

“Arise Ye Wretched of the Earth”. The First International in a Global Perspective. Ed. by Fabrice Bensimon, Quentin Deluermoz, and Jeanne Moisan. [Studies in Global Social History, Vol. 29.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2018. xiv, 404 pp. Ill. € 140.00; \$168.00. (E-book: Open Access).

DELALANDE, NICOLAS. *La lutte et l'entraide. L'âge des solidarités ouvrières.* [L'univers historique.] Editions du Seuil, Paris 2019. 361 pp. € 24.00.

For those who do not know, the citation in the title of the volume by Fabrice Bensimon *et al.* is an English translation of the first phrase of “The Internationale”, written by the French Internationalist and Commune Eugène Pottier just after the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871. While the song clearly refers to the International Workingmen’s Association (IWA), or First International, founded in 1864, it later became the official anthem of the Socialist or Second International, founded in 1889. Clearly, by choosing this song, the latter wanted to stress continuity with its predecessor. Labour internationalists of all sorts have referred to the First International as progenitor, but, however right they may have been, it is important to stress its unique character and the discontinuities in organizing internationally. The First International was not a federation of national socialist parties like the Second, nor was it a unified and centralized “world party” like the Third or – on a much smaller scale – the Fourth International. Unlike these, and even more unlike today’s highly institutionalized international NGOs, the First International was a bottom-up, grass-roots combination of local sections, trade unions, and individuals, coordinated by a General Council in London to stimulate and support organizations of the working class internationally, be it exclusively in Europe and the Americas. This insight also guides Bensimon *et al.*, who want to “rethink” the IWA by insisting “on entanglements between localities and struggles which were sometimes very different, interconnected by complex flows and appropriations” (p. 6).

The Bensimon volume, which has its origins in a Paris conference celebrating the 150th anniversary of the First International in 2014, is a worthy successor to a volume produced at its centenary, also on the basis of a Paris conference, organized in 1964 by now legendary experts such as Ernest Labrousse (Paris) and Jan Dhondt (Ghent).¹ Based on ongoing research, this landmark event in the historiography of the First International sparked off a wealth of studies, source editions, and syntheses of its history in the years to follow. The flow may have slowed in recent decades, to the extent even – as the editors of the “Arise” volume remark (p. 3) – that “only a few specialists and political activists are now interested in it”, but the footnotes in the assembled contributions in this volume reveal the wealth of post-1964 research. The amount of new research is one of the explicit motives for “an update” (p. 3) and it is of great merit indeed: by summarizing and referring to this research, the Bensimon volume makes it accessible to a wider public of both specialists and non-specialists. The accessibility is enhanced by the brief length of each of the twenty-four contributions (most are only ten to fifteen pages long), by the well-chosen illustrations (twenty-five in total), and by two useful appendices on the chronology of the International and on membership figures.

1. Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, *La Première Internationale: L'institution, l'implantation, le rayonnement, Paris 16–18 novembre 1964* (Paris, 1968).

The delegates and contributions to the 1964 conference were arranged by country, reflecting both the character of international academic cooperation at that time and the interpretation of the composition of the International itself. There are several contributions in the 2014 volume on the IWMA in different countries (in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland,² Spain, the USA³), but it is highly significant that others are about different nationals – Poles, Russians, Italians – in the IWMA, as these were often operating transnationally. It reflects a major shift in the approach to the International, a deliberate one in the 2014 conference and subsequent book: following the “transnational turn” in labour history it wants to add “studies of flows of people, ideas, technologies and money” to “existing national analyses [...] centred on countries” (p. 5). Indeed, many chapters relate local developments to transnational connections, others take a new look at ideas circulating in the International (like Proudhonism, positivism, and feminism). In early research, the history of the International was often written from the perspective of the political struggle between Marx and Bakunin, but this volume manages to overcome this dichotomy by showing that opinions were much more diverse and cleavages less clear cut than the early historiography suggested.

