Transnational Solidarity in the Making

Labour Strikes, Money Flows, and the First International, 1864–1872

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The International Working Men's Association (IWMA) was established during a period marked by an increase in the globalization of trade, information and political cultures.¹ It was one of the first international organizations (along with the Alliance israélite universelle and the International Committee of the Red Cross, among other examples from the early 1860s) to establish cross-border relations of solidarity among subaltern groups.² The promoters of the movement wanted to move beyond sentimental calls for brotherhood in order to establish real, effective solidarity between workers in different countries.³ To do so, the organization planned to pool resources and workforces, thereby blocking the concentrated power of capital. Mobilizing workers' money was therefore one of its first tasks. Given that not all workers were properly educated or organized at this point, it was vital that flows of money could both

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- 2 Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *The Mechanics of Internationalism. Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford, 2001); Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914* (Malden, 2004); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2010); Madeleine Herren, *Internationale Organisationen seit 1865. Eine Globalgeschichte der internationalen Ordnung* (Darmstadt, 2009).
- 3 See the official report of the General Council, Geneva Congress (1866), in *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents publié sous la direction de Jacques Freymond* (Genève, 1962), t. 1, p. 30.

enable the IWMA to function and support the social struggles that were on the increase between 1864 and the early 1870s. This paper thus focuses on the organizational use of resources within the IWMA, and what this reveals about the links, both vertical and horizontal, that were formed between the General Council of London and local sections from its establishment up until the Paris Commune. The hypothesis therefore consists in following the money trail in order to gain a better understanding of the moral economy of this early experience of workers' internationalism. Money matters, as economic sociology has clearly demonstrated, are by no means crass material issues devoid of ideological, social or moral implications. On the contrary, analysing them allows us to gain a practical understanding of the principles that guided the IWMA leaders as well as the contradictions that concerned and divided them.⁴

Having consulted reports of the General Council of London from 1864 to 1871, records of conference decisions from 1866 to 1872, and some of the many printed sources from the period, we shall highlight the recurring debates that motivated the IWMA in the area of fundraising and money flows.⁵ Week after week, the members of the General Council faced problems that forced them to put their political principles to the test. What contribution should each member make? Should supporters be sanctioned for late payment? Was it possible to organise a Europe-wide system of loans to support strikes? How could they ensure these loans would be repaid and lead to proper reciprocity? Should workers be helped with a donation, a subscription or a free loan? These were all issues the IWMA had to resolve through their day-to-day experiences, in London or in local sections, and they were reflected in the theoretical discussions taking place in conferences on the subjects of credit, justice, centralism and decentralization. Above all, they encouraged people to think of the IWMA as an ephemeral and fruitless experiment with the aim of constructing a kind of workers' State, which could raise resources then centralize and redistribute them. Naturally, the anti-authoritarian branches of the organization strongly opposed this perspective; nevertheless, it formed a key part of the theoretical and practical debates that marked the existence of this exceptionally ambitious organization between 1864 and 1872.⁶

4 Viviana Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money* (Princeton, 1994).

5 This article mostly builds upon examples taken from the French context (as far as strikes are concerned). A wider enquiry based on other European strikes and money flows is in progress.

6 Even the antiauthoritarian Bakunin found it necessary to build an "International state of millions of workers", Basle Congress (1869), see Association internationale des travailleurs, *Compte rendu du IV^e congrès international tenu à Bâle en septembre 1869* (Bruxelles, 1869), p. 80.

The IWMA's Resources: An Idol with Feet of Clay

The supposed wealth of the International Working Men's Association gave rise to a number of myths. Its opponents were concerned by the organization's absolute power and suspected it of raising vast sums of money right across Europe in order to finance strikes and destabilize the authorities.⁷ Governments, informers and spies sought to alert the public to the risk posed by the First International, whose stated aim was to pool workers' resources in order to block those accrued by the holders of capital.

Behind the Myth

The members of the General Council were more aware of the limited resources at their disposal and fully realised the exaggerated and far-fetched nature of these stories. At the General Council of August 1869, Marx expressed his amusement at an article published in the London issue of the French police publication, *L'International*, which accused the IWMA of exercising a "universal dictatorship" and of being "now occupied in filling its cash-box and as soon as that was accomplished it would decree its laws".⁸ Likewise, in the report he drew up a few weeks later for the Basle Conference, he mentioned the rumour that the Swiss authorities had sent "a messenger" to London "on the fantastic errand of ascertaining the dimensions of the International general 'treasury-box'".⁹ If the General Council members seem to have distanced themselves from these accusations, it was because they had no illusions about their inglorious financial situation. In fact it rather suited them to let the authorities believe they were omnipotent. It was better to appear wealthy and intimidating than to publicly acknowledge their limited means. The General Council therefore did nothing to counter the stories that were circulating in that regard, except to refute the notion that they were encouraging strikes from London.

This issue became more complex when it came to calling for subscriptions from members: would this not advertise their poverty and make them appear weak to the authorities? Hit hard by unemployment, in November 1866 campaigners in Lyon demanded, through Eugène Dupont, that a subscription be launched right across Europe. The General Council chose to refrain, fearful

7 See for instance the well-known account given by the French spy Oscar Testut, who infiltrated the Lyons section of the IWMA (*L'Internationale. Son origine, son but, son caractère ...* (Paris, 1871 [3rd ed.]) pp. 61–62).

8 Minutes of the General Council, 10 August 1869 (*Documents of the First International, 1868–1870* (London [etc.], 1974) p. 139).

