

Chapter 1: Where Did We Come From? The Origins and Ideals of the Workers Movement

The Earliest Examples of Labour Organising

Even before trade unions as we know them today came to exist, there have been many examples of workers banding together for better conditions.

In 1170 BCE, the first recorded labour strike took place in the Egyptian village of Deir-El-Medina, which was home to the artisans and tomb-builders who built the Valley of the Kings.

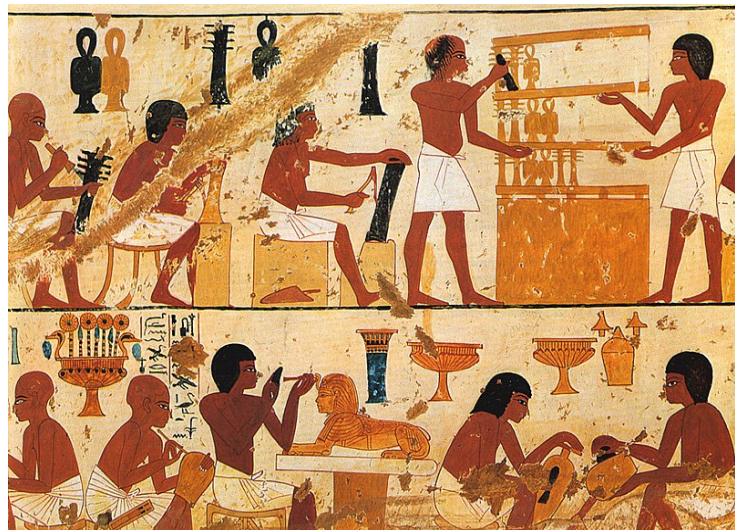
It took place under the reign of Ramses III, who was the last powerful pharaoh of the Egyptian Empire. His regime claimed to be based on the Ancient Egyptian value of *ma'at*, or harmony, under which universal, communal, and personal balance was the highest good.

Attacks from marauders and corruption in the ruling class had depleted Egypt's wealth and grain supply. As a result, artisans and labourers had not been receiving their rations on time.

Angry with an 18 day wait for their rations, workers went on strike. They lay down their tools and marched towards the city shouting, "*We are Hungry!*", staging a sit-in.

In response, the officials gave them rations and sent them home. However, this did not solve the underlying problem and soon the labourers' conditions became harsh once more. They went on strike again. This time they blocked all access to the Valley of the Kings so that no priests or family members could pay their respects to the dead. This was very effective, and eventually the officials agreed to pay the workers their rations on time.

The strike marked a major change in the relations between workers and officials. The strike began in protest at late wages but soon became a protest of corruption and injustice. The workers had taken it upon themselves to challenge the rulers' way of governing. It was also the first time that anyone had directly challenged the value of *ma'at*. The success of this strike encouraged others to do the same.



Egyptian Craftsmen were highly-skilled workers who made beautiful decorations for the tombs of the powerful. When they weren't paid on time, they went on strike, and even robbed the tombs that they'd created.

Religious Proto-Socialism

Before the growth of ideas like socialism, anarchism, syndicalism, and communism, there were still conflicts between the haves and have-nots. In some cases, these have-nots were peasants and serfs who did not work for a wage, but instead had to provide crops, join the army, or work for free for local

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lords. In some cases, they were urban and rural workers in industries much smaller than those we know today, the rules of which were set by a few masters. Sometimes they were self-employed, sometimes they were waged, sometimes they worked for many years to pay off debt, sometimes they were enslaved, and sometimes they were employed in different ways at the same time.

The have-nots in these pre-capitalist societies often used religious ideas and language to explain their situation, forming left-wing religious movements. Some of these movements saw no way for the oppressed to change things and said that you should quit society rather than get rid of the government or the masters and landlords. The Bogomils were a Christian movement amongst Slavs in what are now the Balkan states, and were most popular in the lands of modern Bulgaria and Bosnia between the 900s and the 1400s. They hated the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, and were oppressed by both. While they launched no uprisings against the state, they said that the world and its authorities were wicked.

“They teach their followers not to obey their masters; they scorn the rich, they hate the Tsars, they ridicule their superiors, they reproach the boyars, they believe that God looks in horror on those who labour for the Tsar, and advise every serf not to work for his master”

-Cosmas the Priest, *Sermon Against the Heretics*

However, some religious proto-socialists led and took part in uprisings. In 1416, thousands of peasants, nomads, and seafarers joined an uprising led by Sheikh Bedreddin against the Ottoman Empire, in the lands of what are now Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece. It was the biggest revolt in the entire history of the Empire, and came after a gruelling 11 year civil war and a series of fights between the Ottomans and nearby rival states. All this conflict had put a lot of stress on ordinary people, and many had even been forcibly deported to different parts of the empire, often to lands that were unsuitable for their needs.

Many were inspired and organised by Börklüce Mustafa, a preacher whose followers dressed in simple, plain clothes and ate simple, plain food. Mustafa preached that everything must be shared in common— food, clothing, ploughs, and lands, and that there was no difference between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. This message caught on, and 6000 followers joined him, defeating two imperial armies before being eventually put down.

Bedreddin and Mustafa were both killed for their part in the revolt, but remain inspirational figures for many on the Turkish left today. Marxist poet Nazim Hikmet wrote the *Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin* in his honour.

This was not the only uprising by religious proto-socialists. In 1524-5, peasants and urban workers across what is now Germany revolted against their governments which were run by princes and priests. 50 of their representatives got together in Memmingen and drew up a list of demands which included:

- The right to hunt, fish, farm, and gather wood in lands which had once been public, but powerful lords had taken over.
- An end to being treated like serfs and instead treatment as equals.
- Reductions in rents, taxes, and fines on the poor

This revolutionary movement also made alliances with some of the less-wealthy nobles and masters who wanted more say in the existing system, but not a total change. These middle classes often made

separate peaces with the authorities once they had gotten some guarantees that they would get a place at the table, and left the peasants to be violently crushed by the better-armed armies of the big landlords. Some 100,000 would die in the Peasants War, including a famous radical preacher named Thomas Müntzer. His reported last words "*Omnia sunt communia*" ('All things are to be held in common' or 'Everything is for everyone') can still be found on left-wing movements' banners today.

These movements were often unsuccessful, but showed some key principles of workers' politics which are important to today. They organised beyond borders, and built alliances of very different types of workers and peasants- no matter where they lived, the way they were exploited, or who they worshipped. Their legacies have inspired many, and their ideas helped pave the way for the first modern labour movements.

Before the Unions: Guilds

Guilds were some of the first popular membership organisations. These groups were very common in medieval Europe, but similar types of organisations existed around the world- from Turkey and Russia to China and Japan. They organised people by trade, and contained masters (employers), journeymen (skilled workers), and apprentices (trainees). Some of their activities are similar to those of modern trade unions, but they also took on a range of other roles.

They were often given exclusive rights to practice their trade by a local ruler. Members of the guild would be the only people allowed to take part in that trade, and would make and sell their products in conditions and at a price set by the guild's membership. They jealously guarded their trade secrets to stop people who hadn't completed an apprenticeship from practicing the job. This would keep competition for jobs down, and keep wages high (in theory).

The Revolt of the Ciompi

In late 1300s Florence, the wool guild was open only to the trade's employers, not the workers. The wool-carders (known as *Ciompi*), whose job was to comb wool so it was ready for spinning, were banned from organising.

Florence had 21 guilds at the time, and they effectively controlled the local government– 7 big guilds represented the richest trades' leaders, and 14 smaller ones represented skilled artisans and newly-rich merchants. Some 5000 people were guild members, out of around 55,000 people living in Florence. There were 10-15,000 wool-carders, who had been explicitly banned from organising guilds or gathering in groups of six or more, after a previous attempt to organise in the 1340s.

Those not in the guilds had no political voice, were underpaid for their produce, had to pay heavy taxes on basic food, and often faced months of unemployment throughout the year. Workers and those in debt could face cruel and violent punishment. Those in the smaller 14 guilds wanted equal government power to those in the big 7. They formed an alliance with the unorganised wool-carders, and in 1378 they rose up as part of the *Ciompi Revolt*.

In June and July of 1378, the *Ciampi* and other unrepresented workers took action- they refused to work, and attacked the houses of the rich, the monasteries, and government buildings. They marched on the jails and freed poor prisoners.

On July 21st, a crowd of 7000 people, both from the small guilds and *Ciampi*, stormed the city government headquarters and hung flags representing the minor guilds and unrepresented workers across the building. Records of workers' convictions and debts were burned in the uprising.

The unorganised formed three guilds, and were able to take part in the city government, with one of the *Ciampi* becoming the city's leader. Salt and flour prices were regulated, work guaranteed for the textile workers, debtors' prison and many debts abolished, and the barbaric practice of chopping off workers' limbs as a punishment was ended. Rulers from big guilds were ousted, and the minor guilds increased their power.

However, the *Ciampi* soon found that the small 14 guilds were still blocking their attempts to improve the laws. The wool-carders staged their own uprising in August 1378, demanding full control of the city government, but were slaughtered in the grounds of the government's palace by their former allies. The 3 new guilds were forcibly broken up and many of their gains made during the uprising lost.

Members took oaths promising to support each other, to keep the group's secrets, to pay their dues, and to stick to the rules of membership. The guilds provided members with insurance, support in sickness, and even a social club. They organised religious ceremonies, festivals, parades, and feasts.

In some cases, members of the early labour movements kept rituals and habits that were common within the guilds. But it would be wrong to say that they simply evolved into modern working-class organisations. They bound together workers and bosses by industry, and the masters often tried to prevent the journeymen and apprentices from challenging them or organising separately.

Before the Unions: Journeymen Associations

For most of history, when workers got together to try and improve their lot, they faced violence and harassment from people in power. They had to look for ways to cover up their activities by pretending to be other types of organisations.

From the mid-1300s, many journeymen started organising separately from the guilds. They set up journeyman's associations (sometimes called 'fraternities') which represented them and them alone. Members of these associations and professions started wearing special clothes- such as fancy hats and trousers- to show that they were not just servants. They started taking oaths to protect and support one another, and more and more refused to let guild officials mediate disputes between journeymen and masters. They wanted to represent themselves and be independent. They organised their own ceremonies, feasts, parades, and insurance, separate of the guilds.

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Journeyman often had networks of pubs and inns where they could find work. They would ‘tramp’ from town to town, and would be able to find out if there was work available from other journeymen at these places. If there wasn’t, they were looked after and then sent on to the next town. Many of these networks were international, and were used by journeymen to make sure there wasn’t too much competition for work, so they could have more control over conditions and wages.

These organisations started becoming so threatening to the masters’ control that by the 1500s, the state tried to clamp down on them. In 1530 a law was passed across the Holy Roman Empire (a large state which included parts of modern Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Croatia- to name just a few!) which banned Journeymen from striking. Similar laws were passed across France throughout the 1500s, and in England in 1549. The English laws remained in place until 1826.

To get around the laws against striking, if the journeymen had a problem with a master or masters in a town, they would blacklist that employer. Journeymen would quit one or two at a time, and then use the networks of inns to find work in other towns, while people at inns would warn newcomers against taking the vacant jobs. In the city of Colmar (in modern day France), bakers boycotted the city for 10 years from 1495 to 1505. They were annoyed that they were bumped from a prestigious position in a local religious procession, and did not return until they were given their original spot!

Before the Unions: Friendly Societies

The late 1600s and early 1700s also saw the emergence of other types of workers’ organisations, such as the **friendly societies**. As workers started moving from the countryside to the towns, they could no longer rely on the charity of churches to help them when they were sick or help their families if they died. Instead, they set up groups where all members would regularly contribute part of their wage as a form of insurance. They would put their funds into a locked box kept at a local ale house, a practice which started with sailors but soon spread to other trades.

In 1793 in England, they were made fully legal by ‘Rose’s Law,’ while trade unions were still illegal. English Friendly Societies soon became fronts for trade union and radical activities. In 1810 when button makers were in dispute with their employers, they formed the ‘Loyal Albion Lodge’. As one member later recalled: *“We had a sick and burial club, our only legal hold in those days, but our principal object was to keep up wages”*

Similar groups combining mutual aid and workplace organising have existed around the world. In the Philippines a series of ‘Gremios’ sprung up from around the 1850s, often amongst groups of skilled workers. All members would put money into the organisation, and get support for times of sickness and hardship. In some cases, they organised feasts on religious holidays.

These groups also took action against the Spanish colonial authorities and their employers. In 1872, members of the ‘Gremios de Impresores’ struck in protest of poor pay and conditions, and abuse from Spanish foremen. Also in that year, members of a mutual aid association set up twenty years earlier for Filipino workers and soldiers at the arsenal in Cavite City, mutinied and fired on Spanish officers. They had recently been told that they would have to pay more taxes to the colonial state, and that they were to take part in forced, unpaid labour. The uprising was crushed violently within two days, and several Filipino priests were executed for allegedly taking part. The rebellion and its violent

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putdown helped provoke the Filipino independence movement. While the Spanish colonial powers banned the workers' gremios in 1887, they helped to lay the groundwork for the emergence of the union movement in the early 1900s.

