, 1920-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁹ Matthew Broad, *Harold Wilson, Denmark and the Making of Labour European Policy* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021).

¹⁰ Jan de Graaf, *Socialism across the Iron Curtain: Socialist Parties in East and West and the Reconstruction of Europe after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹¹ Jacopo Perazzoli, "Qualcosa di nuovo da noi s'attende". *La socialdemocrazia Europa e il revisionismo degli anni Cinquanta* (Milan: Biblion, 2016).

transitions in the 1970s,¹² and the transnational contributions of the French Socialist and German Social Democratic parties to the origins of European integration.¹³

Costa is a member of this generation and his new article emerges from this scholarly context. In essence, the article is about how international socialists became Cold Warriors during the late 1940s. One of its main arguments is that *Socialist World* evolved from a platform of inter-socialist dialogue between Western socialists in democratic countries and Eastern socialists under the Soviet Bloc into a Western instrument for fighting the Cold War. At first, the journal, like Comisco as a whole, maintained a pluralist stance as socialists tried to craft a sort of Third-Way bridge between US capitalism and Soviet Communism. This led its editors to downplay the severity of what was happening in Eastern countries at a time when Soviet occupiers and Eastern Communists cajoled and threatened social democrats into forming unitary people's parties. SW editors used 'geographic determinism,' identifying differing historical cultures as responsible for the dramatic events in the East, while praising the economic transformations brought about there by widespread nationalizations and land reallocation. Within Comisco, however, this accommodation led to paralysis caused by the inability of international socialists to comment clearly about postwar geopolitical conditions. This in turn led to exasperation, as Eastern socialists blocked the reincorporation of German social democracy into the international socialist community and opposed Western forms of cooperation. Costa insightfully shows how SW moved from pluralist debate to a single line of action in 1947–1948, leading it to momentary success when it forcefully condemned the Prague Coup. However, it was never going to be able to resolve the fundamental difference between Western continental socialist views and those of UK Labour and the Scandinavian parties on European integration, a topic Costa explores further in a recent article in the *Journal of Digital History*.¹⁴

International socialism westernized and coalesced in support of the Marshall Plan in 1947. Here it would have been interesting to learn whether the SW was also venue for an East-West debate on the Marshall Plan. Costa persuasively argues that in 1948 the Prague Coup proved a 'turning point' for the SW, as it was for international socialism more widely. The journal went on the attack, sounding much like its domestic right-wing competitors when it denounced communist 'totalitarianism' as akin to that of the Nazis. This new line earned it the secret support of British intelligence, making SW a further case of Western intelligence agencies clandestinely funding anti-communist socialist parties and trade unions as part of their general efforts to influence civil society in the 1940s–1950s.¹⁵ Worryingly for left-wing socialists who were committed to economic transformation, SW now promoted political over economic democracy, downgrading the latter. In this way, we see the path being paved for the 1951 Frankfurt Declaration that re-founded the Socialist International on a reformist, Cold War-oriented platform.

As the internal East-West conflict waned within Comisco with the expulsion of the Eastern parties, new conflicts crystallized that would set the stage for controversies within international socialism in the 1950s. The most important of these was over the issue of European integration, though SW writers did not employ this term because 'European integration' was a neologism from 1949, after the journal closed. Past and future luminaries like former French prime minister Léon Blum and European federalist Cerilo Spinelli, brother of future European commissioner Altiero Spinelli, used the SW platform to argue for supranational forms of European cooperation against UK Labour and Swedish Social Democrats. The latter, in turn, refused supranationalism and attempted to keep all forms of international engagement, including international

¹² Christian Salm, *Transnational Socialist Networks in the 1970s: European Community Development Aid and Southern Enlargement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹³ Brian Shaev, "Liberalising Regional Trade: Socialists and European Economic Integration," *Contemporary European History* 27:2 (2018): 258-279. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777318000073>

¹⁴ Costa, "Taking the Measure of Social Democracy: Exploring the Ideology of the Socialist International through Topic Modeling," *Journal of Digital History* 2 (2023): 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jdh-2022-0001>