9 *Documents of the First International, 1868–1870*, p. 328.

that such an action would expose the organization's weaknesses.¹⁰ The same issue was raised in the summer of 1870, when the General Council lacked funds to distribute the speech Marx had written on the subject of the Franco-Prussian War. Some members suggested establishing a subscription in order to build up a printing fund. The General Secretary of the Council, a German named Johann Eccarius, was opposed to the move: "This would mean telling the public that we are short of funds, and this would reduce our importance, which depends largely on the belief that we have considerable sums at our disposal, and would bring no money in at all. The worst thing we can do is to tell the public and the governments that we are poor". The IWMA's reputation and the fear it instilled in the authorities was, indeed, a question of belief. Hermann Jung added, "If we reveal our poverty, the press will not respect us as it does now; people believe we are powerful because they think we have a great deal of money".¹¹ In the same vein, in February 1871 the activist Auguste Serrailier, in France at the time, refused to deny the rumour published by *Le Figaro* that the Bonapartist authorities had given the First International a sum of 200,000 francs, for fear of making people realise that the IWMA was not as wealthy as it seemed. The organization exercised the same caution when publishing the number of supporters. Marx deemed it preferable not to "reveal [...] the true strength [of the movement], because the public still thinks that the active members are far more numerous than they really are".¹²

For several years, the Council simply did not have a clear idea of the state of its finances, which it managed approximatively as needs required. As in any organization, the financial question nevertheless constituted a real power issue. It was not until the spring of 1870 that several members of the Council spoke of the need to establish a finance committee. They had some figures on the revenue and spending of the General Council for previous years, but an accumulation of unpaid debts (the Geneva Conference of 1866 had led to a debt of 40 pounds, of which only 21 had been repaid four years later, in 1870¹³) was making the situation unclear, particularly when each conference incurred further expenses that were scarcely covered by the payment of subscriptions. It was not uncommon to see Council members put their hands in their own pockets to keep the operation afloat.

10 Minutes of the General Council, 6 November 1866.

11 Minutes of the General Council, 26 July 1870 [translated from the French version].

12 Minutes of the General Council, 20 December 1870, p. 82 [translated from the French version].

13 Minutes of the General Council, 9 August 1870.

In the summer of 1870, the task of improving the Association's financial management was placed on the agenda. No sooner had the finance committee been appointed – made up of Mottershead, Lucraft and Harris – than it came under fire. All three men defended themselves by condemning the lack of rigour and professionalism they had observed in the running of the accounts. They expressed surprise that an organization as ambitious as the IWMA could have such a flawed accounting system. Mottershead stated that “the books are managed in such a negligent fashion that one blushes just to look at them”, while Harris considered that “the books are not kept as is done in business and would be condemned in the courts”. The local sections, too, were highly critical of the “Council's too-primitive accounting” when they were asked to approve it during conferences.¹⁴ The Council could not be sure of the total amount of debt it had to repay or the number of subscriptions that had not yet been paid by the sections. A few months later, a discussion was held on the possibility of reducing the Council's general expenses, at the initiative of a new finance committee (made up of Boon, Hales and Serrailier). It was suggested that the salary of General Secretary Eccarius should be lowered; this was set at 15 shillings and was a burden on the Council's budget. The General Council was divided into those who thought the First International should be managed according to the voluntary activism model (Hales stated that “there are thousands of people who have devoted their lives to a movement without expecting any payment”) and those for whom its ambition and international dimension required specific skills that should be matched with appropriate payment. The tension between voluntary engagement and professionalism affected the General Council itself, which had to address directly the issue of a fair salary for its Secretary. For Milner, who condemned “the cheese-paring economies of the Manchester school”, competence came at a price: “The Secretary's work should not be measured according to ordinary business rules. The Association's Secretary must be a capable man known throughout Europe and America, and just finding such a man requires money”.¹⁵

In 1870–1871, there was no doubt that the organization's management needed to become more professional by appointing a finance secretary, but such a move clashed with a founding principle of the IWMA, which had been established on the basis that workers were best able to determine their own

14 See the 9th session of the London conference, 22 September 1871, in *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 2, p. 211 [translated from the French].

15 Minutes of the General Council, 18 October 1870 [all quotations translated from the French version].

destiny.¹⁶ This sociological premise was, however, the cause of the organization's problems, and several Council members observed that finances were too serious a matter to be entrusted to unqualified individuals. This ambiguity could be clearly seen in the choice of finance secretary: Marx and Friedrich Lessner suggested that Engels, who had just joined the Council in September 1870, should take up the position; Engels refused, however, believing that "only workers should be appointed for anything related to finances", unlike Marx, who thought that "a former trader is the best person for the job".¹⁷ The organization continued to swing between a workerist principle and a logic based on professional competence. The London Conference of September 1871, rather belatedly, established a kind of compromise: it acknowledged the need to hand the accounting over to a specialist, who would be monitored by an inspection committee made up of workers.

