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THE BETRAYAL OF SOLIDARITY? SOCIALISTS AND IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN, 1890-1914

The forces of modern capitalism moved steadily eastwards across Europe during the nineteenth century subverting and dislocating the traditional economies in their path. This tide of change had begun to reach East Central Europe by the 1850s. In subsequent decades economic and technological forces such as the spread of railways, the distribution of factory – made products and specialisation in agriculture were combined with medical advances and the growth of populations to undermine customary occupations. The secular decline of living standards in traditional crafts and agriculture was exacerbated by cyclical economic crises. These economic forces uprooted individuals and families from their towns and villages and forced them to seek work elsewhere, either in Europe or overseas. Religious and political persecution, as in the case of Russian pogroms, supplemented the economic causes of emigration.

These economic and political forces fundamentally altered the major sources of emigration in Europe. Until the early 1880s most European immigrants to the United States came from northern and western Europe but by 1896 the proportion had fallen to no more than a half. By 1907 the numbers from southern and eastern Europe, made up largely of Italians, Poles, other Slavs, and Jews from the western pale of settlement in the Russian Empire, comprised at least 80% of European immigrants entering the United States. At the same time many Russian Jewish emigrants, sometimes referred to as Lithuanians, arrived in Britain and settled in the main centres of London, Leeds and Manchester where, as in the United States, their primary occupation lay in tailoring or the garment trades.

The main purpose of this article is to examine the effects of this emigration on socialist opinion and attitudes in the receiving societies. Heavy immigration resulting in job competition for an indigenous labour force may be expected to produce movements of a nationalistic or xenophobic character. The pressures to limit entry to foreigners have often conflicted historically with values or ideologies which proscribe discrimination and reject the alleged connection

between falling living standards and immigration. Many nineteenth-century socialists, for example, argued that low living standards among the industrial working classes were rooted in capitalism itself, which exploited the labour force and pitted worker against worker. The reform or overthrow of capitalism required international labour solidarity, whereas immigration controls divided worker from worker and weakened anti-capitalist forces. As time went on this argument became less persuasive to socialist opinion and divisions on the immigration question began to appear.

This study of the impact of mass immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe on socialist movements in the United States and Britain presents in a stark form the tensions between ideological and pragmatic considerations, and attempts to identify the circumstances which determine the victory of one side or the other in the ensuing debates. Furthermore, this analysis illustrates some of the differences between the British and American labour movements in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as well as throwing light on "Anglo-Saxon attitudes" to immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe. Finally it develops, at least implicitly, a comparison between historical and contemporary restrictionist movements and in so doing provides a broader context for the current discussions on migration policy in western Europe.

The conclusion reached by this discussion is that American socialists were more antagonistic to foreign-born newcomers to the labour force than their British comrades. This difference of attitude may be explained by the very dissimilar social, political and demographic conditions in the two societies, and by the different character and volume of the immigration flows.

The contrasting attitudes of British and American socialists to immigration can perhaps best be approached by way of a comparison between the attitudes and policies of the broader labour movements in the two countries. In the United States the two main labour organisations of the 1880s, the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), supported the law of 1885 banning the importation of alien labour under contract to American employers. In the next decade the AFL concentrated on tightening up the 1985 law believing, in the face of continuing high levels of immigration, that employer--induced immigration was the main problem[1]. British trade unionists, too, stressed the responsibility of employers for the immigrant traffic and drew attention to the impoverished character of most immigration. Resolutions of the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) at its annual conferences between 1888 and 1895 aimed to prevent "the importation of foreign pauper labour" by employers, especially during labour disputes. The failure of a resolution in 1892 to exclude foreign paupers may be attributed to the omission of a clause stating

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[1] **Ch. Erickson,** American Industry and the European Immigrant 1860-85, Cambridge, Mass., 1957, p. 157-158, 165.

explicitly that they were the agents or hirelings of the employers. In other words British trade unionists were not prepared to place the blame for unsuitable immigration on the immigrants themselves, preferring to attribute it to the maleficent activities of the employing class[2].