The Bensimon volume claims to collect studies “from a global perspective”. It does so by “adding geographical areas which have sometimes been neglected”, mainly in the United States and Latin America, and by studying “transatlantic networks in the Hispanic world” (pp. 5–6). Despite the guise of this “globalization”, the profound Eurocentric character of the IWMA cannot be hidden, as the sections in the Americas (North and South) were all formed by European immigrants and settlers. By passing over and not problematizing this undeniable fact, the book misses an opportunity to relate the ideas and politics of the International to the kind of “global labour history” advocated in this *Review*. Non-European struggles (in Algiers and Martinique) and the attitude of the International towards them are mentioned only in passing in the contribution on the Paris Commune by Quentin Deluermoz, who rightly concludes that more research needs to be done in this field (p. 120). Writing about Marx and the International, Jürgen Herres states outright that “the sympathy of the International for colonized peoples was restricted to denouncing colonial ‘excesses’ and did not question the colonial system as such” (p. 309). We have to wait for the Third International for anti-colonialism to become part and parcel of the politics of internationalism.

While the Bensimon volume mainly reiterates and reinterprets research done after the 1964 conference, the book by Nicolas Delalande (who also contributed to the Bensimon volume) is innovative. By analysing the collection and distribution of support money and discussions concerning it, Delalande is able, based on meticulous reading of a great many archival and edited sources, to uncover internationalism not as a system or an ideal, but as an actual practice of mutual aid and cross-border support for workers and workers’ organizations. The idea that the First International had many resources at its disposal brought fame

2. Written by the Swiss veteran expert Marc Vuilleumier, who also contributed to the 1964 volume. Some years ago, his principal studies on Swiss labour history were brought together in *Histoire et combats. Mouvement ouvrier et socialisme en Suisse, 1864–1960* (Lausanne, 2012).

3. Written by Michel Cordillot, a French expert on the history of the International, who also acted as an important advisor to the editors and provided many of the illustrations from his personal collection. His principal studies can be found in *Aux origines du socialisme moderne. La Première Internationale, la Commune de Paris, l'exil* (Paris, 2010).

among workers and fear among adversaries, but it was a myth. During the wave of strikes in the late 1860s and early 1870s, striking workers sometimes applied to the International for help, based on the myth of ready money in its coffers, but to no avail. The General Council was able, however, to act as organizer and mediator in collecting money to support strikes from unions and workers all over Western Europe. It was one of its main concerns in its weekly deliberations. Delalande concludes that money was forwarded mostly in the form of loans to express “horizontal” solidarity among equals, not in the form of gifts as a kind of “vertical” help, like a charity. Financial support was a material expression of commonly felt interests across borders. He also shows that the intermediation of the General Council was supplemented by direct cross-border support (loans) between unions in the same trades. In my own research on the case of cigar-makers, I discovered how extensive this kind of financial support could be as an expression of genuine cross-border solidarity.⁴ Delalande’s book shows that this was just one example among many.

The analysis of discussions on mutual support reveals another, in my view very interesting, characteristic of workers’ associations affiliating to the International. The British trade unions (or more precisely the London Trades Council), which took the initiative to organize an International Workingmen’s Association in 1864, advocated so-called new model unionism, which, according to Eric Hobsbawm, replaced earlier artisanal outlooks, and had left behind what Friedrich Lenger called “the artisanal phase of the labour movement”.⁵ While artisanal associations strived for producers’ cooperatives to supersede the wage labour market, “new model unions” wanted to act on that market as wage bargaining agents. The priority of establishing producers’ cooperatives was part of a kind of “associational socialism” (as the German labour historian Thomas Welskopp called it) prevalent in the early labour movement, and Delalande shows very clearly that this idea was generally adhered to in the associations affiliated to the International in continental Europe. He cites a Swiss militant, Pierre Coulley, for instance, who, in 1867, stated that money to support strikes would be better used to create producers’ cooperatives.⁶ This was part of a broader cooperative and mutualist outlook. From Delalande’s research it becomes clear, for instance, how popular Proudhon’s idea of workers’ credit to finance own initiatives was among Internationalists in the Francophone world (France, Belgium, Switzerland). On the British side, similar Owenist ideas were by now more or less obsolete, but still present among some English members of the General Council, like John Weston (who was criticized for it by Karl Marx in his famous address on “Value, Price, and Profit” in defence of trade unionism and wage struggles) and Martin Boon, who, in 1871, proposed to use the