The Payment of Subscriptions, between Voluntary and Compulsory Participation

The Association's fragile financial situation could be explained by the difficulty it experienced collecting subscriptions from the different sections. Its European-wide approach was entirely new. It was no longer a question of providing occasional support to workers in another country when they were hit by conflict or disaster, but rather of paying an annual subscription that proved that the local sections supported and were part of a developing organization. The Council, keen to increase the Association's membership, faced a dilemma: when dealing with societies that wished to join, if it focused too much on the need to contribute it ran the risk of scaring off those with limited resources; on the other hand, granting membership to societies that did not contribute could weaken the organization, whose numbers were increasing faster than its resources. As General Secretary Eccarius explained at the London Conference of 1871, "there are many more sections that feature in the minutes than in the accounting books".¹⁸

The International's ability to collect outstanding subscriptions was a recurring problem between 1865 and 1872. Certainly, workers in England and on the continent were accustomed to making regular contributions to mutual benefit

16 See for instance how Marx explained this mismanagement at the London conference, 9th session of the London conference, 22 September 1871, in *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 2, p. 212.

17 Minutes of the General Council, 18 et 25 October 1870 [translated from the French version].

18 *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 2, p. 177 [translated from the French].

societies, which were often based on interpersonal exchanges and communities of businesses. The IWMA, meanwhile, had brought about a change on an unprecedented scale: workers now contributed remotely to an organization based in London, whose leaders were little known and whose management during the early years had been far from exemplary. Relationships based on trust and shared experience were essential for facilitating an automatic contribution from members. Furthermore, IWMA subscriptions were implemented on two levels: workers had to contribute to the section to which they belonged (the subscription amounts varied considerably according to the resolutions adopted¹⁹) and to the General Council, which required an annual payment of one pence to cover its costs. Like any federal organization, the First International had problems distributing resources between local sections and the central branch. Incidentally, this was one of the clear causes of the conflict that was brewing between Marxists and Bakuninists in the late 1860s. While ideology played an obvious role, purely organizational factors should not be underestimated. The General Council was afraid that sections with a high degree of local autonomy might emerge, including on a financial level. Marx thus inserted a hand-written remark in the version of the resolutions of the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy that he was annotating, on the subject of the subscriptions collected by that section: "New taxes absorbing our own contributions!".²⁰ The General Council was constantly reminding the sections of their financial duty, which must be performed if the London centre was to continue doing its job.

The subscription fee, both individual and collective, was also a source of disagreement. On a number of occasions, discussions took place to determine whether it was right to establish a set fee for each supporter in those societies requesting collective membership of the Association, or whether it was possible to adjust the fee according to their size, relative wealth and professional singularity. The theoretical amount paid to the General Council, initially set at 3 pence then 1 pence, was only of value on paper. There was a fierce debate on the matter at the Geneva Conference of 1866. Lawrence, the London representative, argued for a certain amount of flexibility, which was necessary to avoid frightening off the English societies; the French Proudhonians, on the other hand, argued for an uncompromisingly egalitarian approach, fearing that those same societies, the richest in Europe, might be given preferential

19 Oscar Testut mentions monthly subscriptions ranging from 10 to 60 centimes for various French sections (Lyons, Paris, Rouen and so on), *L'Internationale, son but*, p. 60.

20 *Le Conseil général de la Première Internationale, 1868–1870* (Moscou, 1974), Karl Marx's remarks on the program of the the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy.

treatment. For Ernest-Édouard Fribourg, from Paris, there was “an inequality of rights, because there is an equality of duties”.²¹ He, too, concluded that all members should pay the same amount.

In practice, the General Council showed great pragmatism, and when a society with hundreds or even thousands of members joined the Association it usually received a discount on the average subscription fee per member. This solution seemed preferable to a hard-line approach that could discourage trade unions from taking part in an organization whose usefulness, they believed, was not always apparent. When the London *Deutscher Arbeiter Bildungs Verein*, comprising 1800 members, announced its plan to join the First International, it offered to pay two pounds a year to the General Council (which was equivalent to a quarter of a penny per member, in other words four times less than the amount established in the resolutions). To those who took exception, Marx replied that justice did not consist in “making everyone pay alike whatever his means might be”.²² In reality, and despite the Council’s objurgations, large societies wishing to join the Association were invited to set their own joining fee, much like the Birmingham trade unions in October 1870, who were only told what the carpenters and joiners, for their part, were contributing.²³ The Council’s main concern was avoiding a scenario in which a society joined without paying any fee at all, and it reminded all its correspondants of this, particularly those in Germany, in December 1868. Any amount would do, even if it was lower than those laid down in the official resolutions. It is worth noting that these debates on the fairness of contributions were taking place at every level of the Association and workers’ movement. The Parisian bronze workers, on strike in March 1867, faced the same issues when trying to establish the daily contribution that each worker should make to the strike fund. Some argued for unchanging, flat-rate fees, while others preferred proportionality, which was considered to be a fairer way of taking account of different people’s salary levels.²⁴ Once again, the IWMA’s theoretical debates on distributive justice (particularly on the subject of taxes²⁵) were put to the test in the practical task of managing the organization and social movements.

21 Geneva Congress, 8 September 1866, in *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 1, p. 55 [translated from the French].

22 Minutes of the General Council, 15 December 1868 (*Documents of the First International, 1868–1870*, p. 53).

23 Minutes of the General Council, 18 October 1870.

24 *Historique de la grève du bronze en 1867*, Paris, typographie de Gaittet, 1867.