This close similarity of official labour attitudes in the United States and Britain did not extend beyond the mid – 1890s. On the one hand the TUC remained firmly attached to its traditional policy of linking immigration to employers' inducements. Across the Atlantic, however, the AFL approved a literacy test for immigrants in 1897, acknowledging that the contract labor law of 1885 was incapable of controlling induced immigration. This obviously shifted the focus of the debate from the activities of the employers to the characteristics of the immigrants themselves. It was no longer assumed that immigrants were undesirable only if they were imported by employers. In supporting the literacy test organised labour indicated that illiterate immigrants as well as those under contract were equally incapable of assimilating American values and hence of maintaining American labour standards. Since the highest proportion of illiterate immigrants came from Eastern and Southern Europe the new policy was evidently designed to discriminate against them. This was a fundamental change of direction. By 1914 the AFL had built up ever more impressive majorities in favour of the literacy test which was finaly passed by Congress in 1917. Shortly afterwards the AFL went a step further, calling for the suspension of immigration altogether or for the introduction of quotas discriminating against immigration from Eastern Europe. As is well known, such quotas became law in the 1920s[3].

It is againts this background that the attitudes of British and American socialists should be compared. Indeed, it may be the relative strengths of socialists in the respective labour movements which helps to explain the divergence of approach outlined above. At the same time this relative strength helps to account for the contrast in attitudes to immigration among the socialists of the two countries. In short, pragmatic considerations (such as the defence of living standards) may outweigh ideological ones when they, the socialists, have less power in the political process. To take the case of Britain, the influx of so-called "new unionists" (from the newly-formed unskilled workers' unions) into the TUC in the 1890s led Keir Hardie, the first leader of the Labour Party in the House of Commons, to state that the majority of delegates to the 1898 TUC congress had socialist sympathies. The Labour Party, which emerged out of the trade union movement after 1900 was, it may be assumed, advocating

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[2] Report of the Twenty-Second Annual Trades Union Congress 1888, p. 41, 50 (hereafter TUC Report); TUC Reports, 1892, p. 53 - 54; 1894, p. 59 - 60; 1895, p. 46.

[3] **A. T. Lane,** American Trade Unions, Mass Immigration and the Literacy Test, 1900 - 1917, Labour History, 25, Winter 1984, p. 5 - 25; **J. A. Garrard,** The English and Immigration 1880 - 1910 London 1971, p. 175.

policies in the interest of a trade union organisation which had a majority socialist element. Socialists were on the inside looking out rather than, as in the United States, on the outside looking in[4].

Yet, in the early 1890s, socialists were in a strong position in the American trade union movement as well. The severe economic depression beginning in 1893 attracted an increasing number of trade unionists to radical political solutions. However, the implacable anti-socialism of the AFL leadership caused many socialists to abandon the unions while others joined the rival federation, the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance. This increased the distrust in the AFL for all socialists and associated them with schism and betrayal. Hence by the end of the 1890s socialist influence in the counsels of the AFL was limited, and the possibility of American trade unions following in the steps of their British equivalents and forming a political organization independent of the two major political parties was rather remote. When the American Socialist Party was founded in 1901 it could count on the allegiance of only a minority of delegates to the conventions of the AFL. In practice it became a junior partner in the relationship, arguing its cause from a position of weakness[5]. This may help to account for the American socialists' less sympathetic response to immigration than the British Labour Party's.

Before turning to this question we should not overlook the common ground between British and American socialists in the 1890s and early 1900s. For example, the immigrants causing the greatest concern in both cases came from Eastern and Southern Europe. Despite this socialists in both countries in the 1890s took a fraternal or internationalist approach to immigration, believing that an emphasis on inward population flows simply diverted attention from the real cause of the workers' problems, which was the capitalist system itself[6]. Moreover, they all agreed that political and religious refugees should be offered asylum. Attempts to distinguish between immigrants on the grounds of racial or cultural characteristics was anathema. As a leading American socialist, Daniel De Leon put it, socialism did not recognise "such insulting iniquitous distinctions as 'inferior' or 'superior' races among the proletariat". Capitalism itself "[fanned] the fires of such sentiments in its scheme to keep the proletariat

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[4] **J. H. M. Laslett,** Haymarket, Henry George, and the Labor Upsurge in Britain and America during the late 1880s, International Labor and Working-Class History, 29, Spring 1986, 80; **H. A. Clegg, A. Fox, A. F. Thompson,** A History of British Trade Unions since 1889, vol. 1, London 1964, p. 262.

[5] **D. Herreshoff,** American Disciples of Marx: From the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era, Detroit 1971, p. 121, 125 - 126; **H. H. Quint,** The Forging of American Socialism, New York 1964, p. 151 - 152, 164 - 165; **M. Hillquit,** History of Socialism in the United States, New York 1906, p. 324, 328; **P. S. Foner,** History of the Labor Movement in the United States, vol. 2, New York 1955, p. 298 - 299.

[6] TUC Report, 1895, p. 46.

divided"[7]. Socialists also shared a common hostility to foreign workers imported under contract by employers to break strikes or to force down the wages of British or American workers[8].