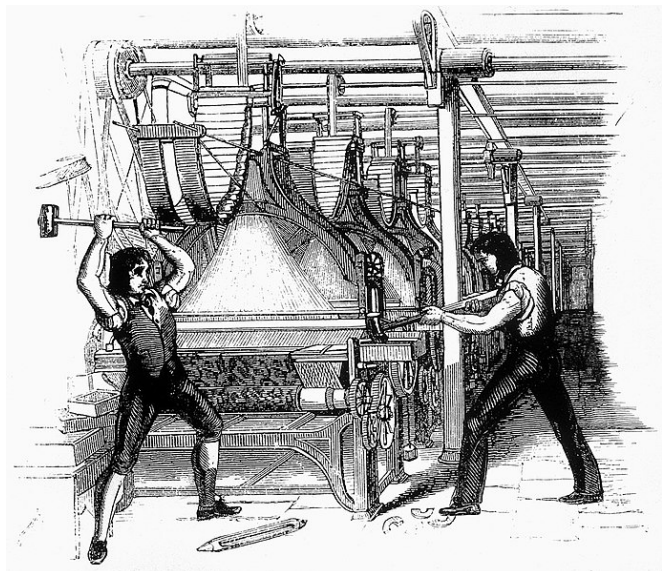
These types of groups which combine mutual aid and worker organising can still be found today, particularly in the informal economy. During the Covid pandemic, for example, the Nepal Transport Labour Association distributed food bundles and personal protective equipment to members, and pressured bosses to provide free Covid testing. In Brazil, waste pickers organised together through CataSaúde Viraliza project (an alliance between NGO's and unions), supported one another by distributing food and personal protective equipment, and lobbied local governments for access to vaccines.

During the era of proto-unions, strikes were often marked by 'rioting' and the smashing of machines. The guilds of old had once had the right to enter workshops and destroy both machines and tools which had not been approved of by their society. Many underground trade unions, modelled on guilds and journeymen associations, kept up this tradition.

In England this happened frequently in the 1700s and 1800s. **The Luddite Movement** (1811-1817) was perhaps most famous. Gangs of workers would gather at night to break into workshops, and smash new machines which had led to wage cuts, job losses, health risks, and a 'speeding-up' of monotonous work. In some cases, they had to fight the army to get at the machines. Some employers even started building secret vaults to hide their property. This was a time of 'collective bargaining by riot.' When picketing and protesting could see you arrested, fined, and even killed, sabotage and riot seemed to be much more effective tactics. In some cases, Luddites wanted to end the threat that machines posed to their working conditions; in others they explicitly called for the right to vote.

In France, machine-breaking took place before and during the 1789 Revolution. In the five years leading up to it, St Etienne was home to waves of machine-breaking, with metal workers, silk ribbon makers, and coal miners all taking part. During the revolution, wool workers often led machine-breaking actions, destroying and setting fire to English-style machines ('spinning Jennies') and the proto-factories which threatened to make their work repetitive, dangerous, and precarious. They would also attack government officials' and tax collectors' offices at the same time.

Across many countries, repressive laws against workers' organisations forced workers to create front groups, and dual-purpose groups. They combined mutual aid with organising and action (sometimes taking violent forms), to improve their working conditions and have a greater say in society.



Before striking and picketing were legal, workers often rioted and destroyed machines to express themselves. Here the English Luddites break stocking-frames in 1812.

The Earliest Unions

Because many of the earliest trade unions had to operate in secret, it is hard to pinpoint when exactly the first 'modern' unions existed. Between the late 1700s and mid-1800s, however, groups which could definitely be called trade unions started to be formed in England.

This went hand in hand with huge changes in the way that the economy was organised. **The Enclosures** saw aristocratic landowners drive many peasants off their traditional lands to make way for wool-producing sheep, forcing the former-peasants to move to the towns and the cities. New machines changed the way many industries would work, and brought together larger workforces. Raw materials were grabbed from new colonies by European powers, while their local industries were destroyed so that European products could be sold without competition. At the start of the 1700s, India produced 25% of the world's textiles, but British conquest and control meant that a century later, India was the largest importer of British textiles.

As poverty and population grew in many cities, the young working class increasingly had a reason to resist and the numbers to do so successfully. More and more, the production of goods was being done by large numbers of people working together in a single site or place. Mass workers' action was becoming more powerful.

In Manchester, England in 1818, cotton workers went on strike. This was nothing particularly new. But this time, strikers from each mill elected a delegate to a central committee which arranged well-organised pickets and large protests. As a local military officer put it:

"The peaceable demeanour of so many thousand unemployed men is not natural... their regular meeting and again dispersing shows a system and organisation of their actions which has some appearance of previous tuition"

The cotton spinners received solidarity funds from friendly societies of other trades. The strike soon spread from the spinners to carpenters, glassblowers, and brick-makers, and all would hold giant, peaceful demonstrations. Soon, nineteen different trades formed a general union called the **Philanthropic Society**. Another was set up in London. Delegates from across the country met to plan how to organise more effectively together. Even though the strike was defeated after 10 weeks, the idea of a public-facing trade union, drawing together workers from several sectors and trades, was growing in strength.

In 1824, the laws banning trade unions were repealed in Britain. Trade unions still faced legal harassment and violence from both employers and the state, but they were no longer explicitly illegal. Attempts were once again made to bring the trade unions together. Over the next twenty years there were several efforts, including the National Association for the Protection of Labour (1830), the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (1834), and the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour (1845).

Organising Internationally

In the early 1800s, unions and workers' associations were on the rise in many different countries. Australia's first unions were founded in the 1820s. France, which had many friendly societies that had organised strikes, saw the growth of workers co-operatives in the 1830s. In Germany, local workers'

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associations were growing in number, while in the first half of the 19th century, there were 23 court cases in the United States where 'combinations' of workers who fought to get better wages were prosecuted. The mood was growing across Europe and the Americas to not just combine nationally, but internationally as well. In 1843, the French-Peruvian activist Flora Tristan published '*L'Union Ouvrière*' ('The Workers' Union'), in which she called for the establishment of an international general workers' union. Flora had travelled widely before publishing this book, visiting Peru, England, and Ireland. She had been impressed by the English Chartists' and Robert Owen's attempts to set up a general union for all workers, men and women. She was particularly impressed by the Irish people's ability to organise in the face of dire poverty, and repeatedly stated that the French workers could learn from them.



Flora Tristan was a campaigner for women's and workers' rights. She called for workers from different countries to organise into one big union.

She was a tireless fighter, who campaigned for women's rights to divorce and own property, and called for the working class to organise themselves just as the bosses had, and the aristocrats before them. She went on tours of her home country following the same routes that travelling journeymen took on their search for work. She would stay in shabby hotels and put on meetings with local groups of workers where they would discuss what they needed and how best to achieve their goals. She was regularly harassed by the police and denounced by the church. She concluded that workers needed to stop organising in small groups for specific trades, and instead all unite- not just in France, but across borders.

"The Workers' Union," she wrote, *"should establish ... in all capitals of Europe, committees of correspondence."* In her pamphlet, she stressed that the workers had to emancipate themselves by their own action, and that no one else was going to do it for them. What's more, she claimed that they had to unite internationally because society itself had become international. *"Workers, you see the situation. If you want to save yourselves, you have only one means: you must UNITE."*

Flora's ideas were very similar to those that Marx and Engels would develop later on in their famous Communist Manifesto. She continues to inspire to this day- in Peru, a feminist NGO was established and named for her in 1979, which to this day works with the international labour movement to challenge the poor treatment of women both in the workplace and society.

This idea of organising internationally was not just the result of theorists or dreamers. Since the early 1800s, journeymen had gone on international journeys to seek work in towns and cities across Europe. These 'tramping' routes only worked when there was coordination between groups of workers on different sides of national borders - there had to be a way to check that they had served their apprenticeships.

These migrant workers were joined by groups of political exiles and refugees, who had to flee their home countries because of repression, and who would continue writing, publishing, and organising in

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whichever country they could set up a base in, sharing their democratic and radical ideas with fellow travellers.

In the 1830s, Paris was an important centre of this international organising. The League of Outlaws was set up among German workers (mainly tailors) there in 1834. The group's leader, Theodore Schuster, wanted a 'cooperative republic' to be founded by a revolution led by outlaws and exiles. He argued that the divisions between bosses and workers was more important than the divisions between the Germans and French.

The Outlaws drifted apart after a few years, but a number of them formed the League of the Just in 1836. Its leaders were based in Paris, but it had branches across Germany, Switzerland, and eventually England. A German tailor named Wilhem Weitling drafted the League's manifesto, which called for a revolution led by workers to create a society based on shared property and equal work. Despite being a secret organisation, the group had internal elections and democracy. After a French secret society attempted to seize power in Paris in 1839, the authorities cracked down on the group, arresting, imprisoning, and exiling many of their leaders- despite the fact that they had nothing to do with it!

The attempts to create a formal and permanent organisation which could bring together workers from many countries shifted from Paris to London. London was the home to many political refugees who had been forced to flee their homelands by oppressive governments (including those who had been in Paris in 1839)- the strength of the labour movement and the country's relatively-liberal political culture was attractive to many.

England had already been home to an early working class internationalist effort. In 1836 the working-class pro-democracy campaign group, The Working Men's Association of London, heard of a crackdown on the young Belgian workers' associations. Their secretary, William Lovett, wrote and published an 'Address to the Belgian Working Classes', which encouraged the fledgling labour movement of the country to fight against attempts to shut them down. In this letter they declared that all labourers should work together, saying *"We are of opinion that those who produce the real wealth of any country...have in reality but one great interest."*

The address was a hit, and soon reprinted in Belgian, French, and German publications. Belgian workers sent a reply which declared their allegiance to the international working class.

This exchange of letters soon led English workers to collect funds to help Belgian workers' fight against legal repression. There were soon attempts to turn solidarity campaigns into solid organisations.

In 1844, political exiles from across Europe, living in England, got together with some English Chartists and Socialists to have a banquet. This wasn't just a pleasant evening meal and some nice conversation; the attendees formed the 'Democratic Friends of All Nations' and declared that 'All Men are Brethren.'

They were a well-meaning group, but not well-organised, and soon collapsed. The following year, a

*"To those who will stir us up
against our brethren and speak to
us of our fatherland and the
general welfare we shall answer:
there is no other fatherland but
the world, and the general
welfare is the welfare of all the
peoples, of all the countries."
- 'Le Courier Belge',
January 24, 1837*

larger effort was made for a bigger banquet, and the 'Fraternal Democrats' were set up, using the same motto. This group had secretaries for each nationality represented at the banquet, and is seen by many as the forerunner of the First International (see page 28). While they lasted longer than the Democratic Friends, they found it difficult to organise across Europe after the failed revolutions of 1848, and stuck to publishing messages of international solidarity and articles on international events, rather than organising.

Unions, Revolution, and Reform

The French Revolution of 1789 shocked Europe to its core. One of the most powerful European ruling families had been ousted, not by another monarch, but by a movement of people demanding 'liberty, equality, and brotherhood.' Even though the revolution eventually came full-circle, with Napoleon first crushing the left and then the royal family eventually returning, its memory spread fear amongst the monarchs and aristocrats of Europe.

Many of the pro-democracy movements of the era were led by the growing capitalist class- traders, factory owners, 'professionals', and bankers- who were horrified at being locked out of power despite their wealth. They wanted political equality, so that they could also have access to the power of the state.

However, the foot-soldiers of these movements were often working men and women, who wanted an end to the poverty that they found in the cities. Many of them sought democracy because they hoped that having a political voice would mean an end to the starvation and sickness that defined city life.

'Peterloo', the working-class protest for democracy that was met with extreme violence in Manchester, 1819, was one such example of this idea. The years preceding this protest had seen cotton spinners in the region attempt to unionise and petition parliament for a relief to their poverty, with each of their efforts being met with violence from their rulers. The idea of democracy was enticing to these people.

In 1848, a series of revolutions spread across Europe. Barricades were thrown up across major cities, government offices were stormed, and revolutionary democracies were established. These were revolutions driven by organised workers- in Milan, 338 out of 350 who died on the barricades were from the working class. In France, the workers of Paris were the heart of the revolution. However, within the year, the revolutionary wave was defeated across Europe.

While workers were concentrated in cities which held the keys to power and willing to take to the streets, they were still small in number and weak in organisation. Trade unions tended to be a few hundred, or perhaps a few thousand strong at most. The first national German trade unions were



In Berlin, 1848, workers and students set up barricades to protect the new democratic government they had created against the soldiers of the regime.

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founded in the heat of the revolution. Small socialist groups and famous socialist thinkers existed, but there was no large-scale party of the workers in any European state. They could scare their enemies, but not defeat them.