25 Cf. Geneva Congress, 1866, Section 7, in *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 1, p. 35.

Naturally, the First International was not the only organization to face these difficulties. Based on free participation and with no real enforcement authority, the organizations of civil society were required to develop sophisticated methods in order to raise funds among their members. Turning solidarity into action demanded know-how and a particular way of doing things that would encourage people to hand over their money. During its first years of existence, the First International focused in particular on mobilizing English societies. On 28 November 1865, "Citizen Jung made an appeal to the British members to be up and doing to collect money for the Congress and declared that the *dolce far niente* [delightful idleness] of the British members paralysed his efforts among his own countrymen in London and Switzerland".²⁶ Several decades later, Kautsky also recalled that inculcating the practice of contributing among its members was one of the First International's major challenges.²⁷

Although the leading members of the First International were creating an entirely new organization, they sought inspiration in existing efforts, including from outside the world of labour. In the minutes of the General Council, it is not uncommon to find references to the fundraising practices of religious or philanthropic associations, which some members were keen to imitate. In 1865, several English leaders cited the example of Robert Owen's movement in order to propose that a commemorative medal should be created for the London Conference of 1865. Others, including Marx, were more sceptical and opposed the move on the grounds that the organization was still in its infancy and had done nothing special to commemorate.²⁸ Although rejected, this proposal nevertheless shows a desire to develop material links between the organization and its members. A more conventional method consisted in launching appeals for contributions, even of very small sums, which other organizations were already doing. In 1865, the radical English campaigner William Cremer is recorded as stating that, "as it was by collecting pence that the religious bodies raised the greater part of the money for propagandism, [...] in this instance we might with benefit borrow their plan of action. There

26 Minutes of the General Council, 28 November 1865, p. 119 [translated from the French version].

27 « The payment of regular contributions was a thing to which the workers had first to grow accustomed. On the Continent at first it would have been easier to get up a riot than to get them to pay affiliated contributions », Kautsky quoted by H. Collins, « The international and the British Labour movement: origin of the international in England », in *La Première Internationale. L'institution, l'implantation, le rayonnement* (Paris, 1968), p. 37.

28 London conference, 25 September 1865, minutes reproduced in *The General Council of the First International, 1864–1866. The London Conference 1865* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 231–250.

were hundreds who would give one penny but would not give a shilling".²⁹ During its first years, the Association was open to any means of raising funds, no matter how insignificant.

Gradually, however, the IWMA refined its methods of collecting subscriptions, particularly by devising increasingly bureaucratic measures. Members were required to obtain a member's card when they joined the organisation, which was provided in exchange for payment of the subscription fee (see Figures 5.1–5.3). The London Conference of 1871 took this reflection on the link between membership and subscription even further. To counter the high number of outstanding debts that was weakening the International's finances, conference attendees decided to establish a committee responsible for thinking of new ways of raising money. The system proposed by the committee consisted in encouraging each member of the Association to affix an annual stamp worth 1 pence to his member's card, which would renew his membership. If they failed to do so, members would not be admitted to the following conference. Engels was among those who argued in favour of imposing strict sanctions (including exclusion) against those who did not meet their obligations.³⁰

Methods also changed within the Council. Sections that remained in debt were monitored more closely and issued with frequent reminders. Citizen Morris proposed setting up a blackboard in the Council room listing societies that were late to make payment. This desire to impose sanctions and control the IWMA's income more efficiently was part of a more general hardening of the relations between the organization's different divisions. A few years earlier, Marx had seemed a good deal more pragmatic with regard to this issue, believing that financial matters should not deter societies from joining the International. In 1870–1871, however, faced with the Bakuninist threat, there was a change of tone. The Spanish representatives at the Hague Conference of 1872 were the first to bear the brunt of this. Suspected of having Bakuninist links, they were informed that their mandate could only be validated on the condition that they cleared all of their outstanding subscription payments. After lengthy negotiations, the Spanish representative Rafael Farga i Pellicer consented to give some money to the president of the congress in order to obtain the validation of his compatriots' mandates.³¹ The First International adopted uncompromising practices for collecting subscriptions just as its internal divisions were becoming more marked: in this specific case, the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

³⁰ *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 2, p. 189.

³¹ The Hague Congress, 1872, in *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 2, p. 338.

requirement to meet financial obligations served as an ideological call to order for sections considered suspicious.

Strike Money: Transnational Solidarity within the First International

The money collected by the General Council in the form of annual subscriptions as a means of financing its activities in fact represented only a small fraction of the money transfers made between the different bodies of the First International. As well as vertical transfers from the sections to the Council, which helped strengthen the organization and meet general costs (rent, salaries, correspondance, printing, congresses), there were a great many horizontal transfers between sections; the General Council was aware of these without necessarily monitoring them. Money circulated across borders, from one section to another, in the form of aid and donations to finance the strikes and resistance to lockouts that were frequent between 1865 and 1871 in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Italy.³²

The Council's role was not clear, however. It centralized knowledge of social conflicts and financial requests issued by particular sections, and functioned much like an international observatory capable of sharing and disseminating, via its national representatives, information on the state of the mobilizations that were underway. This informative role was coupled with the power to call upon sections, particularly those in England, to come to the aid of workers on strike, thereby creating the conditions for transnational solidarity between workers. However, the Council itself had never really been in a position to manage flows of money, apart from on a few rare occasions, in a way that would guarantee equalization on a European scale. The difficulties it encountered were practical as well as theoretical: the conflict between centralists and federalists ran through the very core of the organization, and some feared that the Council had taken on the characteristic functions of a State, which consisted in collecting and redistributing resources. The well-known ideological differences between Marxists, Proudhonians, Bakuninists and Blanquists materialised on very specific issues: the circulation and control of money were

32 Knud Knudsen, « The Strike History of the First International », in Frits Van Holthoorn and Marcel Van der Linden (ed), *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830–1940* (Leiden, 1988), pp. 305–322.

indicators of the type of solidarity that the International wanted to develop between European and American workers.