There was, therefore, a great deal of common ground between American and British socialists on the immigration question. But differences began to open up in the first decade of this century. On the British side, socialists keenly opposed the main provisions of the Aliens Bill of 1905, notably the proposal to ban the immigration of "paupers". The latter were defined as people who could not prove they could support themselves in the job market. This was clearly an attempt by the sponsors of the bill to change the focus from the inducements offered by employers to the character of the immigrants themselves, and to make distinctions between different groups of immigrants. In other words they were setting out on the road the AFL had followed after 1896. In their opposition to this aspect of the bill Hardie and his Labour colleagues in the House of Commons were joined by the Independent Labour Party and the Social Democratic Federation. In short, British socialists appeared not to waver from the principles they had adopted in the 1890s[9].

Across the Atlantic, however, the situation was markedly different. Here a keenly-argued debate took place between fairly evenly-matched sections of the Socialist Party on the immigration question. Resolutions passed at the 1908 and 1910 conventions of the party represented a compromise between opposing points of view. On the one hand were those who clung to traditional positions. On the other, represented strongly in the leadership and the rank-and-file, were radicals who wanted to exclude certain ethnic and national groups, both from Asia and Europe. In this they went further even than the AFL whose support for the literacy test involved selectivity rather than prohibition. This "radical" position was in blatant contradiction to the traditional socialist "open door" policy. A look at the background to this debate will help us to understand why the rejection of solidaristic values occurred.

Divisions first appeared in 1904 when party delegates to the congress of the International Working Men's Association in Amsterdam had to respond to a motion on immigration. Some of the American delegates opposed any attempt to prevent or limit immigration but others, most notably Morris Hillquit, spoke against the importation by capitalists of "workers of backward races", such as

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[7] **D. Herreshoff,** op.cit., p. 169.

[8] TUC Report, 1888, p. 50; **J. A. Garrard,** op.cit., p. 188; Records of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor of America, September 1984. For example, Hardie and his labour colleagues in the House of Commons tried to amend the Aliens Bill of 1905 to exclude alien strike-breakers.

[9] **K. Lunn,** Immigrants and British Labour's Response, 1875 - 1950, History Today, 35, November 1985, 49.

Asiatic coolies, who competed with native labour and readily submitted to exploitation[10]. Hillquit's argument was, however, consistent with traditional opposition among some socialists to alien contract labour.

However, three years later, Hillquit advanced his argument a stage further. This time he shifted the spotlight away from the activities of employers and shone it instead on the countries of origin and the ethnicity of the immigrants themselves. He defined "undesirable" immigrants as those incapable of joining trade unions and of working constructively with American workers to improve wages and working conditions. "Just what races are to be included in this category", Hillquit continued, "is a question that can only be decided from time to time with reference to the particular circumstances and conditions of each case". Nevertheless it is apparent that one of his most important criteria was the level of economic and social development of the country of origin. Although it was generally believed that Hillquit had Asiatic countries in mind, it is noteworthy that he did not specifically exclude immigrants from the less-developed countries of Europe[11].

Hillquit's influence in the party is shown by the attempt of the American delegation at the congress of the International in Stuttgart in 1907 to establish the principle of dividing immigrants along ethnic lines into "organizable" and "unorganizable" (the latter originating in "backward" countries), and to make exclusion of the latter a part of socialist policy[12]. The congress unequivocally condemned the American resolution. While it recognized the difficulties facing workingmen in countries "of a more advanced stage of capitalist development' from the effects of the mass immigration of workers accustomed to a lower standard of life, it saw' no proper solution of these difficulties in the exclusion of definite nations or races from immigration [...]". The Congress would go no further than to condemn the importation of contract labourers[13].

In the face of this rather crushing repudiation of Americans' case Hillquit promised that the American delegates would uphold the decision of the congress on their return home. This was easier said than done. His party was badly divided and he had the greatest difficulty in obtaining a majority for the Stuttgart resolution at the conventions of the party in 1908, 1910 and 1912. The opposition was led by two senior figures in the party, Victor Berger and Ernest Untermann, who persuaded its National Executive Committee not only to continue its opposition to Asiatic immigration but also to exclude all immigrants from less-developed economies "where the workers of such countries have show themselves, as a body, to be unapproachable with the philosophy of

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[10] The International Socialist Review, January 1907, August 1907.

[11] Ibidem, August 1907; Social Democratic Herald, 12 October, 1907; State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Hillquit Papers, Box No.8, Research Notes, Internationaler Sozialisten Kongress zu Stuttgart, 18-24 August, 1907.