Signs that this situation was changing came in 1871, when the workers of Paris rose up once again, forming the **Paris Commune**. After an unpopular war between Napoleon III's France and Prussia, the citizens of Paris refused to disarm, and formed their own local government, electing socialists and anarchists to represent them. They allowed workers to take over workshops and run them democratically, they abolished debts and rents owed by the poor to the rich, established free schools, banned night work in bakeries, and demanded pawn shops return the goods and tools of workmen which were sold off due to the poverty brought on by war. The conservatives' government, based in Versailles, were determined to crush the Commune, and invaded the city, unleashing a wave of extreme violence on the people of Paris. Between 5000 and 30,000 workers and 'Communards' were killed in the infamous 'Bloody Week' when the city was taken over by the old rulers. The violence of the initial uprising could not compare to the bloodshed of the counter-revolution- a theme common to workers' history.

These experiences of the potential power of organised workers, and the dangers that they faced should they fail, encouraged labour activists across the world to think about how they could gain power not just in their workplaces, but in wider society.

International Anti-Slavery Movements

It was not just waged workers who were beginning to organise internationally. Enslaved workers also used international networks to defeat the system which denied them their rights.

The European Empires and colonial states relied on slavery to take the resources from conquered lands and to grow cash crops. When genocides, brutal conditions, and imported diseases wiped out too many locals for a successful slave society, slaves were imported from overseas. Infamously, the Triangular Trade saw between 10 and 12 million African men, women, and children enslaved and forced onto boats to cross the Atlantic Ocean and work in the Americas. International traders grew rich off selling slaves, and selling products like sugar, tobacco, and cotton grown by enslaved peoples.

The enslaved peoples resisted in many ways. Sometimes they wrecked machines. Sometimes they worked slowly. Sometimes they ran away and set up 'Maroon' communities (groups of formerly-enslaved black workers who banded together, sometimes joining with indigenous peoples, sometimes forming small bands, and sometimes large-scale cities and regions). Sometimes they openly rebelled.

The most successful slave rebellion was in Haiti. Originally a French colony called San Domingue, it was the most profitable colony in the Americas, producing more sugar and coffee than anywhere else. Forced to trade solely with France, the colony was very important to French elites' wealth. The land was rich, and the people were worked to exhaustion in horrific conditions.

During the French Revolution, white slave-owners tried to gain independence so they could choose who to trade with. Poor whites protested because they felt that they deserved liberty, equality, and brotherhood- which in their eyes meant the right to own slaves! Non-enslaved black and mixed-race people wanted an end to white rule in the colony, but not necessarily an end to slavery.

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The slave rebellion broke out in 1791 and took 13 years to succeed, with Haiti becoming the first independent black republic and the first state to ban slavery in 1804. They were led by Toussaint Louverture, who has remained an inspirational figure for many to today. It was an extremely difficult struggle- the slaves had to fight against many different groups who wanted the return of slavery. First, they had to defeat white land-owners, then British and Spanish invaders, then Napoleon's French Empire.

Some of Napoleon's forces in Haiti were Polish soldiers who had also seen their attempts to fight for equality and independence crushed by invading empires. While Napoleon had promised them that he would fight for an independent Polish state if they worked for him first, many of them saw similarities with the group of formerly-enslaved black people of Haiti. These Poles defected and fought the French, and were rewarded with citizenship after the revolution.

Haiti became a source of inspiration to enslaved workers across the world- particularly in the Caribbean and throughout the Americas. During an attempted slave revolt in Cuba in 1812, Spanish authorities found picture books containing portraits of the Haitian revolutionary leaders. Haiti provided refuge for runaway slaves, and to anti-colonial activists such as Simon Bolivar, who would help end Spanish rule in the continent. Many local Spanish American elites came to support an end to slavery because they feared being overthrown, as had happened in Haiti.

Though Haiti abolished slavery, they were forced to pay the French former slave-owners 150 million francs in exchange for an end to their attacks and diplomatic recognition in 1825 (the US refused until 1862 after campaigns led by black Americans forced change). They were only able to pay off the amount with French and US loans, keeping the country trapped in debt for hundreds of years to come.

As Haitian slavery ended, it increased in the southern states of the USA. While several northern states had abolished slavery, the end of the institution only came in 1865 towards the end of the US Civil War. The pressure to end slavery across the entire country had come from an international campaign organised by churches, supported by workers, and which grew in strength through every slave rebellion.

Autobiographies of runaway slaves in the USA were published in the UK and across Europe, becoming hugely popular and inspiring petitions and campaigns. French societies translated and published American anti-slavery essays in the late 1700s despite royal attempts to censor them. Former slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs toured Britain in the mid-1800s, giving well-attended public speeches about the evils of slavery. International boycotts were launched of slave-produced sugar, and together with slave revolts, helped to reduce the profitability of the system.

During the American Civil War, ships from the slave-holding Southern states were blocked from leaving ports by the northern navies. This caused a 'cotton famine', causing great hardship in the cotton industry and mass unemployment amongst workers in cotton mills. Many mill bosses lobbied the British government to break the blockade. Their workers felt otherwise.

In 1862, mill workers in Manchester, England got together at the Free Trade Hall and passed a resolution offering their solidarity and support to the northern states, the blockade, and the fight against slavery. Although they faced poverty in the short-term, they recognised the importance of solidarity and of the struggle against racism. Similarly, the International Working-Mens' Association (often referred to as the First International) sent a letter of support to Abraham Lincoln in 1864, stating that the abolition of slavery was of vital importance to the entire global working class.

International Capitalism and Empire

It is impossible to talk of the history of workers' organisation without talking about the history of capitalism. Early capitalism was only possible because of the robbery of different groups of people. Lands that had been used by large groups of people for hunting, growing, and wood were turned into the private property of the rich. European empires stripped what we now call the Global South of its natural resources, enslaved human beings on a scale never seen before, and destroyed local trades to make sure their industries profited.

From the late 1400s, this expansion of empires and enslavement of non-Europeans made many merchants and their states very wealthy, creating some of the vast pools of money needed for the development of capitalist industry. It also led to large numbers of people crossing borders, and created conditions for workers in different countries that made international organising both possible and necessary.

The peoples whose lands were invaded and colonised were worked so brutally that many consider it to be a genocide, with some local populations dying out almost entirely due to overwork, lack of food, violent treatment, and disease. The Taino people, for example, lived across the islands of the Caribbean and were the first group to come into contact with the Spanish. Within 50 years, only 10% of their population remained.

The Spanish Empire created a system known as *encomienda* which made all native populations property of the Spanish crown. They could then be 'gifted' to Spanish colonists to perform hard labour, and then replaced with others from local villages if they died. Frequently men were forced into mining gold or silver, and both men and women were forced to work on agricultural plantations. Often they did not have enough time to grow their own food, creating famines and aiding the spread of disease.

Overworked and enslaved native populations did not just accept their fate. In 1712, the Huilliche people rose up in a cluster of islands known as the Chiloé Archipelago, in what is now Chile. A new colonial governor had changed the way the *encomienda* system worked, so native workers received no payment, and were tortured if they did not show up for work. On the evening of February 10th, 600 Huilliches stormed the houses of their Spanish bosses, killing them and their families. A brutal counter-insurgency killed many hundreds of locals in response. In the aftermath of the violence, the Spanish authorities replaced the governor and put in place new labour regulations. By the end of the 1700s, the Spanish got rid of the system altogether as it caused too many uprisings by local populations. However, as we will see, it was too little, too late.

As slavery became less profitable and more politically dangerous following not just the Haitian Revolution, but a series of revolts across Barbados, Demerara (now Guyana), Jamaica, Cuba, and the Southern states of the US, the institution gradually died out across the Americas. The profits of the system were funnelled into industry, trade, technological development, and infrastructure across the 'Global North'. Many trade networks established through slavery were kept running.

Slavery became less profitable and more politically dangerous for the imperial powers over time. However, they had another system of unfree labour that they could use – indentured labour.

This system placed workers on contracts that would take them overseas to other colonial states for years at a time, and only allowed to return home at the end of the contracts. Sometimes the workers were allowed a small parcel of land to settle in the foreign country they had been working in.

Indentured labour became very popular for colonial powers in the 1800s as certain raw materials - for example guano (bird and bat faeces used for fertilisers) and rubber – became more important to modernising capitalist industries. These resources required very demanding physical work to extract them from the earth.

Many of the indentured labourers employed in these growing industries, as well as on plantations and in mines and transport, came from China and India, and were referred to as 'coolies', although that term is now more often used as a slur. Indentured labourers were often lied to about the work they

would be doing, or found out the pay didn't live up to the promises, or in some cases were even kidnapped. Some signed up out of poverty and desperation.

All the major empires, whether British, French, Spanish, Dutch or Danish, used this system, as well as several independent states, such as Peru. Working conditions were often brutal – In German New Guinea (now a part of Papua New Guinea), around half of the 400 Chinese indentured servants brought

Chinese Workers Revolt in South Africa

In 1905, Chinese indentured workers in the gold mines of North Randfontein, South Africa, started a work-to-rule protest. Over the previous six months, they had been forced to work longer and longer and to drill deeper and deeper into the rock- by the start of the year they were working an extra 7 days per month with no increase in pay. They worked in groups of about 20, each supervised by a 'head man'

At first workers tried 'passive resistance'. Many would stay away from the mines, or ran away from the houses on the mining company's land. So many ran away that the government banned Chinese workers from even leaving the mining companies' property. They also arrested a number of Chinese workers for 'refusing work', sentencing them to hard labour.

Then the workers presented a mass petition, demanding an increase in pay, which management refused. Instead management tried to divide the workers – they offered the 'head men' extra pay for getting members of their crews to drill deeper than they were contractually obliged to. The workers had no legal right to reject this offer- so instead, every day, all 1300 Chinese workers drilled exactly 12 inches deep into the rock- no more, no less.

The police were called by the mine owners to arrest the ringleaders for 'refusing work', despite the fact that they were doing exactly what their contracts stated. When they arrived, they were pelted with sticks, stones, and bottles, and forced to flee by the organised workers. The police eventually returned with reinforcements from five surrounding towns, and had to chase the workers down the railway tracks and fight several battles before eventually arresting 53 ringleaders. Management realised that even arrests wouldn't break the workers' resistance, and so offered a better deal which meant that all workers got extra overtime pay.

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over in the late 1880s to work on tobacco plantations died before their contracts were up. The Peruvian Chincha Isles were known as the 'Islands of Hell' as so many died mining guano.

It was very difficult for indentured workers to organise. They could easily be arrested or deported if they refused work. Company bosses regularly used violence against workers who protested or who didn't work as hard as was demanded of them. Local governments were happy to turn a blind eye to abuses of workers, and imprison workers who refused to be exploited.

As with the anti-slavery movement, reports of horrifying conditions were published in the international press, and a combination of uprisings and political pressure helped to end the system. The numbers of indentured workers shrank in the late 1800s and 1900s as anti-colonial movements grew in power.

Growing Chinese discontent in the 1870s led to a mostly-successful banning of the practice. A major strike among Indian indentured servants in South Africa in 1913 and campaigning from Indian nationalists during World War I led to its end in the British Empire in 1917. The Dutch Empire started to get rid of the practice in its Indonesian colonies after a series of strikes in the sugar industry and the growth of the Indonesian anti-colonial movement. It was only finally abolished in the Dutch Empire as the Depression of the 1930s led many colonial bosses to want to lay off the 'coolie' workers.

International movements against slavery and indentured labour often did not directly lead to the setting up of organisations which are still with us today. However, they created connections and communications networks around the world which were vital for the growth of the political and industrial wings of the international workers' movement. They also helped lay the groundwork for anti-colonial and anti-racist ideas to be taken seriously by sections of the labour movement in the powerful imperial nations. What's more, they showed that through a range of tactics and alliances, even the most oppressive systems of repression can be challenged, changed, and defeated.

Labour and Nationalism

Internationalism is a very common ideal within the workers' movement. It is pretty much agreed by everyone that we should work across borders, although there are different views about how this can be done. The question of nationalism, however, has proved to be much more divisive.

'Nationalism' can mean many different things to many different people. To make things easy, we will say it is the belief that there are groups of culturally-similar people who can be called 'nationalities', and that each of these groups has the right to rule themselves in their own state.

In Europe in the late 1700s and early 1800s, this was a revolutionary idea. Nationalists challenged the idea that kings and queens were representatives of God who should rule over many different peoples and lands, and that aristocrats should have special privileges over everyone else. Nationalists generally believed that all members of the nation were equal and should have equal rights and an equal say in how their country was run (although many elite nationalists were unsure whether women, minority language and religious groups, workers, and non-white people could be counted as part of the nation).

The examples of the French and American Revolutions helped to make the idea of nationalism very popular in the 1800s. Many middle-class people, wealthy merchants, and business owners liked the idea because it could help them become more powerful than the aristocrats.