¹⁵ Julia Angster, *Konsenskapitalismus und Sozialdemokratie: die Westernisierung von SPD und DGB* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009). ISBN: 9783486594539 3486594532.

socialism itself, within non-binding intergovernmental boundaries. Interestingly, Costa shows that a future member of the European Parliament, Gerard Nederhorst, was arguing as early as 1948 that socialist forms of integration required supranationalism if they were not to devolve into liberal integration, an argument Nederhorst continued making against UK Labour Party officials into the early 1960s.¹⁶ On that note, it is striking that many of the socialists who were most important to internationalism in the 1950s, for example Max Buset, Gerard Nederhorst, and Erich Ollenhauer, etc., contributed to a journal with such a fledging, flash-in-the-pan existence. Their presence shows that this type of international engagement mattered to socialists, one of the key points that Imlay also makes.¹⁷ Further, we can see traces, fragmentary as they are in such a short-lived journal, of mutual influences and learning. The phrase usually credited to German Social Democrat Karl Schiller as part of the German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) march to reformism in the 1950s, 'as much competition as possible—as much planning as necessary,' was already part of the Swedish Social Democrats' party platform, and was republished for an international audience in SW in 1947.

The article is skilled at identifying the silences on display in SW, in particular the uncritical nature of its articles about European colonialism and how the journal sidestepped the fraught issue of how to balance national responsibilities with commitments to socialist internationalism. On the last point, I remain wary of the 'nationalization of Socialism' thesis that Costa refers to, which in my view operates too much as a *deus ex machina* in international socialist history. No doubt something akin to this happened in the UK Labour Party during the Second World War but other parties were generally committed to strengthening internationalism in the 1940s–1950s. By the late 1960s–early 1970s, there were tensions between the Dutch, French and German parties, but also close ties between the Austrian, German, and Swedish ones.¹⁸ While the article excels at showing the practical difficulties facing SW editors and contributors, it would have been helpful to place this explicitly within media history and the decline of the political party press more generally after the Second World War. Perhaps the failure of the SW was not only an internal affair but in part reflected the changing media landscape that also hit national party journals.

These reflections aside, I would like to highlight the particular strength and potential for future work on internationalism of the second major argument Costa lays out in this paper: that the journal, and, by extension (in one of the best traditions of microhistory), socialist internationalism as a whole, were seriously hobbled by an ambiguity in their goals, intentions, and purposes. Costa writes perceptively that, due to an inability to resolve this dilemma, the Socialist International turned to more confidential, technical work in transnational socialist economic expert meetings in the 1950s. Some of this was due to indecisiveness but as much or more was due to internal conflicts about whether international socialism should focus on informal consultations or on propagating an active, public socialist agenda. Was the purpose to consult and learn from one another, and to offer a forum for debate and mutual explaining and comprehension? If so, an open journal without a clear political line fit the bill, though it was unlikely to attract much of a readership, as Costa argues. Or was the purpose of socialist internationalism to build a transnational political body dedicated to collective action and propaganda? Posing the dilemma in these terms would likely prove useful to scholars of internationalism beyond socialist internationalism.

¹⁶ Brian Shaev, "Socialism, (Neo)Liberalism and the Treaties of Rome," *Renewal: Journal of Social Democracy* 27:1 (2019): 31-40. ISSN: 0968-5211.

¹⁷ Imlay, "Socialist Internationalism after 1914," in Clavin and Glenda Sluga, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 213-242.

¹⁸ Christelle Flandre, *Socialisme ou social-démocratie: Regards croisés français-allemands, 1971-1981* (Paris: Harmattan, 2007) ISBN: 2296019692 9782296019690; Marc Drögemöller, *Zwei Schwestern in Europe: Deutsche und niederländische Sozialdemokratie, 1945-1990* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 2008) ISBN: 978-3-86602-139-6; B. Vivekanandan, *Global Visions of Olof Palme, Bruno Kreisky and Willy Brandt: International Peace and Security, Co-operation, and Development* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

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