The Role of the General Council: Information and Coordination

Very soon after the establishment of the IWMA and the support shown for the Leipzig typographers in 1865, calls for help flooded in from across Europe, which put the General Council in an awkward position. For many societies, federations and committees on the continent, the highly organized British trade unions were seen as sources of money to be called upon in times of strike.

The requests received in London appeared to be based on a misunderstanding. Much like the authorities and police services, which had an entirely false notion of the IWMA's available income, the sections on the continent imagined that the Association had considerable financial reserves and would have no trouble providing funds. In fact, with a few exceptions, the First International did not have its own budget for assisting strikers on the continent. Its role was limited to researching, writing and distributing communications, and acting as a go-between for continental sections and British sections. Indeed, the organization's leaders were reluctant to respond to the increasing numbers of requests for help (particularly given that the Council saw its role as being far broader than just registering and supporting strike movements), but they saw these requests as a positive sign because they were proof of the interest that the Association was sparking among workers from different areas and nationalities of Europe and the American continent. However, they were also a source of weakness and incoherence in so far as the London Conference members wanted to be able to coordinate the different strike movements rather than make a scattered response to their emergence. Furthermore, it seems to have been difficult for them to make too many requests to the English societies, whose relations with the First International had never been straightforward, without draining their resources and enthusiasm. On several occasions, particularly from 1868–1870, the General Council was concerned about the number of conflicts (strikes or lockouts), which were all too often improvised and badly organized. The calls for help were evidence of both the hope people placed in the IWMA and the weakness of the strike committees, which did not have sufficient local resources to put up a sustained fight against their employers. The Geneva section, which issued many requests for help in 1869 and was frustrated by the lack of response, was thus criticized for its tendency to provide uncoordinated support for a large number of small strikes that did not have enough funds to take long-term action. For the members of the General Council, transnational solidarity should go hand in hand with proper

coordination among strikers themselves, who were supposed to receive support from local resistance societies and well-prepared strike funds. Ideally, the General Council would hope to be consulted before a strike broke out, although in reality this almost never happened.³³ At the beginning of 1870, there were so many requests, coming from Belgium and Germany in particular, that correspondants were asked to inform people that there was no possibility of obtaining financial aid from London under existing circumstances.³⁴

More often than not, the General Council's role was limited to disseminating information and establishing contact between delegations of strikers and English societies, although many of these did not necessarily need the Council's mediation, as there was already a high level of solidarity between professional groups.³⁵ On several occasions, the General Council published communications in support of European strikers such as the Belgian miners of Marchiennes in February 1867, the Parisian bronze workers the following March, the puddlers of Seraing, in Belgium, in April 1869 and the building workers of Geneva in June 1870. These texts were circulated in the many newspapers affiliated with the International, through national representatives and in workers meetings. They were intended to mobilize overseas sections and raise funds (as well as preventing attempts by employers to import foreign workforces in order to break the strikes). However, Marx was concerned by the large number of these communications. During the Creusot strike of 1870, he stated that "from everywhere money was sent, and it would have a bad effect if London sent only words".³⁶ To his mind, the General Council's role could not be limited to incantation. It also had to prove its ability to provide concrete support for movements that needed it.

Transfers and Redistributions

Even though its financial contribution was limited, the General Council played an important part in establishing contact between striking workers, be they French, German, Belgian or Swiss, and those who were the most likely to come to their aid – in other words the English workers.

The Parisian bronze workers' strike of 1867 is the most symbolic example of the Council's *modus operandi* during the period. A Parisian delegation was despatched to London in March 1867 in order to shore up support and help.

33 Minutes of the General Council, 6 and 13 April 1869.

34 Minutes of the General Council, 4 January 1870.

35 Beatrice and Sidney Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London, 1894), p. 218.

36 Minutes of the General Council, 26 April 1870 (*Documents of the First International, 1868–1870, op. cit.*, p. 229).

The three bronze workers' representatives, assisted by several members of the General Council, were received by around 20 English societies, which agreed to provide them with donations and loans. The presence of the General Council was not a decisive factor but it did make the Parisian workers' request easier, because it enabled information to be passed on effectively to the various societies and gave the delegation a more official status.³⁷ This was also the case on other occasions, for example during the Geneva building workers' strike and the Basle ribbon workers' strike in 1869. The Parisian foundry workers sent their own delegation in June 1870. Making the trip to London, although not a requirement for a successful strike movement, became a necessary stage for these conflicts that lasted a long time and called for large sums of money. The General Council was fortunate to have several trade union representatives among its members and was able to provide accommodation for those who made the journey from the continent. The funds that were raised, while not vast, were far from insignificant. According to the minutes of the General Council, English societies approved financial support in the form of donations and loans to the sum of 58 pounds (1450 francs) for the Parisian bronze workers (who also received donations and loans from Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux, Geneva, Lausanne, etc.), although it is not clear whether or not the full amount made it as far as France.³⁸ A breakdown made for the Sotteville-lès-Rouen strike of 1869, for example, showed that of 2500 francs collected, 500 came from London, in other words one fifth of the overall resources.³⁹

How much freedom did the Council have to direct the money transfers that linked European workers' societies together? On a number of occasions, its members tried to expand its role of merely passing on information and relaying local requests in an effort to redirect flows of money from one region to another. This was especially true when the Sotteville-lès-Rouen workers' strike broke out at the beginning of 1869. Marx and Robert Applegarth recalled that the carpenters and joiners from London had lent the Parisian bronze workers 20 pounds in the spring of 1867. Considering the money had not yet been repaid, they proposed instructing the bronze workers to transfer an equivalent

37 *Historique de la grève du bronze en 1867*, p. 49; Minutes of the General Council, 12 March 1867; *Le Courrier français*, 10 and 17 March 1867.