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Many early socialists and labour activists were also nationalists because they wanted an end to monarchies and aristocrats. They were also internationalists- they wanted a series of democratic nation-states which worked with each other, rather than fight with one another. Nationalism at times became an internationalist cause.

For example, Poland had been divided up between the rulers of Austria, Prussia, and Russia through a series of invasions and treaties between the 1770s and 1815. Polish people in these different states were often treated as second-class citizens- they had few political rights and were often banned from using their own language in schools, business, and government.

The cause of Poland was very important to many working-class fighters for democracy throughout the 1800s. In 1830 a revolt by the Poles against their Russian rulers turned into a fully-fledged war, known as the November Uprising. The Polish movement was brutally crushed by the Tsar's armies, causing socialists and democrats from the country to move across Europe, and even to the Americas, seeking refuge.

A number of radicals arrived in England, setting up organisations in which they could continue organising, such as *Lud Polski* ('Polish People'). *Lud Polski* called on English workers not to support the Polish aristocrats who merely wanted to restore

their old kingdom, but instead called on them to *"find their allies in us, the simple soldiers, peasants, artisans."* They found supporters amongst Chartists (a working-class pro-democracy movement) and the Irish nationalists, who saw the Polish struggle for democracy and independence as a kindred movement.

The Chartists and Irish nationalists organised protests against state visits by Russian rulers, and urged the government to support Polish independence and take a strong anti-Russian stance. Some of the Polish émigrés in turn got involved in the English workers' movement for democracy. Major Bartłomiej Beniowski, a left-wing Polish army officer, helped train the Chartists in military tactics and strategies. He was not the only one- in Germany, Austria-Hungary, the United States, and Italy, Polish émigrés played important roles in democratic and labour movements in the mid-1800s.

The movement for a democratic Poland also inspired others to act. In Germany in 1832, the Hambach Festival was organised to demand democracy, national unity, and political liberties. 30,000 people attended, with women's and workers' involvement encouraged. There was also a large contingent of Polish people present, whose struggle for freedom was praised by platform speakers.

In the colonised countries of the world, nationalist movements also grew up to challenge the lack of democracy and the unfair ways they were treated. In Latin America in the late 1700s and early 1800s, nationalist movements challenged the Spanish Empire. Often these were alliances between elites, workers, and native populations, who all had different reasons to dislike Spanish rule. Some of these



Flag of the November Uprising- The slogan reads "For Our Freedom and Yours"

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movements were very left-wing. For example, in Chile in 1780, two Frenchmen named Antonio joined up with a local also named Antonio, in the 'Conspiracy of the Three Antonios' - they wanted to abolish slavery and the class system, and create a republic. These movements developed into a massive military campaign in 1808, which defeated Spanish rule on the continent by 1826. While the campaign did lead to some important improvements for ordinary people, like the gradual abolition of slavery, it ended up being controlled by local elites. Instead of creating a new continent-wide and democratic state, as figures such as Simon Bolivar had hoped for, rival nation-states were formed which were often controlled by local traders and landowners.

Many socialists and trade unionists have supported oppressed and colonised peoples' nationalism due to their internationalist politics and support for democracy. It has been a part of campaigns which have connected working people across the world.

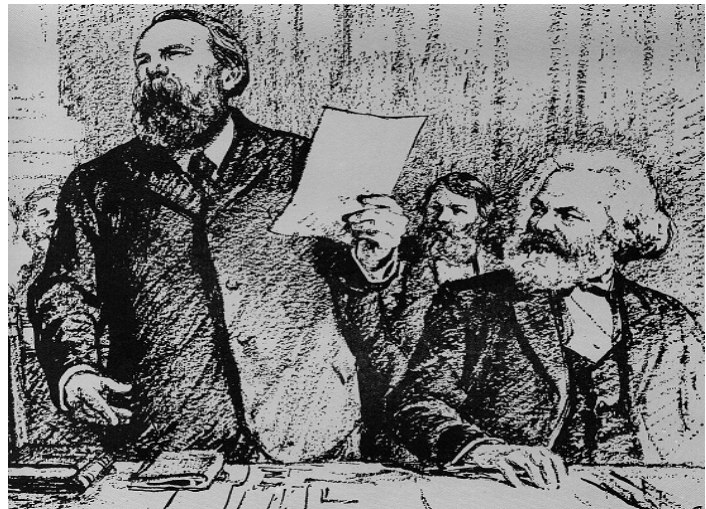
However, some in the workers' movement did not want alliances with nationalist movements, which were often led by the middle classes. They felt they would use the workers' movement to come to power and then turn on them when they had the force of the army, police, and courts on their side. Some felt it was a distraction from working class issues, and that creating a new nation without creating socialism first, would end up just creating a new group of capitalists that workers had to deal with. Rosa Luxemburg, for example, was an important revolutionary socialist from a Polish-Jewish background during the late 1800s and early 1900s, who played an important role in German and Polish socialist movements. She spoke out against the idea that the workers of Poland should fight for an independent state as their immediate goal- she thought they should fight for socialism, which would allow them to develop a Polish nation not connected to a capitalist nation-state.

The Communist Manifesto

In 1848, one of the most important and influential texts in the history of the modern world was published. *The Communist Manifesto*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, would shape the ideas and activism of the labour movement over the next 150 years (although it was not well-known until the 1870s).

This short book was itself the product of attempts by working people to organise internationally. The Communist League, based in London, had commissioned Marx to write the manifesto to explain the principles of their group. This group was born of a merger between two others; The League of the Just, and The Communist Correspondence Committee, based in Brussels, which connected socialists from across Europe and had been run by Marx.

The Manifesto, a short, tightly-argued and highly-compressed document, contains a philosophy of history, an analysis of socialist ideas and a call to revolutionary action. At its core is the idea that



Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote together, studied together, organised together, and got drunk together.

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historical changes are driven by the struggle between classes with different economic wants and needs. In the era of capitalism, the struggle between the bourgeoisie (the bosses) and the proletariat (the workers) had become key. A socialist society, which could end the conflict between classes, could be brought about only by the workers, organised as a political party.

This was ground-breaking for its time. The most prominent socialists in Europe felt that because the political repression they faced was so harsh, the only way to create socialism was to organise secret societies of the trusted few, which could launch coups and implement top-down decrees which stripped the rich of their wealth. But the Manifesto instead said that the first objective of the revolution was to "*win the battle of democracy*". Socialism would come from the working class, democratically organised, taking power for itself.

The workers' struggle, according to the Manifesto, had to be international. The bourgeoisie had created a world market; their companies took raw materials from one country to be worked on in factories and workshops in another, and the finished goods were then sold on in further countries still. Workers were already working together across national borders to create and to distribute products: taking control of production would also require them all to pull together, regardless of where they were from.

The Manifesto ends with the message: "*Workers of all countries, unite!*" which has since appeared on the banners of labour organisations and the headers of left-wing publications the whole world over. The ideas of the manifesto were so powerful, that they inspired the founders and members of many of the trade unions that would shape the modern world.

The First International

After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, governments across Europe worked tirelessly to stop democratic and labour movements from growing. Repressive laws, secret police, and state violence were all used to stop ordinary people from organising.

However, the cities and factories kept on growing, drawing more people into the urban working class, and prompting more and more working people to work together to fight for their rights. The 1860s saw a great revival of labour activism, and it was in this atmosphere of resistance that 'The First International' was born.

The International Workingmen's Association was founded in London, 1864, with its opening speech given by a still relatively-obscure German radical named Karl Marx. This group was a collection of very different organisations and individuals from around the world. Trade unions, socialist parties, left-wing nationalists, and anarchist clubs all affiliated. In many countries, national labour organisations had not yet been formed, so this international connected mainly local or regional groups together. The international drew together groups of workers organising for better treatment in the workplace, with groups who were fighting for political democracy, alongside those who wanted a complete overhaul of the capitalist order.

Many trade unionists found that the International could help them win their struggles in the workplace. In April 1866, the tailors of London went out on strike, demanding higher wages. They immediately contacted the International's General Council, which used the telegraph to let Belgian, Swiss, German, and Parisian tailors know what was going on. The European tailors agreed not to do

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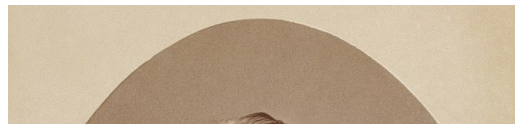
any work for British firms, and many of the groups contacted also donated to the tailors' strike fund. The London tailors won, and the following year returned the favour when the tailors of Paris went on strike, making sure that French bosses couldn't use English workers as strike-breakers.

Internationalism wasn't just a nice idea- it was helping workers win better pay and conditions across Britain, Europe, and the world. From the bronze workers of Paris and Hamburg's cigar makers to New York's sewing machine workers and engineers in Newcastle, striking workers across the world won with the help of the International's appeals to other groups of workers to prevent strike-breaking and offer solidarity funds.

The First International collapsed in the wake of the Paris Commune, as a factional divide, repression in France, and disinterest from British trade union leaders in building the group all weakened the organisation.

There had been a growing divide in the organisation between those who wanted a centralised organisation with a strong leadership, and those who wanted it to act as a voluntary coordinating body between groups. Those in the former wing tended towards Marxist ideas, and those in the latter camp leaned towards anarchist and syndicalist ideas, with Mikhail Bakunin serving as a figurehead.

This divide grew as the Commune was crushed, with both sides taking very different lessons from its defeat. A number of activists within the ranks, including Marx, felt



Women Workers in the First International

There was a strong strain of sexism within part of the First International – several of its leading French members, for example, were opposed to the idea that women should do paid work outside the house. They were opposed by women like Virginie Barbet, who helped organise an important strike of women silk-spinners in Lyon, France, in June, 1869. The striking women were promised strike funds from abroad if they voted to join the First International, which they duly did. However, the promised funds were not sent to women strikers, and were instead used to build the local branch of the organisation rather than to support their dispute.

There were many women played an important role in shaping the First International. One of them was Victoria Woodhull, who was born in rural Ohio, USA, in 1838. She came from a family of petty thieves and con artists, and grew up in extreme poverty. She worked as a clairvoyant, not a particularly lucrative trade, but after giving a hot stock tip to prominent industrialist Cornelius Vanderbilt (most likely a result of her sex worker friends passing on insider information from their wealthy clients rather than her abilities to see into the future), she was given a small fortune which she used to set up a radical newspaper that supported racial and sexual equality, and democratic and labour rights.

She founded a New York section of the International in the US which organised some impressive solidarity demonstrations with the Paris Commune in the face of police violence and harassment. She also published the first English translation of the Communist Manifesto in her newspaper, and helped get the organisation a lot of publicity. However, others within the US section gradually pushed her out of the group, claiming her demands for women's equality and the right to 'free love' (non-monogamy) would alienate ordinary workers.

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that the Commune failed, in part, due to a lack of effective and militant centralised political leadership which could build a new state.

The International's General Council organised a conference in London in 1871, which few anarchists were invited to, and passed a motion calling on the International to support the formation of workers' political parties which could capture state power. Anarchist-leaning sections of the international in Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland objected, and called their own conference at which they demanded a review of the structures of the International through a congress.

This congress took place in The Hague in 1872. The anarchists were in the minority, and were accused of forming a secret international-within-the-international.

Victoria Woodhull played an important role in connecting European and American workers through the International, but her opponents (both right-wing politicians and fellow activists) used sexist ideas to slander her.

Their leading figures were expelled, and a separate anarchist-leaning international was soon formed separately from the Marxists' international. Marx also proposed a motion which moved the headquarters of the International to New York. Coordination with the more-active European sections became much more difficult in the wake of this move. Both the 'red' and 'black' internationals withered away by the end of the decade.

While the international had a short lifespan, it had shown how valuable international organisation could be, and would remain an inspiration for labour activists for years after.

Industrial Unionism

The trade unions connected to the First International were, generally speaking, 'craft unions'. These unions organised small, specific groups of workers who took responsibility over lots of different parts of their job; cabinet-makers, boot-makers, hatters, lace-workers, and so on. Their culture often reflected the guilds and journeymen associations which came before them.

Many unions established in the mid-1800s were craft unions. These unions, like the guilds of old, were often worried that their industry could be 'swamped' by unskilled workers, lowering both the quality of their products and their wages. They had very high membership dues, meaning only the better-off workers could join, and limited access to the trade through highly-restricted apprenticeship schemes. Their strength came from their ability to control the nature of the work and access to it- if less people could do their job, then they could demand higher wages for doing it.

The relatively-high wages of members in these skilled jobs with little competition for work, meant that they could pay high union dues which could support full-time officials. These officials tried to ensure that their unions' funds weren't seized by the government or drained by long strikes. In the minds of many of these leaders, their unions needed to be respectable and act within the law if they wanted to continue being of use to their members.

More conservative than the general unions and machine-smashers of the early 1800s, these unions preferred to use negotiation and arbitration rather than strikes and protests for collective bargaining. Many tried to cooperate with company management to ensure that they could retain the gains they had won in the workplace. From the 1860s joint arbitration boards with delegates from the unions became more common in Europe and North America- the managers hoped that the union leaders would keep their members from getting militant if they had official representation.

