

## Land, Labor, and the State: The First International in America, 1864-1876

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On the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1872, the American branch of the International Workingmen's Association (I.W.A.), also known as the First International, held its first Congress in Philadelphia. The organization was primarily composed of immigrants, bringing together Cuban cigarmakers, former French Communards, German trade unionists and exiled 1848ers, Irish Fenians, and veterans from the abolitionist and spiritualist movements in a radical transnational network. Their platform called for the "total abolition of all class rule and all class privileges," for "[c]omplete political and social equality for all, without distinction of sex, creed, color or condition," for the "nationalization of the land and of all the instruments of production," for the "reduction of the hours of labor," for "[m]oney to be issued by the government only, to be a legal tender and to bear no interest," and for "the adoption of the principle of associative production, with a view to the complete supersession of the present system of capitalist production."<sup>1</sup> The organization was marked by considerable ideological diversity. English-speaking members of the organization such as Damon Kilgore argued for a reduction of taxation rates and legislation to end speculation, while Stephen Pearl Andrews and Thomas Phillips elaborated theories on wage competition. German-speaking members were influenced by the writings of Ferdinand Lasalle and the newspaper of the French-speaking New York City section, *Le Socialiste*, circulated texts by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Blanqui. Through a study of the American branch, this project will provide an intellectual and political history of labor internationalism during Reconstruction.

This project will contribute to the history of economic thought by outlining a critique of political economy from the perspective of labor. Andrew Sartori writes that "[i]n a Marxian reading, 'political economy' is a science of social abstraction."<sup>2</sup> This project will show how these categories of social abstraction were thought of and written about by workers in tracts, pamphlets, and meetings, and how these categories were lived, by describing the process by which labor became alienated in their workplaces. The First International has been the subject of extensive scholarship, while its American branch has garnered far less attention. In a chapter on the American branch of the I.W.A., Michel Cordillot emphasizes its impact on the development of socialism and trade unionism in America, arguing that a schism between the German-speaking and English-speaking sections resulted in a popular perception of communism as "ideas stirred up by foreign agitators."<sup>3</sup> Published in 1962, Samuel Bernstein's *The First International in America* counterposes the trajectory of the I.W.A. to the rise of American liberalism. He accounts for a diversity of economic and political positions within the organization, including

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<sup>1</sup> "Records of the Federal Council B Convention Resolutions and Proceedings 1870-1876," in the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, *Papers of the International Workingmen's Association*, Box 1, Folder 8.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Sartori, "Global Intellectual History and the History of Political Economy," in Samuel Moyn and Sartori, Andrew, *Global Intellectual History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 111

<sup>3</sup> Michel Cordillot, "Socialism v. Democracy? The IWMA in the USA, 1869-1876," in Fabrice Bensimon, Quentin Deluermoz, and Jeanne Moisand, (eds.) *"Arise Ye Wretched of the Earth": The First International in a Global Perspective*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018): 280.

monetary reform, mutual banking, and trade-unionism.<sup>4</sup> In an abrupt departure from Bernstein's approach, Timothy Messer-Kruse's *Yankee International* frames the development of the First International in the United States as an ideological battleground between German Marxists and American social reformers.<sup>5</sup> A recent anthology argues that the organization's historical role has been majorly revised since the 1960s, citing the rise of transnational history and a renewed attention to its rank and file.<sup>6</sup> Building on this historiography, this project will foreground the circulation of economic ideas across the Atlantic and their effect on the politics of the grassroots of the organization.

This research grant will allow me to undertake research into the Central Council of the I.W.A. as well as its French and English branches. I hope to find evidence of their influence on the American branch, particularly with regards to the circulation of economic and political writings. The grant will cover a return flight to Europe (600\$), a week stay in a hotel in London (300\$), and a two week stay in a hotel in Paris (600\$). In London, I will look at the papers of the organization in the British Library and the Bishopgate Institute. In Paris, I will visit the National Library, the Musée social, the library of the Université Paris-Nanterre, and the Archives de la préfecture de la police. The Musée social holds key documents related to the economic thought of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the fonds Paul Lafargue at the Université Paris-Nanterre contains papers pertaining to the correspondence of the French branch. Lastly, I will consult the files on labor and the socialist movement in France in the Archives de la préfecture de la police and the National Library. I have not applied for any other funding to go Europe for this research.

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<sup>4</sup> Bernstein, *First International in America*, 18-21. Another of Bernstein's monographs, *Essays in Political and Intellectual History*, contributes several chapters to the study of nineteenth-century labor struggles and communism in France and the United States. Samuel Bernstein, *Essays in Political and Intellectual History*, (New York: Paine-Whitman Publishers, 1955):134-199.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848-1876*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998): 258.

<sup>6</sup> Fabrice Bensimon, Quentin Deluermoz, and Jeanne Moisan, (eds.) *"Arise Ye Wretched of the Earth": The First International in a Global Perspective*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2018).