38 Statistics based on the minutes of the General Council, 12 et 19 March, 2, 9 and 16 April 1867.

39 Publication of the « Cercle d'études économiques de l'arrondissement de Rouen », General Assembly of 7 February 1869, in *Les révolutions du XIX^e siècle, 1852–1872*, 9 vol., (Paris, 1988), v, *L'AIT en France*.

amount to the textile workers of Normandy. On that occasion, the General Council tried to supervise the allocation of cross-border loans between societies as a means of avoiding having to launch further appeals for financial support. The money lent to the continent could stay there as long as it was being used to fund strikes. Johannard, authorized by the General Council, went to Paris himself in order to recover the 20 pounds from the bronze workers and take the money straight to Normandy. For Applegarth, every time the English societies "had advanced money to any body of men on the Continent it had always been with recommendation of the International, in fact he considered the money has having been lent to the International and hence he thought we were perfectly justified in transferring it from one body to another".⁴⁰ In this spirit, the International could act as a kind of clearing house for workers, ensuring that the sums lent matched the loans requested. This notion offended some people, as can be seen from the debate on resistance funds that took place during the Basle Conference of September 1869. While everyone agreed on the need for a more widespread use of this type of structure, which underpinned collective movements, the anti-authoritarians were concerned that a super-State might be established within the International, coordinating resistance funds and controlling the management and transfer of money. For the Belgian delegate Eugène Hins, for example, resistance societies should first and foremost be "a trigger for decentralization, since the different centres will differ by industry, which shall, in a way, form separate States, and shall permanently prevent a return to the old form of the centralist State: this will not, however, prevent another type of government for local relations". The Frenchman Julien Fruneau, a representative of the carpenters, echoed his feeling: "What he fears above all is the creation of a State, which he wants nothing to do with".⁴¹

The money transfers carried out under the aegis of the IWMA also encountered technical and material obstacles. Delays in decision-making and relaying were not always adapted to suit the timescale of strike movements, the outcomes of which could change from day to day. Information took time to circulate (it is worth noting that the Council was very concerned about postal costs, which were a *sine qua non* condition for an international organization of its kind⁴²) between the continent and London, and English societies were keen to gather members together in order to hold votes before sending any money.

40 Minutes of the General Council, 5 January 1869 (*Documents of the First International, 1868–1870*, p. 58).

41 Association internationale des travailleurs, *Compte rendu du IV^e congrès international*, pp. 145–146 [translated from the French].

42 See Cremer's proposal for uniform postal fees in Europe, Geneva congress, 8 September 1866, in *La Première Internationale. Recueil de documents*, t. 1, p. 57.

The time taken to reach a decision explains why certain sums of money that had been voted on were sometimes approved too late, after the strikes had already ended. Even if the decision was made quickly enough, it also took time to physically transfer the money, especially in a context in which the national police were watching closely over the activities of members of the International. The organization of transnational solidarity therefore depended on the technical, social and police infrastructures that conditioned it. The loan approved by London mechanics for Parisian foundry workers in 1870 is a good example of this. The General Council welcomed the decision but was unsure of the wisest way of transferring the funds to Paris. It ruled out the postal services on account of the police checks and tense atmosphere in the French capital. The only possible solution was to send an envoy to take the money in person; according to the Council, this was both the safest and most likely way to have a positive impact on the strikers' morale, as it would be a physical and human sign of the solidarity that was being shown towards them.⁴³ On other occasions, however, the intermediaries who were supposed to transfer the money were not entirely trustworthy. The Belgian workers, who were promised considerable sums of money following the Seraing violence, complained that they had only received 200 francs and had no news of the correspondant who had been given the task of handing over funds.⁴⁴ Transnational solidarity came up against the harsh limitations that the States tried to impose on it, as well as the difficulty of establishing networks of trust that were completely reliable on a European scale.

The Moral Economy of Solidarity between Workers: The Ethics of Reciprocity

Beyond the General Council's intervention, the practice of providing assistance, loans and donations to other sections established a transnational solidarity that linked the different sections to one another through aid and funding. The IWMA thus provided a framework for developing ways of using money for transnational campaigns, which formed long-distance bonds of solidarity between groups that did not know each other personally. As the historian Marcel Van der Linden pointed out, solidarity during this period was, by nature, fundamentally "sub-national", because there was no national organization that could centralize exchanges and conversations.⁴⁵

43 Minutes of the General Council, 12 July 1870.

44 Minutes of the General Council, 16 November 1869.

45 "It is important to note that all cross-border solidarity in these cases was at a sub-national level. Because no national trade unions as yet existed, international contacts were always between local organizations in different countries. It was in fact a 'sub-national