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However, the craft unions faced a big challenge- **The Second Industrial Revolution**. Beginning in the 1870s-1880s, a series of new inventions changed the world of work once more. Advances in chemicals allowed oil to be refined, new fertilizers to be produced, the growth of plastics and rubber production. The invention of dynamite changed the way that quarries, mining, oil extraction, and tunnel-building worked. Electric power, the use of concrete, and mechanised tools all became widespread, allowing the growth of new types of factories, larger than ever before. This meant that workers no longer needed years of training to be able to do a job- who needs a skilled carpenter when a mechanical saw gets the same results?

Use of the telegraph and the telephone became more common, and rail networks grew massively, making the world a smaller place. As a result, giant integrated companies started growing, expanding across countries and over borders, knocking many of their smaller rivals out of business. Some of these formed trusts and cartels, and started taking on new functions. Instead of just manufacturing one product, some expanded to include transportation, manufacturing of parts and machinery, extracting raw materials, and so on.

The big companies used new management techniques- a skilled artisan was no longer responsible for deciding who to bring on to a project or how the work would be done- instead company-appointed managers decided how to do the job.

These changes led to a rise of a new type of union- the industrial union. Unlike their older cousins in the craft unions, industrial unions organised all workers in an industry, regardless of skill-level or position. As they had less control over training, job requirements, and the nature of the work than the artisans of the craft unions, the way they organised had to be different. They relied on coordinated and well-timed strikes, which could shut down an entire workplace or sector. Because of the nature of their workplaces, and the needs of their members, industrial unions tended to be more militant than the craft unions (although not always).

“These unskilled are very different chaps from the fossilised brothers of the old trade unions; not a trace of the old formalist spirit, of the craft exclusiveness”

Letter from Engels to Herman Schlüter, 1890

The growth of industrial unions was a worldwide phenomenon. In Argentina the first national industrial union, the *Confederación de Ferrocarrileros*, was created just after 1900. In the USA, the Knights of Labor helped spread the idea of industrial unionism. It had started as a secretive organisation in the 1870s- members joined through secret rituals and were given fantastical titles (the leader was called the Grand Master Workman), like the older unions in Britain. However, by 1886, it had grown to over 1 million members, organised in industrial unions, and was leading a series of strikes, boycotts, and political campaigns across the country. It would decline a few years later, as the more-moderate American Federation of Labor (AFL) proved better at getting recognition agreements with companies and avoiding violent suppression by state governments. While being a largely US-based group, during its heyday the Knights also attempted to create international links and overseas branches.

The Knights' glassmakers' union was particularly strong, and during the 1880s it worked with European unions to prevent strikebreaking and ensure exchanges of union membership cards (this allowed migrant unionists to be registered as a member of the equivalent union in their new country). In 1884 they held a conference with Belgian, French, Italian and English glassworkers, and set up an

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international alliance. The Belgian and English sections soon rebranded themselves as branches of the Knights, and workers from other trades joined them- coal miners, tin workers, lace makers, and many more. By 1889 they had 10,000 members in the UK, as well as growing sections in New Zealand and Australia- the New Zealand section became very powerful in the 1890s, and even designed new welfare and labour laws for the country. Small groups in France and Italy were a part of the network too, regularly sending reports to be published in the Knights' American journal.

However, the Knights' attempts to expand internationally in Europe crumbled by the early 1890s. Within the US they were facing increasingly violent repression which led to the collapse of two major strikes in 1886 and 1887, demoralising the movement. A rival craft union federation, the American Federation of Labor, split from the Knights and began poaching its members, while pursuing more moderate tactics. With the main organisation in threat, European-based unions saw little reason to become affiliates.

In most countries, industrial unions did not become the only type of union. In Germany up until World War II both craft and industrial unions existed side-by-side. In the USA, the major trade union federation, the AFL, remained a craft union federation, and was very conservative in its politics.



Mass pickets, often used by industrial unions, were supported during the 1889 London Docks Strikes by local communities and international donations.

The Great London Docks Strike, 1889

A wave of strikes in 1889 and 1890 spurred on the growth of industrial unions in Britain. Perhaps the most famous of these was the London Docks strike, a five-week dispute which drew in hundreds of thousands of workers across the shipping and transport industries, and caught the attention of workers across the world.

Working on the docks was back-breakingly hard work, and also very insecure. Workers would gather at the docks in the morning to find out if they were needed for the day. If they weren't picked to work, they weren't paid. Today we would call them informal workers.

In August 1889, the workers at West India Dock were told that their bonus pay was being cut, causing outrage. Socialist activist Ben Tillett led a group of them out on August 14th, organising them through the small Dockers' Union he had set up two years before.

The Dockers' Union demanded guaranteed minimum hours, an increase in pay, better overtime rates, and union recognition. They called on other workers to come out, and over 130,000 strikers joined in just two weeks. Dockside warehouses, factories, and workshops stood still, while abandoned ships waited in the docks.

15,000 pickets were kept on hand to block the docks and prevent others going in to work. There were huge demonstrations that roved through the capital, carrying banners covered in rotting fish heads and onions, symbols of what they were forced to eat due to poverty pay and infrequent work. In working-class areas, signs were strung across streets telling landlords they could forget about collecting the rent until after the strike.

As the strike reached the three-week mark, funds were running low, and hunger was growing. International solidarity was key to it continuing. In Australia, workers and trade unionists heard about the dispute, and started raising funds to support the British strikers. Over £30,000 (around \$3 million in today's money) was donated, meaning the movement could continue and even support more workers to join the pickets. Within a fortnight they had won.

The success of the dockers (and the matchstick workers the previous year- see page 45) inspired a wave of strikes among previously unorganised workers in the UK. There were 517 strikes in 1888 but over 1211 in 1889, three-quarters of which won most of their demands.

These successes convinced unorganised workers to join and found unions on a scale not seen before- trade union membership jumped from 700,000 to 1.5 million in Britain in just 4 years. Some of these industrial unions were so popular that workers from other trades asked to join, turning them into general unions. This growth led some craft unions to embrace change, and they loosened up membership requirements and reduced their dues. What's more, the leaders of the dockers saw the value of international solidarity, and began working with others to set up the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), which remains a powerful global union today.

The Second International

The second industrial revolution made it easier for people to communicate and organise at a national level. Workers in many different towns and cities were now working for the same company. Trade union federations and large socialist parties grew in Central and Western Europe throughout the 1880s. There had been several international meetings of trade unionists in the 1880s, at which the lack of coordination between workers' political parties had grown more concerning to attendees. The time seemed ripe to create a new body which could coordinate these national workers' movements across borders. July 14th, 1889 was the date set to remedy this issue. The conference would take place in Paris, 100 years since the storming of the Bastille prison had opened up a new chapter in human history.

Two international workers' conferences actually ended up taking place that day in separate ballrooms in Paris, one for the 'Marxists', and the other for the 'Possibilists'. The 'Possibilists' felt that socialists could join with other political parties to achieve limited reforms, while the 'Marxists' believed in independent workers' parties. It is the latter congress which is viewed by many as the 'true' founding congress-400 delegates from over 20 different countries were welcomed by Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, who announced:

"We gather here under the banner of the red flag, the flag of the international proletariat. Here you are not in capitalist France... Here in this room you are in one of the capitals of the international proletariat, of international socialism."

Those present that day agreed to keep organising international congresses, with the next to take place in 1891.

At this second congress, held in Brussels, the Marxists and Possibilists reunited. What's more, the delegates present decided to launch a campaign for an eight-hour day for every worker in the world. They chose May 1st as the date for an international wave of strikes and protests.

At the first ever May Day in Britain there were two rival demonstrations. One was led by the old craft unions, while the other was headed by the newly-founded, radical, gas workers' union (the forerunner of today's GMB). The gas workers held a loud and lively protest, filled with banners and music, while the craft unions struggled to get their members to join their own parade.

Despite these kinds of petty squabbles, the protestors in the various countries seemed pleased with the day's results. It became an annual event- not just to fight for the eight-hour day, but to celebrate the power of workers around the world.

As socialists started coordinating actions and discussing and debating more frequently, it was decided that there needed to be a permanent body to organise within. At the international congress in 1900 the International Socialist Bureau was formed, made of representatives from the different countries' socialist parties. Both the congresses and the Bureau are what are referred to as the 'Second International'

Although parties and representatives from countries such as the USA, Turkey, India, and Japan also took part, the International remained a largely-European affair. The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (the German Social-Democratic Party, known as the **SPD**) was a particularly strong organisation at the time, and tended to be very influential in the international movements of the

1890s up until World War I. It was able to regain its position after the end of the war, but the destruction of the trade unions and workers' organisations by the Nazis in 1933 halted this.

The Second International and the Division of Parties and Unions

Initially, like the First International before it, different types of groups were represented in the Second International's Congresses. Trade Unions, Friendly Societies, Co-operatives, and Socialist Parties all took part. Originally there was a lot of overlap between what these groups did- trade unions might fund funerals, co-ops might run candidates in elections, and so on. But by about 1900, these different types of groups' roles had been more-clearly separated, with each setting up their own international. The International Socialist Bureau organised solely with political parties.

The strict division of roles between trade unions and political parties where the former deals solely with workplace issues, and the latter deals with politics and laws, was accepted by large parts of the movement. Many socialists looked to the SPD (the largest socialist movement in the world) for inspiration, and it was the model that they had used. This model came about partly out of necessity- anti-socialist laws in Germany meant that any attempts by unions to voice their support for a socialist vision of society would lead to them getting banned, and members being imprisoned, fined, or fired. The SPD had set up many of the unions, and was considered to be the leader of the unions, but they were to focus on their own specific tasks.

However this model was never accepted by everyone. Groups influenced by syndicalism (see page 38), such as the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), believed unions should mobilise workers to change society, not just their workplaces. In Britain, powerful trade union leaders felt they should control the party- not the other way round. In practice, many unions have taken political stances independent of 'their' parties.

International Trade Secretariats- the Origins of the Global Union Federations

Some of the union representatives attending those early congresses of the Second International decided to organise fringe meetings for workers doing similar jobs. At these meetings, new international organisations were set up to coordinate between unions of these workers in different countries. These became known as the International Trade Secretariats (ITS's), the first permanently organised form of international trade union solidarity. Twenty-eight had been formed by 1911, with a total membership of over 6 million workers. Many of the first ITS's were formed by craft unions, like those of the printers, cigar-makers, and hatters.

Their main activities were organising solidarity during strikes and exchanging information on trade conditions and labour laws. At times they helped to raise funds for striking workers from across Europe, and prevented the use of foreign workers to break strikes. In their early years they were often more focused on the exchange of information, earning them the nickname 'the post-box internationals'.

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The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has been one of the longest-standing of these international organisations. It was founded in 1896 after negotiations between dock workers in Hamburg, the British dockers' leader Joseph Havelock Wilson, striking dockers in Rotterdam, and the Swedish organiser Charles Lindley. They all agreed to send delegates from their unions to the London conference of the Second International, due to be held that year.

At the congress, sailors' and dockers' union representatives from France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Britain, Sweden, and the USA met in a hotel in central London, and pledged to build an international federation. The radical and energetic Tom Mann was elected its first president.

They did not have an easy start. Belgian authorities immediately banned the non-Belgian leaders of the ITF from entering the country, and violently arrested Ben Tillett (famed leader of the 1889 docks' strikes) on his arrival. Early ITF attempts to support its members' strikes were generally unsuccessful, and shipping owners were successful at organising internationally to import strike-breakers to beat the unions. Tom Mann, who was unable to receive a proper wage from the ITF, moved to Australia to become a full-time organiser in 1901, demoralising many members.

Mann was replaced by a German leader, Hermann Jochade, who relocated the headquarters to Berlin. Jochade was far more conservative than Mann. Under his leadership the ITF would not support strikes in one country by calling for sympathy strikes or preventing the importation of foreign workers to break strikes. Instead, he focused on developing a strong international centre, which could support efforts to lobby national governments by organising the international exchange of advice and information. This strategy was very controversial- the French leaders said the ITF was being treated as a friendly society rather than a union, and the Austrians even nicknamed Jochade 'the slow train'.

Despite the conservatism of the leadership, the members still wanted the ITF to live up to its early aspirations. In 1910, a strike which began in British ports was spread through the ITF's networks- soon Belgian, Dutch, Danish, and Norwegian dockers and sailors joined in, with over 1 million workers taking part in the international strike. These were very successful disputes, and the unions involved nearly doubled their membership. The ITF was proving itself to be effective.

The ITS's were not controlled by any political parties, but they had close links with the socialist parties and shared many of their views. The Building Workers' International held its congresses at the same time as the Second International's. The International Association of Textile Workers, headquartered in Manchester, banned Christian trade unions from joining as they did not believe in socialist principles.