[12] The International Socialist Review, February 1908.

[13] Ibidem, September 1907.

Socialism". It would be a short step to conclude, like the AFL, that there was a correlation between certain undesirable qualities among immigrants (inability to join trade unions, willingness to take lower wages, lack of sympathy for socialism) and low levels of literacy. The restrictionis elements in the Socialist Party no longer even paid lip service to the ideals of international working class solidarity[14]. Those who still advocated totally free and unrestricted immigration, like Eugene Debs, the party's candidate for the Presidency of the United States in 1912, were now a small minority[15]. The majority divided between those who supported Stuttgart, opposing only contract labour, and those who wanted to exclude particular ethnic or national groups, whether from Asia or Eastern and Southern Europe.

There is convincing evidence, therefore, that the exclusion of Europeans who could not assimilate to American values was an essential part of the policy of the opponents of Stuttgart. The fact that the leaders, in their resolutions to the conventions, concentrated solely on the exclusion of Asiatic immigrants shows their tactical awareness. Their intention was to disarm opposition from Russian Jewish or other East European delegates. In fact, this concession failed to convince them since they saw the exclusion of Asians as the thin end of the wedge which could be used subsequently as a precedent for excluding Europeans[16]. Moreover, the distinction was illogical and artificial since it left the restrictionists with no effective method of limiting European immigration other than the contract labor law, which they knew was ineffective, and the literacy test which was never mentioned. In this case the attempt to obtain majorities by tactical means was so transparent as to invite rejection, which duly occurred.

Despite being beaten by slim majorities in the conventions restrictionists were able to defy party policy and present a restrictionist case to the electorate in the 1912 presidential election. While the party's candidate was touring the country proclaiming internationalist policies on immigration, the party's campaign book criticised both Asian and European immigration in distinctly hostile and unfraternal terms, emphasising the undesirable characteristics of eastern and southern European immigrants and conveying the unequivocal impression that the Socialist Party favoured a stringent restrictionist policy vis-a-vis these newcomers[17].

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[14] Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party (hereafter Proceedings) 1908, p. 105; 1910, p. 100, 116-117, 158; 1912, p. 210-212; Social Democratic Herald, 12 October, 1907; The International Socialist Review, September 1907; **I. Kipnis,** The American Socialist Movement 1897-1912 (1952: rept. Westport, Conn., 1968), p. 279.

[15] **A. Trachtenberg,** The Heritage of Gene Debs, New York 1928, p. 16-17, 44-46.

[16] Proceedings, 1910, p. 76, 84, 87-88, 99, 119, 125-128, 149.

[17] Socialist Party of America Papers (microfilm), National Office Papers, Correspondence and General Records, Reel 6, Extract from the 1912 Socialist Campaign Book; **Ch. Leinenweber,** The American Socialist Party and the "New" Immigrants, Science and Society, 32, Winter 1968, p. 5-6.

It is apparent, therefore, that the Socialist Party of America was evenly split, not between internationalists and restrictionists, but between two sets of restrictionists, with the internationalists on the fringe. Though the party refused to endorse the exclusion of Asian immigrants (and by implication some immigrants from Europe as well) it did so by narrow majorities. Moreover, some delegates, for example John Spargo, supported the principle of excluding national groups which threatened the American standard of living (i.e. the line taken by Berger) but refused to vote in support of Berger's resolution because the volume of immigration was not yet sufficiently large to undermine wages[18].

This resume of the attitudes and policies of American socialists indicates that they had moved further away from the traditional policies of solidarity and internationalism than their British comrades. How is this to be explained? A number of reasons suggest themselves, among the most significant being the relative influence of socialism in the British and American trade unions. As socialist strength in the British TUC increased in the first decade of this century, in the United States it declined in the second half of the 1890s and never recovered. As a result the Socialist Party could expect support from no more than one-third of the delegates at AFL conventions in the decade before the First World War[19]. Inevitably, attempts to win support from the trade unions involved the socialists in making concessions to majority trade union opinion on matters of policy, including the issue of immigration restriction. Accordingly, debates in the party on immigration between 1904 and 1912 were often initiated by restrictionists in order "to bring the party into line with the mood of the organized workers"[20]. This "tactical expediency" was far less necessary in Great Britain, where the socialist presence in the trade unions was stronger, particularly after the rise of new unionism in the 1890s.