4. Ad Knotter, “Transnational Cigar-Makers: Cross-Border Labour Markets, Strikes, and Solidarity at the Time of the First International (1864–1873)”, *International Review of Social History*, 59 (2014), pp. 409–442, reprinted in *idem*, *Transformations of Trade Unionism: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives on Workers Organizing in Europe and the United States, Eighteenth to Twenty-First Centuries* (Amsterdam, 2018), pp. 69–100; available at: <http://www.open.org/search?identifier=1003990>, last accessed 29 June 2019. Delalande was able to find even more details about the international cooperation of cigar-makers and the activities of their London representative James Cohn.

5. See on this issue Ad Knotter, “From Artisanal Associations to Collective Bargaining Agents: Two Phases of Early Trade Unionism in Amsterdam (1864–1894)”, in *idem*, *Transformations of Trade Unionism*, pp. 101–132.

6. Delalande, *La lutte et l’entraide*, p. 100.

International as a kind of international clearing house to exchange products made by its members (shoes, clothes, watches ...) to circumvent merchants and middlemen.⁷

Contrary to the dismissive attitude towards trade unions as instruments of wage struggle taken by followers of Proudhon in the Francophone world, of Owen in Britain, and of Lassalle in Germany, the strike wave of the late 1860s and early 1870s made it clear that the British “new model unionism” represented the future of the labour movement also on the continent. Many continental workers’ associations administered funds for mixed purposes, such as mutual aid, travel money, to set up cooperatives, as well as to support strikes, as Delalande shows, but during the strike wave it became clear that most of them were ill-prepared for sustained struggles. This was one reason they applied to the General Council for help. The relatively wealthy British unions were often prepared to give financial support and to advise on how a proper trade union could organize strikes, because they had experienced labour markets to be transnational and wanted to prevent competition from fellow workers from the continent. In this way, the International could act as a kind of school of trade unionism, based on the British example, be it mainly for urban artisanal associations. Delalande’s book also informs us about the distance between these urban associations dominating the International and the mass of industrial workers in mines and factories, whose spontaneous strike actions were supported benevolently, but with a clear patronizing undertone.

Delalande’s book is not only about the First International, and it includes a substantial, although smaller part on the practice of internationalism in the period after its demise, stretching well into the twentieth century. The 1880s are described as a kind of transition period, after which new kinds and new bastions of labour unionism emerged, international migration took on new forms and caused new tensions, also in the labour movement, and several initiatives of international organization were tried. The story unfolds partly along well-known lines, such as the rise of mass industrial unionism, the growing preponderance of the German movement, the institutionalization of international trade unionism now separated from the political internationalism of the Second International, and political debates within it. The book’s perspective on the “financial management” of international solidarity provides new insights but is not as innovative as the part on the First International.

Delalande concludes with a short chapter on the changing face of international solidarity in the interwar years, mainly by organizations connected to the (revived) Second and to the Third International, which succeeded in becoming truly global for the first time. The book ends with a political declaration, which acquires full force once one has read the book: as at the time of the First International, the workers of the world will not be able to combat the generalized competition in the global labour markets of today without international cooperation and organization. As his study shows, international movements come and go, but for various reasons I doubt if the call to “Arise, ye wretched of the earth ...” will be followed again on a massive scale any time soon.

Ad Knotter

International Institute of Social History
Cruquiusweg 31, 1019 AT Amsterdam, The Netherlands

E-mail: ad.knotter@iisg.nl

doi:10.1017/S0020859019000439

7. *Ibid.*, p. 69.