The spread of industrial unionism also impacted the ITS's. As many of the smaller craft unions merged into national industrial or even multi-industrial unions, the existence of ITS's dedicated to organising particular job roles became outdated. What's more, the number of tasks that they had taken on meant that they needed a decent income to fund research, education, communications, office space, and the employment of staff (most ITS's did not have a full-time general secretary until after World War II).

Many of the smaller ITS's merged together to form organisations which spanned entire industries. In 1920 the bakers', brewers', and meat-workers' ITS's merged to form the International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). A resolution passed at the founding congress shows how the changes in industry had led to the changes in union organising:

“The concentration of production of a wide range of foodstuffs in single, large-scale enterprises is a more and more frequent phenomenon, and ... this concentration of production has been taken into account in a number of countries by the merging of the labour organisations of these industries to form food workers’ associations.”

The ITS’s became the strongest and longest-lasting international labour organisations. Their sector-specific nature helped ensure this. Issues like the transfer of union membership for workers who crossed borders, or how to deal with safety issues in a certain trade, got close attention and were best understood by workers within that industry. They still exist today, and are now called the Global Union Federations.

A Trade Union International

As well as these sector-based organisations, many trade unionists wanted an international body where the national federations could coordinate. Leaders of the British TUC, with their distaste for socialism, and the French CGT, with their dislike of political parties, were particularly keen on an international for trade unionists only.

In 1901, trade union leaders from Northern Europe got together and established the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC). It published annual reports in English, French and German on the growth of the labour movement in different countries and important legislation. It also raised funds to support strikes- in 1913 Dutch tobacco workers received £2,470 from the ISNTUC (over \$170,000 in today’s money), helping them to win a strike.

However, the organisation faced serious problems. Reports sent in by national union federations (to be used in the ISNTUC publications) were often late, vague in detail, or not submitted at all. The German leaders regularly fought with the syndicalists from the French CGT and Dutch Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat (National Labour Secretariat), who wanted the body to take stances on broader issues like war and socialism.

The ISNTUC also had difficulty working out which union federations could take part. They had a policy that every country should have one national centre, which should then take its rightful place with them. In countries like Bulgaria and the USA, radical socialist and syndicalist union federations rivalled more moderate federations, creating tensions over which group to accept. Often the more moderate choice won out, such as the AFL being chosen over the revolutionary IWW (see below). It was also tricky when it came to the unions of the Austrian Empire, where Czech-speaking unions resented the German-speaking unions’ leadership of the movement, as it mirrored German-speakers’ power within the Empire.

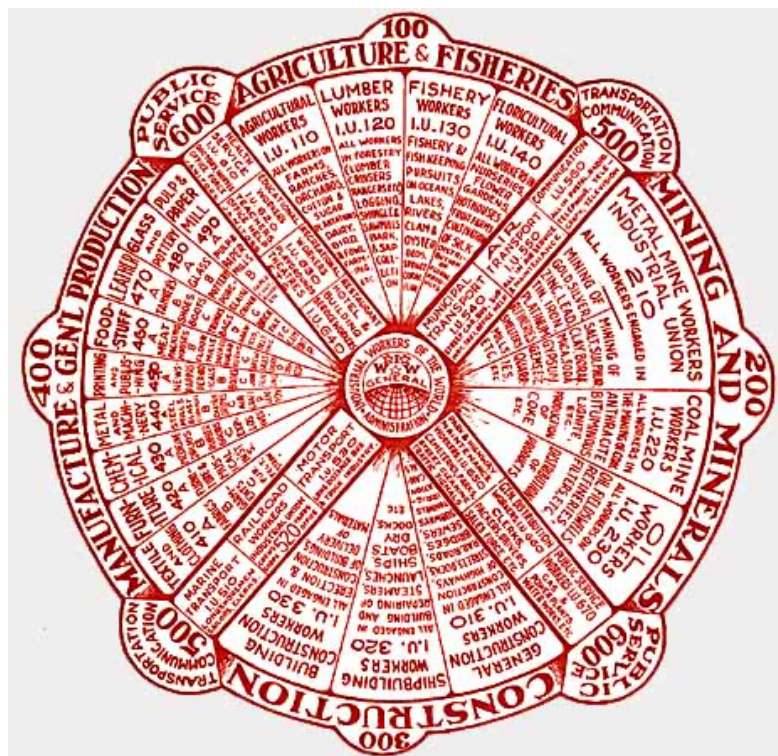
Despite these arguments, there were signs of growth. The ITS’s became more involved in the ISNTUC, eventually sending delegates to its international conferences. In 1913, it was renamed the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). It had members in twenty countries (all European, except for the USA’s AFL), with a total membership of around 7.7 million.

Revolutionary Syndicalism and the IWW

The second industrial revolution didn't just pave the way for the growth of social-democratic* unions and parties, it also gave birth to alternative labour movements and ideas. Syndicalism was one of these.

Syndicalism was a militant movement with lots of local and national varieties. Syndicalists generally shared several main ideas. They emphasised the importance of class struggle and anti-capitalism- they wanted workers and their unions to run the factories and workshops and a revolution to bring this about. They also said that strikes were more effective in bringing an end to capitalism than pushing for changes to the law through political parties. They felt it was better to organise workers in the workplace to confront their bosses and gain more control.

In some countries, syndicalists set up their own unions. In France, the CGT became the major national trade union centre, becoming an inspiration to syndicalists around the world. Many French socialists chose to join the CGT rather than setting up a rival socialist centre. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or 'Wobblies') became a major force in the American labour movement, challenging the AFL's leadership. They also organised seamen across borders, with IWW members and branches present in ports in the Caribbean, South America, and Australia. In Canada, socialists set up a revolutionary union called the One Big Union. In Japan, syndicalism and anarchism were very influential ideas during the early years of the labour movement. The syndicalist unions often organised on industrial lines, and kept their gains by strike action rather than joining bodies for collective bargaining with their employers.



This diagram was designed by a radical Catholic priest and founding member of the IWW, Father Thomas Hagerty, and shows how they felt unions should be organised into various industrial departments. The leaders of the AFL sarcastically named it 'Hagerty's Wheel of Fortune'

These unions were often smaller than their social-democratic rivals. The French CGT was an exception, as was the Spanish Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT). They were, however, an important part of the labour movement, especially between 1900 and the 1920s.

In Latin America they were particularly important. In Argentina, an explicitly anarchist-syndicalist trade union centre was the biggest in the country from the late 1800s up until the 1920s.

* Although today the term 'social-democrat' is often used to indicate that someone is a labour moderate, it was once interchangeable with the term 'socialist'. In this book it is used in this historic sense.

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Anarchism had been a growing movement in the country since the 1870s. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, a number of French anarchists took refuge in Argentina, and began organising and publishing a regular newspaper. They were soon joined by Spanish and Italian radical migrants, including famous Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta who had fled imprisonment in 1885 by smuggling himself on board a ship bound for Buenos Aires in a crate of sewing machines. Adverts of their meetings regularly appeared in newspapers published as far away as Switzerland.

In 1901 they were able to set up the Federación Obrera Argentina (FOA), a syndicalist national union centre to coordinate the growing numbers of strikes across the country. At its 1905 annual conference the group was renamed Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA) to show that it rejected national borders, and the delegates voted for an explicitly anarchist manifesto.

While many of the Latin American syndicalist unions declined in power in the 1920s along with their European cousins, some syndicalist unions remained strong after this period- the CNT remained a very powerful force in Spain, and even today there are examples of well-organised IWW branches and syndicalist unions.

They often attracted workers who were employed in casual or seasonal work like dockers, builders, and agricultural workers. These workers frequently shifted trades, so it made little sense to join craft unions, and as they often changed bosses when they changed jobs, they did not depend on goodwill to keep their position- they could take a more confrontational approach.

The unions also attracted workers who were frustrated by the socialist/ social-democratic parties and their affiliated unions. In Italy, the Socialist Party tended to focus on winning piecemeal gains for workers in the industrialised north, frustrating agricultural workers in the south, who joined the syndicalist *Unione Sindacale Italiana* in greater numbers.

In Ireland, a kind of modified syndicalism became popular due to the influence of Jim Larkin, a well-known militant union leader and independence activist. Larkin was born in Liverpool to Irish parents, and had become a member of the Liverpool-based National Union of Dock Labourers. He was sent to Ireland to organise for the union (due to the easy transport between Ireland and Liverpool, organising workers in both places was important to prevent strike-breakers being used). However, he was kicked out of the union in November 1908, for launching strikes without approval and offering support to branches which had not yet been recognised by the British-based leadership.

He set up the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union one month later, and aimed to bring all the unorganised workers of Ireland into 'one big union'. He was never a pure syndicalist - he urged the Irish TUC to set up a Labour Party in Ireland so that workers' unions and parties could work together both for socialism and independence from British rule. But he did believe that unions should organise all workers, and that strikes should be a tool in ending capitalism.

The ITGWU proved effective, using syndicalist tactics such as unannounced walkouts, sympathy striking, and mass picketing to win. The union had 30,000 members in 1913, and had become extremely powerful in Dublin. Members of the Employers' Federation often backed down and accepted union demands once the ITGWU started targeting their workplaces. The union was opposed by William Murphy, the owner of the Dublin United Tramway Company and the newspaper *Irish Independent*, who was determined to crush it. He met with other members of the Employers' Federation and encouraged them to join his efforts.

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On August 19th, 1913 he sacked all unionised workers in his printing rooms, and around 100 union men from the delivery section of the tram company. Larkin quickly called out all union members from the rest of Murphy's company, and planned a series of sympathy strikes. The Employers' Federation locked-out their workforces as soon as it looked like a sympathy strike was on the horizon, and demanded that their workers leave the ITGWU.

The local government was also determined that the union be crushed. Many pickets were violently forced off the streets by the police. Larkin was arrested for seditious behaviour and libel. Union meetings were banned. Larkin was released on bail on the condition that he not address any more crowds.

On August 31st, police were closely monitoring the hotel at which a union rally was being held in case Larkin turned up to speak. He snuck in by pretending to be an old, deaf priest, disguised with stage makeup, a fake beard, and a walking stick. Once in he climbed up to a balcony, ripped off his fake beard, and giving a rousing speech, before escaping out of a back entrance. The meeting was then violently attacked by the truncheon-swinging police, killing two workers, and injuring over 300. In response, Larkin organised an 'Irish Citizen Army', armed with wooden clubs, that protected the picket lines and demonstrations throughout the dispute.

The lockout dragged on for seven months. While the British TUC sent funds over, it refused appeals to organise sympathy strikes in British branches of the companies involved. Many workers, facing starvation, agreed to sign contracts promising not to join the ITGWU in exchange for being able to return to work.

Although there were no major explicitly syndicalist unions within Britain, this did not prevent its supporters from working to spread their ideas or forge international connections. The Independent Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) organised an international conference in London in 1913 so syndicalist unions in different countries could work together.

It was badly-organised and nearly split the ISEL with accusations of funds being stolen. The lack of proper preparations annoyed visiting delegates. The CGT refused to attend- it was already a member of the ISNTUC, and the leading figures didn't want a new syndicalist International forming in case it caused a split with the socialists in their ranks. Some CGT-affiliated unions still went, along with Dutch, German, Italian, Russian, Swedish, Danish, Argentinian, Cuban, Brazilian, and Spanish delegates. They drafted and released an anti-capitalist, revolutionary manifesto, and decided to set up an international committee to publish a joint newsletter, but stopped short of declaring a new international union for fear of upsetting the CGT.

While syndicalism as an organised movement declined in the 1920s, the workers' radicalism and frustration it had been based on continued to be



The Spanish CNT remains one of the largest syndicalist unions today. Their logo's colours show their beliefs- the red symbolises the power of workers, and the black symbolises their anarchist ideals.



important in the labour movement. There are still some significant syndicalist union federations today, such as the CNT in Spain. In 2018 syndicalist unions based in Spain, Italy, Greece, Germany, Argentina, Poland, Canada, and the USA established an international organisation known as the International Confederation of Labour.

Christian Unions

Syndicalists were not the only ones to challenge the socialist leadership of the labour movement. From the 1890s, Christian trade unions started to grow in various European countries. They were mainly set up and led by Catholics, who were worried about the growth of socialism (which rejected the idea that the church should have political power or large amounts of land), but saw that it was becoming popular because of the growing misery and poverty amongst workers.

In 1891 the pope issued a letter to the entire Catholic Church called *Rerum Novarum*. It made clear that the church rejected socialism; it called for the rich and poor to work together for a common good, and said that there was nothing wrong with people owning businesses and factories. But it also said that inequality, dangerous working conditions, and poverty were wrong. It approved of trade unions and collective bargaining, and said progressive laws should be brought in to make sure workers weren't exploited.

Christian unions soon sprung up across Europe. In some places they were controlled directly by the Catholic Church, and only open to Catholics. In others they were inspired by the church but not controlled by it, and were open to other Christians and religious groups joining. They were particularly strong in Belgium, Germany, and Italy. In Germany after World War I, about 20% of all workers were in unions that were part of the Christian German Union Federation.