When a section took the decision to come to another section's aid, it would generally vote on two types of assistance that were very different in terms of their form and the social links they entailed. Straightforward *donations* did exist, but always represented a lower sum of money than the amounts *lent* between sections. In April 1870, for example, the Antwerp cigar makers expressly requested to be given loans rather than donations.⁴⁶ Most importantly, solidarity between workers should not resemble charity; rather, in the International, it was established according to the model of free loans and credit, which was the Proudhonians' favoured model. Here we find a connection between the theoretical debates of the International, which focused in particular on the use of credit as an instrument through which to promote workers' autonomy, and the mutual aid practices it helped to foster between European workers.⁴⁷ To raise the funds they needed, the sections could either vote to lend part of their capital – if they had any – or else organize subscriptions or meetings at which the participants were asked to contribute. In this way, the International was able to expand throughout Europe the practices of mutual aid and credit that already existed at local level. Despite everything, the Proudhonians, who were opposed to strikes, were optimistic about the possibility of creating a federation of workers' banks under the auspices of the First International. Even Pierre Denis, editor of *Le Courrier français*, eventually conceded: "If all the workers in Europe were organized into societies as the English are, it is quite clear that strikes would become useful by establishing solidarity between them".⁴⁸

The circulation of loans helped to forge an ethics of reciprocity between the European sections. Free credit had to be reimbursed at some point in the near or distant future. Naturally, the sections did not sign a formal contract for the amounts they owed each other, but the fact that the money was forwarded under the International's supervision strengthened a mutual feeling of obligation and solidarity. The language used by the sections that received loans provides a clear illustration of this by highlighting the notion of a moral and financial debt. Below is the Paris bronze workers' expression of gratitude to the English sections that came to their assistance:

internationalism", Marcel Van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden, 2008), p. 270.

46 Minutes of the General Council, 4 April 1871.

47 See for instance Association internationale des travailleurs (section de Rouen), *Grève du Creuzot*, 1870, 2 p. (signed: E. Aubry, 6 April 1870).

48 *Le Courrier français*, 17 March 1867 [translated from the French].

We have contracted a material debt and a debt of gratitude, whose solidarity is felt by all our members, and it is clear that if any of us were to forget what they owe the rest, by leaving our society before we are completely free of it, they would be reviled by our comrades who remain loyal to their commitments. Their regret at their own failing would be added to the pain they would feel to be rejected by the rest. We hope that we shall not be afflicted by such a desertion, and that all our comrades shall honour the moral and financial commitments that we have contracted for our common emancipation.⁴⁹

In the end, the bronze workers did not repay the English workers the loan until two years later, in 1869, after several reminders from the General Council, which expressed its concern on a number of occasions with regard to the effect that their late payment might have on London societies that they might hope to mobilize for other causes (for example, to support the Geneva strikers in January 1868⁵⁰). However, the financial circuit did not stop there: the Council members (Jung, Dupont and Lucraft) who were appointed to return money to the professional societies of London were, in exchange, given the task of recovering the contributions that those same societies still owed to the Council in anticipation of the Conference being held in September 1869.⁵¹ The International thus appears to have been structured by a dense network of debts, from section to section, from sections to the Council and vice versa.

A more systematic analysis would enable us to precisely map the series of loans and repayments that were being sent in all directions. To return to our previous example, in May 1869 the Parisian bronze workers hastened to launch an appeal to come to the aid of the Belgian victims of Seraing and Le Borinage, right at a time when they had voted in favour of the principle of reimbursing English societies. There was no doubt that benefiting from a loan during a struggle increased the likelihood that the recipients would provide a loan themselves in other circumstances, not necessarily directly to those who had initially lent the money, but to any workers who identified with the International's cause. On the other hand, if the credit relation only extended in one direction, with no reimbursement of any loans, then the cycle of financial transfers could be brought to a halt. When asked to help the Parisian bronze workers in March 1867, the London mechanics chose to decline the request:

49 *Historique de la grève du bronze en 1867*, *op. cit.*, p. 29 [translated from the French].

50 Minutes of the General Council, 21 January 1868.

51 Minutes of the General Council, 17 August 1869.

they stated that they had lent considerable sums of money to the Parisian stonemasons over the previous months but had not yet been repaid.⁵² Even though sanctions could not be imposed on societies that did not meet their moral obligations (in the absence of a coercive authority, a role that, strictly speaking, the General Council did not play), the impact was immediately apparent: the chain of reciprocity was broken and the solidarity that had been established was temporarily put on hold.

The sections of the First International saw the provision of loans as a more egalitarian practice than making donations, and one that was more respectful of different groups' autonomy. Nevertheless, relations of dependence did feature in this climate of reciprocity. The case of the women silk workers of Lyon, on strike in the summer of 1869, is enlightening: they eventually joined the International in order to benefit from the assistance it promised them. This example shows that the leaders of the International were trying to create an exclusive network of solidarity: only those who expressly decided to join could benefit. In this case, the provision of aid was not free from strategic considerations.⁵³

Aid and Solidarity for the Oppressed

Loans gave way to donations in the most desperate cases. The IWMA's register also emphasized a fraternal aid for oppressed workers, which was part of the wider context of developing philanthropic transnational practices, which flourished in the nineteenth century (a precedent had been set, for example, by the Greek uprisings in the 1820s, the deportees of 1851 and, nearer in time to the 1860s, the emergence of the international humanitarian movement⁵⁴). The register of donation and solidarity was more explicit in dramatic situations involving arrests, deportations or violence. It was no longer a question of loans or mutual aid, but rather a feeling of humanity towards "brothers" who were victims of the repression of bourgeois States. In 1867, for example, there was a call for help from the Belgian miners of Marchiennes, who had been repressed by the army. The General Council, which disapproved of their methods, nevertheless found it difficult not to show concern for their wives and orphaned children. The principle of a general subscription was rejected, but an appeal was launched, expressing the English societies' feeling of moral and organizational superiority over their Belgian counterparts: "The moral influence that