In their early years they were often more attractive to 'respectable' white-collar workers, and religious workers who were put off by the atheist ideas of many socialists. But they were able to win some blue-collar support as well- a Dutch priest called Willem Nolans organised miners into a Christian union which successfully pushed the government to set up cheap, decent, housing for their members.

Because they were inspired by the idea that rich people and poor people should work together, the Christian unions were often less confrontational than either their socialist or syndicalist counterparts. In particular they wanted to create joint management boards of workers and employers, rather than lead strikes.

This wasn't always the case- in some places these unions were quite radical. Guido Miglioli led a movement of rural Catholic workers in Italy just after World War I which called themselves '**The Extremists**'. They launched a series of strikes against big rural landowners and led peasants to occupy the big estates, facing down extreme violence from far-right thugs hired by the bosses to stop their movement. They forced an agreement in 1921 where big rural estates' ownership would be split- 70% to the workers and 30% to the existing landowners.

The Christian unions formed a rival international to the social-democrats in 1919 at the Hague- the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU). While they had sizeable numbers of members in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands, they were always a small minority compared to social-democratic unions.

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After World War II, the IFCTU began working in the Global South, including in countries where Christianity was not a major faith. They reformed the organisation, declaring that it was no longer exclusively Christian, and rebranded as the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). In 2006 the WCL merged with the social-democratic international union confederation to form the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

Bundism

In 1897, 13 delegates from illegal Jewish trade unions throughout the Russian Empire gathered in secret in an attic in Vilnius (the capital of modern Lithuania). At this meeting they formed the Jewish General Labour Bund- a socialist party for Jewish people. They grew in size over the next 30-40 years, organising within Yiddish-speaking Jewish communities across Russia, Europe, and North America.

At first their largest section was in the Russian Empire. Within the Empire, Jews were prevented from moving around by anti-Semitic laws, and had to live in towns and cities in an area known as the 'Pale of Settlement'. They were barred from local governments, most were banned from getting a decent education, and they were frequently attacked by violent mobs, often supported by the police, in bloody riots known as 'pogroms'.

While the Bund solely organised Jewish people, it saw itself as part of the broader Russian socialist movement. They sent delegates to the founding meeting of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, and regularly attended party congresses.

The Bund wanted to create a socialist state in which every ethnic/national group, including Jews, had some form of self-government and cultural independence. They promoted and celebrated the Yiddish language and Jewish culture, they organised Jewish workers to fight for better conditions at work and greater democracy in society, and they organised self-defence groups to defend Jewish communities from violent anti-Semites.

After World War I, Poland regained its independence, leading to the separation of the Polish and Russian Bunds. The Russian organisation split- some joined the communists as the Kombund, while others remained outside and were eventually suppressed. In Poland, around 10% of the population was Jewish, and the Bund was a major player in Jewish political life.

The Polish Bund organised socialist youth groups, sports clubs, and cultural associations. Its members organised and led unions in many industries- textiles, leather work, and construction to name but a few. Their trade union members often pooled part of their wages to cover sick pay for one another and to provide support to those who had larger families.

Bundists organised Jewish sections of Polish unions, working as a part of the wider labour movement rather than splitting it. They had some notable successes- when the Warsaw City Council took over a provisions office which distributed food, it started to lay off the Jewish employees. Bundists appealed to their Polish fellow trade unionists and together the groups threatened action, halting the council's attempt to discriminate.



A Bundist Election Poster from Kyiv, Ukraine, 1918. The slogan at the top reads 'Wherever we live is our home!'

As they had in Russia, Bundists organised self-defence groups to protect Jewish communities, demonstrations, and individuals from attack by violent anti-Semites. The militia they organised was well-disciplined, armed, and put to the good of the people, helping to prevent working class people from being evicted by greedy landlords, for example.

Some of their members managed to gain elected positions within local governments, and prominent figures such as Henryk Erlich were key figures in the international labour movement.

During World War II, Poland was invaded by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. While some Bundists were able to flee to the United States, helped by comrades largely based in New York, most were unable to leave. Some fled the German armies to enter the Soviet-occupied zone, escaping the horrors of the Holocaust. However, Stalin was determined to eradicate any political opposition-leading Bundists were arrested by the secret police despite their hope of refuge within the so-called 'workers state'. Two key Bundist activists - Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter- were killed on Stalin's

orders.

Those who remained within German-occupied territories did their best to resist the Nazis. Many hoped to build a unified Jewish-Polish resistance movement, but the Nazis' policy of forcing Jews into isolated ghettos prevented this. Bundist members kept organising, and many took part in the uprising against the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, and the city-wide Warsaw Uprising in 1944.

The population which sustained Bundism was almost entirely eradicated by the Nazis. After the end of the war, many of those who were connected to the organisation were targeted by Stalin as potential rivals for political control of Poland. The Bund in Central and Eastern Europe was finished. Some small groups of Bundists still survive to today, such as the Jewish Socialists Group in the UK and some based around the YIVO institute in New York.

Labour and Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is often thought of as a far-right idea. Indeed, many on the extreme right have claimed that the left is controlled by Jews and that the workers' movement is a pawn of an imagined Jewish conspiracy to control the world.

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However, despite the association of the far-right with the most extreme forms of racism and anti-Semitism, that does not mean that these ideas have not appeared within the labour movement, or that members of trade unions and workers organisations are immune to anti-Semitic ideas.

Conspiracy theories about ‘Jewish bankers’ who secretly control governments and make our lives worse can be easily picked up on by people who feel powerless, are worried about poverty, and want someone to blame. German socialists in the late 1800s famously called anti-Semitism the “*socialism of fools*,” because it was a kind of perverse anti-capitalism.

Anti-Semitism was on the rise in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Since the French Revolution many states had gotten rid of anti-Semitic laws. Some conservatives saw this as proof that Jews secretly controlled the movements that had grown up over the period– liberalism, socialism, democracy, trade unionism. They started using anti-Semitic ideas and arguments more frequently than before.

The Russian Empire was particularly anti-Semitic, as detailed in the previous section. The Tsar and his state published vicious anti-Semitic propaganda both in Russia and overseas, and brought in new anti-Semitic laws while other states were beginning to get rid of theirs.

The international labour movement found it easy to condemn the blatant anti-Semitism of Russia, which was famously hostile to progressive and labour forces. In 1904 the Socialist International voted on a motion proposed by Bundists to condemn Russian anti-Semitic laws and pogroms, for example. It had previously condemned the infamously-bloody Kishinev pogrom of the previous year.

However, when anti-Semitism was not connected to a state power or right-wing movement who had targeted democrats or the labour movement, labour activists could be apathetic, or at times even worryingly supportive of anti-Semitic ideas.

In England, the Social Democratic Federation had a strong anti-Semitic tendency. Henry Hyndman, the leading figure, blamed British imperialist wars on secret groups of Jews controlling the government and the press. In the Netherlands, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, leader of the Social Democratic League, regularly published anti-Semitic tropes in his newspaper, even claiming the German social democrats were controlled by Jewish bankers. Mikhail Bakunin, a major figure in both Russian and international anarchism, alleged that ‘parasitical’ Jews ran capitalism and would run any state-socialist society. In France, Charles Fourier, a major early socialist thinker, claimed that Jews were responsible for capitalism.

This attitude also affected international organisations. At an 1891 conference of the Second International in Brussels, Abraham Cahan, a Jewish trade unionist based in New York, proposed a resolution condemning anti-Semitism as an attempt to divide workers. He was vigorously opposed. French socialist Albert Regnard told the Congress that ‘Jewish bankers’ were a ‘threat to all of us’. Cahan’s motion wasn’t passed, being defeated by one which condemned anti-Semitism, and ‘philosemitism’.

Jewish workers and activists, some of whom had fled Russia due to its anti-Semitic society, organised against these poisonous attitudes. In Britain, Jewish socialists such as Theodore Rothstein played an important role in getting rid of reactionary leaders of the Social Democratic Federation during WWI. What’s more the increasingly-visible Jewish labour movement embodied in organisations such as the Bund or the US-based Workmen’s Circle (which numbered some 87,000 strong in 1925), helped make non-Jewish labour activists increasingly aware of the size and scope of the Jewish working class.

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Confronting anti-Semitism remains an issue for the labour movement today. Sometimes you will hear people blame the Rothschilds for global poverty, or claim that George Soros is behind any political campaign they don't like. Some say that Israel or Zionists are behind every smear against the workers' movement or act of military aggression by a major state.

This way of thinking is dangerous. Some members of the Rothschild family, George Soros, and the Israeli state have done terrible things, to be sure. However, they are not all-powerful entities behind every evil thing in the world. A hyper-fixation on these individuals and institutions at best is a failure to understand capitalism as a way that the world is structured, and at worst leads to a worldview that suggests that Jews are part of a secret shadowy all-powerful network which works against everyone else. Many popular conspiracy theories have anti-Semitic undertones or are openly anti-Semitic, and are becoming more popular in an era where the labour movement has lost ground in being able to educate people and explain the roots of their oppression.

Women's Unions and Socialist Feminism

Despite the prominence of men in unions' leaderships, women have always played an important part in the labour movement. Some of the most significant campaigns that helped to draw people into the movement, improve working conditions, and build connections between different groups of workers and across borders were led by women. But the union movement has also been home to men who were hostile to women's involvement, meaning women often had to fight to be a part of it.

There was an assumption amongst many men that women should stay at home, and that men should earn enough to support their wives and children ('the family wage'). In 1875, Henry Broadhurst, leader of the TUC, declared that the aim of trade unions should be to *"bring about a condition... where wives and daughters would be in their proper sphere at home."*

Employers often paid women lower wages to do the same jobs as men (and in many cases, still do today). Some male trade unionists, rather than attempting to help their women co-workers organise for better wages and conditions, tried to exclude them from the workplaces and the unions, thinking it would keep men's wages higher. Carpet workers in Kidderminster went on strike in 1874 because women were being hired on lower wages than men. Letters were sent to the local newspaper promising violence against the women and their families, while the factory was picketed by men. The men won, and the newly-hired women were all fired.

Women were not passive, and challenged their treatment in the workplace and exclusion from the unions. In Britain, The Women's Trade Union League (founded in 1874) challenged this exclusion, and successfully lobbied for the first women delegates to attend a TUC congress. When they were excluded from men's unions, they set up their own and showed that they could be powerful fighters for change.

In 1888, the 'matchstick girls' of the Bryant & May Factory in London went on strike. These young women workers received abysmal pay, were regularly fined by managers for making mistakes on the production line, and were being made sick by the use of dangerous chemicals in the workplace ('Phossy Jaw', brought on by white phosphorous, caused brain damage, loss of teeth, and collapse of the jaw- it was extraordinarily painful).

The young women went on a wildcat strike after an article about their treatment was published in a socialist newspaper, and their bosses fired women who refused to sign a statement claiming that the

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article was filled with lies. They formed a union, sent delegates to parliament, picketed the factory, and marched up and down the main streets of London promising to hang their employers if they didn't get what they want. They soon won, and their victory inspired other groups of workers who had been excluded from the unions to organise, campaign, and strike,.

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, women's work in fighting for better conditions in the workplace, as well as the growing use of mass production methods, led to an end to gender-segregation in many of the general unions in Britain.

Women workers didn't just organise at the national level. There is in fact a long history of women organising internationally to campaign for a more equal world. In 1852, women from Europe and America came together to publish *Sisterly Voices*, a magazine which campaigned for international peace. In 1888, The International Congress of Women was formed on the initiative of US-based feminists, and fought for women's equality in the workplace and in access to education. These campaigns were often organised by middle- and upper-class women, but drew in large numbers of working-class supporters. Other groups such as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (established in Berlin in 1904) would follow soon after, drawing together both working-class and middle-class women into border-crossing networks that fought for women's human rights.

Soon, explicitly socialist and working-class women's organisations were formed. Clara Zetkin, a socialist and trade unionist from Germany, helped to establish the Socialist Women's International in 1907. There were many men within the socialist movement who had opposed the movement for women's suffrage as it was often led by the middle-classes rather than the workers. Zetkin and her comrades challenged this idea at congresses of the SPD, and soon full adult suffrage for men and women was accepted as a key demand of the workers' movement.

At an International Conference of Working Women held in Copenhagen in 1910, Clara Zetkin asked over 100 women from 17 countries – representing unions, socialist parties and women's working clubs – to pass a motion for an International Working Women's Day. They did so, unanimously, and so International Women's Day (as its now known) was born. At the first International Working Women's Day in 1911, over 1 million women across Europe took part in rallies, protests, and demonstrations. Women and their allies demanded equal pay, the right to vote, and a socialist society.

Women became important figures within the international labour movement, with leaders such as Rosa Luxemburg becoming well-known beyond the borders of their home countries. Luxemburg was born in the areas of Poland which had been absorbed by Russia, and had helped to establish one of the major socialist parties in the region. She had to flee to Zurich due to political repression, and moved to Berlin in 1898 due to her desire to be part of the growing German socialist movement. She was both a renowned intellectual as well as a leading light of the left-wing of the SPD. She grew famous for her disdain for secretive and bureaucratic leaders within the socialist movement, and her life-long fight for a truly democratic socialism.

More than Unions and Parties: Labour as a Counter- Culture

*“Our days shall not be sweated from birth until life closes,
Hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread, but give us roses.”*

-James Oppenheim, 1911

The trade unions of the late 1800s didn't exist in a vacuum. They were part of an anti-capitalist labour movement which organised around all aspects of workers' lives. They set up their own sports teams, book clubs, choirs, bands, and co-operative holiday associations.

Socialist and trade unionist **sports' groups** were very common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their organisers hoped these groups would improve the workers' health, provide some fun and distraction from their hard lives, and promote socialist values of workers' cooperation and community. They were meant to be a taste of what a socialist society might be like.

A Socialist Gymnastics Union was set up in the USA in 1850. In 1893 workers' gymnastics and cycling societies were formed in Germany. In 1895 The *Clarion* newspaper organised its famous cycling clubs for workers in Britain. In Vienna, a workers' hiking association was founded that year, and before long similar groups popped up all over central Europe. In 1913, delegates from Belgian, English, French, German, and Italian labour sports groups set up the Socialist International of Physical Education. Although World War I prevented the group's work, it was re-established as the Socialist Workers' Sports International in 1920.

These organisations became huge. In Germany there were over 350,000 worker sportsmen and women in the years before World War I. In 1925, there was a Workers' Olympics held in Frankfurt which attracted over 150,000 spectators- more than the 'official' Olympics in Paris the previous year. In the 1930s, the British Labour Party and trade unions organised a very popular annual 'Workers' Wimbledon', which allowed working people to take part in the traditionally upper-class sport.

It wasn't just sports though. **Music** was taken up by the workers' movement, both for fun and as a way to spread the message. In the USA, Joe Hill, a Swedish immigrant and a member of the IWW, became famous for writing songs that were sung on picket lines and in workers' halls across the country. He would take old religious hymns and swap out the lyrics so that they attacked capitalism and promoted trade unionism. In Germany, socialist choirs did similarly- they would take old patriotic songs and change the words to promote the workers' cause.

“You can make a speech-people forget it the next day. You put the information in a leaflet-people hold onto it for a week and throw it away. But if you write a song and put that information in a song, people hear it, remember it, sing it-it lives on” – Joe Hill



Over 100,000 workers took part in the 1931 Workers' Olympiad, held in Vienna, Austria.

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Trade unions and socialist groups would often raise funds to purchase or rent halls to run their own **social clubs**. These often had libraries, cafes, pubs, and reading rooms on site. They sometimes organised cards' nights and dances. Being a part of the workers movement was about more than branch meetings and picket lines- it was about being part of a wider community.

The popularity of these clubs and associations terrified the enemies of the workers. When Mussolini and his fascists came to power in Italy, the first thing they targeted was not the unions or the socialist parties, but the workers' clubs and sports groups. They saw how effective they were at bringing new people into the movement, and keeping alive a socialist culture, and knew they had to be stopped.

These parts of the workers' movement aren't as prominent as they once were, but across some parts of the world they still play a major role. In Italy you can still find *Palestre Popolari* (popular gyms) which are run by anti-capitalists in working-class neighbourhoods, with at least seven in Rome. In Athens, Greece, the White Tiger Muay Thai Camp proudly declares itself an 'anti-fascist gym' which aims to connect Greek and migrant workers and train to resist the rise of the far-right.

The labour movement has also contained a workers' educational movement. The League of the Just, whose leading German members were exiled from Paris in 1839 and moved to London, established a German Workers' Educational Association for fellow exiles and migrants in 1840. While mainly aimed at German-speakers, its doors and classes were open to workers of any background. It taught on a wide range of subjects – workers could take piano classes and learn about art history, or learn about how the sugar industry's chemical processes worked.

However the group was not just about teaching workers about culture or science- its members wanted a communist society. Karl Marx would eventually join the organisation, and would give lectures on political economy and philosophy. Lessons focused on making workers see themselves as part of a global working class, not just as labourers in a particular industry. It both educated workers, and helped to organise them as revolutionaries and labour activists.

The group renamed itself the Communist Workers' Educational Association as its doors opened to workers of every nationality. It survived until WWI, when many of its German leading figures were imprisoned by the British state.

The group contained within it some very different types of education, which have since been picked up by different workers' organisations. Some focus more on technical education- developing workers' industrial skills so that their company can perform better and hopefully avoid job losses. Others criticise this approach and say the

“In the workers' society there were to be found, besides German and Swiss, also ... Scandinavians, Dutch, Hungarians, Czechs, Southern Slavs, and also Russians and Alsatians. In 1847 the regular frequenters included a British grenadier of the Guards in uniform. The society soon called itself the Communist Workers' Educational Association, and the membership cards bore the inscription “All Men Are Brothers”, in at least twenty languages, even if not without mistakes here and there.”

Frederick Engels describes the Communist Workers' Educational Association, 1847

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goal of workers' education should be to develop a sense of solidarity and an understanding of capitalism and worker organising. Still others want to see workers' education develop workers into fuller people – to give them access to arts and ideas they may not have been able to access through their own schooling.

This tradition of international workers' education remains with us today, and has helped to create important connections between different groups of workers internationally, and also provided vital support to labour movement campaigns.

Many different groups of working-class activists, be they socialist, communist, or anarchist, have also formed organisations to provide aid and support to their fellow workers. They aimed to transform the idea of 'charity' into an act of solidarity.

In pre-revolutionary Russia, groups of anarchists, trade unionists, and socialists worked together in the 'Political Red Cross', which provided food and support to political prisoners. The regime was so brutal that even many rich liberals donated to those imprisoned, despite having little sympathy for their ideas. An eccentric German doctor famously handed out oranges and exotic fruits to prisoners transported along major roads. This group changed names a few times, but continued to exist until the late 1930s in Russia, when Stalin shot its leaders and shut it down. However, it gave birth to the international 'Anarchist Black Cross' movement, which provides aid and advocacy for imprisoned left-wing activists even today.

In 1936, Belgian socialists set up 'Entraide Socialiste' to provide support to refugees fleeing the violence unleashed by fascists in Spain. After World War II, they created an international organisation, known as **International Workers Aid (IWA)**, which coordinated with similar bodies in other countries, which had created a wide network of support bodies- day-care centres, counselling services, social welfare programmes for disadvantaged groups, and prisoner support, to name a few.

As well as providing money, food, and supplies to support labour activists and refugees fleeing violence, the IWAS also tried to spread awareness about workers' movements, and lobbied international organisations and national governments to provide support for those fleeing violence and extreme poverty. In the 1960s they broadened their role, for example by supporting development projects in countries which had formerly been colonised and sending aid to areas affected by natural disasters. In 1995 they renamed the organisation SOLIDAR, which is still active to today, working with networks of NGO's to provide support to workers and lobby for their rights.

There have also been organisations which have brought working-class youth movements together internationally. The **International Falcon Movement** began life in the 1920s when groups from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia got together. These groups were made up of workers who wanted to change education to provide socialist values and teach children about solidarity and self-organisation. The organisation has expanded far beyond the borders of Europe since those early years, with member groups across Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

These groups often combine socialist education with instruction in crafts, skills, and outdoor activities, creating a socialist alternative to the scouting movement. They organise international summer camps so young people from around the world can meet. They have also lobbied for better rights for children, campaigning against child labour and exploitation, and playing an important role in getting the UN to adopt its Convention on the Rights of the Child. They have also campaigned against militarism, promoted sex and drugs education, and support member organisations to fight social inequality.

Workers' and consumers' cooperatives have also played a key role in creating a labour movement which organised within and beyond the workplace.

In the 19th century, workers in new and growing industrial cities faced exploitation in the workplace and suffered from a lack of public services. Making things worse, food was often expensive and bad quality- milk was made to look whiter with chalk, flour for bread was bulked up with sawdust and toxic salts, and poisonous arsenic even made its way into beer and sweets. This was a particular problem in the UK- many suffered from diseases and conditions created by a bad diet, and others were made sick by toxic additions to their food.

In 1844 a group of workers got together in Rochdale, a textiles town in northern England, and decided that workers should pool their funds to get access to cheaper, better quality food. They were known as the 'Rochdale Pioneers', and laid down a set of principles that other cooperatives often adopted. The club was to be democratic, responsible to its members, independent, work with other coops, and aim to improve the communities and lives of all members.

Cooperatives had long existed in many forms and in many places. In Russia, for examples, early anarchists were inspired by land-cooperatives which had long existed in Russian villages. These cooperatives held the land of the village, letting them out to families to farm. However the modern movement traces its origins back to Rochdale.

The early movement was very left-wing, with its newspapers containing information on the trade union movement, discussions of how co-ops could become a basis for socialism, reports on anti-colonial struggles, and so on. They formed reading groups, social clubs, and even political parties.

The pioneers' model spread both across the UK and internationally. In the US the Knights of Labour set up and promoted consumer cooperatives. In Germany, groups of workers pooled their funds to create member-owned banks and housing estates. In France, an early attempt to bring together members of cooperatives from across Europe in 1867 was banned by Emperor Napoleon III. It was considered a threat to capitalist power.

The movement was not confined to Europe. In Argentina, migrant workers set up over 60 cooperatives by the end of the 1890s. Korea's first credit cooperative was formed in 1907. In India, credit unions grew in the early 1900s, pooling members' cash and providing cheap loans so that agricultural equipment could be bought by poor peasants. Ironically here the colonial state often encouraged rural cooperatives, as they hoped to prevent modern industry developing to rival that of the Europeans.

In 1895, representatives of over one million 'co-operators' got together in London and formed the International Cooperative Alliance. The organisation represented land, credit, consumer, and housing cooperatives, as well as workers'



This stamp from Uruguay commemorates the 150th anniversary of the founding of the modern co-op movement. The building pictured was the store set up by the Rochdale Pioneers

cooperatives. The ICA often proved to be more progressive than other parts of the movement. In 1897 it banned member organisations from excluding women. During World War I, its members refused to take sides in the war and instead continued communicating and organising together. In the era of decolonisation, many cooperatives worked across borders to support attempts to develop new, more-egalitarian economic systems in the former colonies.

This movement was at the peak of its influence in the era between and just following on from the two world wars. In France some nine million people were part of the cooperative movement in the 1920s. In Britain around the same number were signed up coop members in 1940. However, from the 1950s onwards, consumer co-ops were often out-performed by capitalist rivals capable of making greater profits and selling a wider variety of products.

The ICA exists but unfortunately has drifted a long way from its original vision of challenging capitalist production. At the 2012 international summit organised by the ICA, major corporations such as IBM, Microsoft, Google, and Ernst & Young were invited to sponsor the event. In an attempt to catch up with major corporations, many have shifted their models to become more similar to big businesses. Increasingly control has slipped away from the democratic majority of the members to a board of governors within larger co-ops that comprise the movement.

Early Environmentalism

Throughout the 19th century, the cities and factories kept growing in size and number. They were eyesores and health-hazards; large chimneys belched out toxic smoke, plants and fields were uprooted or else killed by fumes, sewage systems were poor, and workers' houses were often cramped, poorly-ventilated, and over-crowded.

In Britain, because this growth of towns and cities had happened earlier than in other countries, many socialists and labour activists worried that workers had been weakened- both physically and morally- by urban life.



The Austrian Socialist-Environmentalist Group 'Die Naturfreunde' ('Friends of Nature') grew to become an international organisation. Today it has over 350,000 members in 45 countries.

The Chartists, members of the British working-class movement for democracy, got very interested in this idea after their strikes and uprisings failed to bring change in 1839 and 1842. Some of their leaders called for members to go 'back to the land' and form rural communities without mechanised tools and modern production methods. Some even formed the 'Tropical Emigration Society' and tried to build socialist co-operative colonies in rural Venezuela using wind-and-wave-powered machines which they hoped would one day allow humanity to be liberated from work. This was spectacularly unsuccessful: the technology didn't work, many people got sick and died in these new lands, and most members abandoned the idea.

In other countries, as industrialism hit later, these ideas generally came later. In 1895, *Die Naturfreunde* ('Friends of Nature'), was set up in Austria by socialist

artisans. They felt capitalism denied workers access to proper leisure time and the natural landscape, and so they organised group hikes through mountains and rural areas. This movement soon spread across borders to other German-speaking populations, and then even further beyond. Their members established hiking trails and put up signposts, chipped in to buy collective lodges so workers could stay in the countryside, and campaigned for rural areas to be preserved and open to everyone.

While these movements were very different from the environmentalism we know today, a desire to preserve nature, keep it accessible, and ensure it wasn't decimated for private profit was an important idea in the young labour movement of many countries.