52 Minutes of the General Council, 2 April 1867.

53 Claire Auzias and Annik Houel, *La grève des ovalistes. Lyon, juin-juillet 1869* (Paris, 1982).

54 See for instance Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre. Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914* (Princeton, 2011).

would result from some financial assistance for widows and orphans, coming from abroad, would strengthen the courage of the entire working class and would lead to communications and exchanges of ideas that would give our brothers on the continent a better idea of how to wage labour struggles, and of the kind of organization and education our armies need".⁵⁵ The aid, which was given in the form of a donation, served the veiled function of instructing and moralizing the less well-organized workers on the continent. In April 1867, the attitude of the Parisian bronze workers towards the Roubaix spinners was similar: they condemned the Northern workers' immaturity and use of violence, which could not fail to incite repression by the authorities, while sending them money in order to "relieve these innocent heirs of a past of ignorance and poverty".⁵⁶ The General Council also launched appeals to support the puddlers of the Seraing iron factory in April 1869,⁵⁷ and for the benefit of the families of German campaigners arrested at the beginning of 1871.⁵⁸

The most dramatic example, however, was the influx of refugees from the Paris Commune to London following the massacres of the bloody week in May 1871. The General Council felt compelled to provide assistance to the campaigners, considering the scale of the violence that had been inflicted on them. Even so, implementing that aid proved challenging. A relief fund was established but it was soon clear that it was not sufficient to deal with the large number of refugees who were coming to the Council in June and July 1871. A General Council delegation went to the House of Commons in an effort to raise funds from members of parliament who supported the workers' cause. The solidarity expressed by the English public seemed limited, which saddened Engels: "It is now clear that there is nothing more to gain from the middle bourgeoisie by way of assistance for the refugees and that it is obvious what the working class is made of. [He believed that] the working class of England had behaved in a disgraceful manner; though the men of Paris had risked their lives, the working men of England had made no effort to sympathise with them or assist them. There is no political life in them [...]; if they wish to do nothing, let their behaviour be known".⁵⁹ International solidarity among workers had not yet been achieved.

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55 Minutes of the General Council, 26 February 1867 [translated from the French version].

56 *Historique de la grève du bronze en 1867*, *op. cit.*, p. 53 [translated from the French].

57 *Le Conseil général de la Première Internationale, 1868–1870* (Moscou, 1974), pp. 274–279.

58 Minutes of the General Council, 3 January 1871.

59 Minutes of the General Council, 8 August 1871 [translated from the French version].

Money issues surface almost everywhere in the archives and printed sources of the International Working Men's Association. In order to take a stand against capital – which was already deeply internationalized in the 1850s and 1860s – and make their demands known, the workers had to be able to share their resources beyond borders. The sociotechnological context of the 1860s lent itself very well to this: news travelled more quickly thanks to mail services, telegraphs and the rise of cheap newspapers; people and money could also circulate more easily. The different workers' movements were already in contact with one another before the creation of the IWMA in 1864, but its existence manifestly strengthened their connections. The General Council by no means controlled or organized events, but it did play a part in putting people in contact and circulating information, which enabled mechanisms of solidarity to develop where they had previously been lacking. The proliferation of strikes and conflicts in the years from 1867 to 1871 was accompanied by the more frequent use of loans and donations between sections, with or without the intervention of the IWMA's central bodies. These flows of money, which passed through multiple channels, produced bonds of solidarity and interdependence, particularly at a time when, with the exception of the British trade unions, European labour movements were still in their infancy at national level. Paradoxically, although the Proudhonians quickly became the minority in the International, their ideas appear best suited to describe the practices of free credit that had become widespread among the different sections. The transnational flows of money complemented the resources collected locally, and also reveal a sharing of doctrines and techniques in the area of mutual aid. However, money matters are never straightforward, and power struggles inevitably arose, including within the IWMA. In the end, the very nature of the First International, an organization with a transnational agenda, was put to the test: the ideological conflicts that split the organization apart could not fail to undermine its ambition to centralize and redistribute the monetary resources of the labour movement.

FIGURE 5.1 Membership card, IWMA, 1869.

This 1869 membership card was Hermann Jung's; he paid two shillings ("0.2.0") for his annual subscription. Among the names signing the card, one can identify Hermann Jung, himself, acting as corresponding secretary for Switzerland; Robert Shaw, who was the secretary of the London housepainters and, in the General Council, acted at various times as secretary, corresponding secretary for America (1867–9) and treasurer; Bernard was corresponding secretary for Belgium (1868–9); French instrument-maker and exile Eugène Dupont (1831–81) was corresponding secretary for France (1865–71); Karl Marx was corresponding secretary for Germany from 1864 to 1872; Cowell Stepney, the nephew of Lord Caernavon, was treasurer in 1868–70; French exile and a salesman of artificial flowers Jules Johannard (1843–1882) was corresponding secretary for Italy in 1868–9; Anthony Zabicki was corresponding secretary for Poland (1866–71); Thurigian tailor Johann and exile Georg Eccarius (1818–1899) was a central figure of the General Council from 1864 to 1872, for which he served as secretary from 1867 to 1871.

COLLECTION: IISH AMSTERDAM.

FIGURE 5.2 Membership card of the IWMA.

FIGURE 5.3 Membership card of the IWMA (Friedrich Engels).