Secondly, organized labour and socialist movements in Great Britain and other European states constructed radical and forward-looking political programmes. They condemned the past and anticipated a new and better future characterized by rational planning and social regeneration. In this political climate Labour in Britain could confidently deny the connection between unemployment and immigration[21]. It was assumed that immigration would

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[18] Proceedings, 1910, p. 78-80.

[19] **M. Hillquit,** op.cit., p. 324; **H. H. Quint,** op.cit., p. 165; **P. S. Foner,** op. cit., p. 298-299; Social Democratic Herald, 14 January, 1905; The Western Comrade n.d. (A report of the Seattle Convention of the AFL 1913).

[20] **D. A. Shannon,** The Socialist Party of America, New York 1955, p. 17; **M. Epstein,** Jewish Labor in the USA, 1882-1914, vol. 2, New York 1950, p. 346-347; **I. Kipnis,** op.cit., p. 276; **D. Bell,** The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States, in: **D. D. Egbert, S. Persons** (eds) Socialism and American Life, vol. 1, Princeton 1952, p. 285; **Ch. Leinenweber,** op.cit., p. 5-6.

[21] **K. Lunn,** op.cit., p. 49.

have even less connection with social problems after the achievement of power by a socialist government. American socialists held these views but only up to a point since they operated in a more inhibiting environment. Organized labour in the United States shared with other social groups what might be called a sense of lost innocence, which was quite lacking in Europe. The popular nativist movements, which achieved substantial support at different times in American history and were notably influential in the early twentieth century, attempted to preserve American republican institutions from corruption by slow-to-assimilate immigrants. Similarly, American trade unionists, who were quite strongly influenced by nativist thought, developed their case for immigration restriction not only on the basis of the threat to working conditions and wages but also because of the need to preserve American political institutions and social patterns. In common with the wider society of which it was a part the labour movement in the United States looked back to a purer, more admirable past, founded on revered political principles, while at the same time seeking to come to terms with modern capitalism. The point to emphasise is that in the American labour movement there appears to have been a larger element of regret and nostalgia than was the case in Britain, and this in turn affected the socialist response to events as a result of the connections already described between labour and socialism[22].

Futhermore, racist thinking was more pervasive and influential in the United States than in Great Britain. The racial characteristics widely attributed to black people in the nineteenth century were transferred to Chinese immigrants, as Alexander Saxton has shown[23]. Labour attributed the failure of the Chinese to assimilate in the United States to their inferior genes. Of course, before the First World War, labour did not make the same charge against European immigrants since difficulties in assimilation were explained by the immigrants' inferior cultural background. The new groups would ultimately, it was conceded, assimilate to the higher civilization but the process would take many generations, and all the time additional waves of new immigrants would be flooding in and compounding the problems of assimilation. Moreover, it was not always easy for labour to resist the conclusion that similar patterns of behaviour (between let us say Chinese and Italian immigrants) resulted from the same causes. Once the AFL and a substantial section of the Socialist Party had been persuaded of the racial inferiority of Asian immigrants the doctrine of international working class unity was undermined, and the idea of the open door in

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[22] **J. Higham,** Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925, 1955: rept. New York 1963; **A. T. Lane,** Solidarity or Survival? American Labor and European Immigrants, 1830-1924, Westport, Conn., p. 147-164.

[23] **A. Saxton,** The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California Berkeley 1971, p. 19-20, 274.

immigration policy was more difficult to sustain. In other words, the entrenched patterns of racist thinking in the United States inevitably had implications for immigration policy when the majority of the new immigrants behaved like the Chinese and ceased to behave like Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

It would, however, be unwise to draw too marked a distinction between British and American labour attitudes on the subject of race since the potential for racist thinking was clearly present in Britain as well. J. Bruce Glazier of the Independent Labour Party claimed that aversion to foreigners was partly derived from race prejudice. Nor was organized labour in Britain insulated from the influential contemporary ideas of Social Darwinism, Anglo-Saxonism and eugenics. In practical politics it appears that TUC opposition to the importation of Chinese labour into South Africa was partly based on racial hostility to the Chinese, who were freely stereotyped in sections of the labour press in the 1890s. Faced with the challenge from Chinese immigration that the Americans had to contend with the British labour movement might have reacted similarly[24].

Another reason for divergence on immigration policy is suggested by the long-standing British opposition to commercial protectionism. Attacks on Free Trade were resisted, not only by the Liberal Party, but also by the trade unions and the various labour and socialist parties, which reaffirmed their commitment to cheap food from overseas. Free Trade and free immigration were logically connected, whereas in the United States the traditional high tariff policies were inconsistent with free immigration, as organised labour frequently pointed out. Furthermore, the necessity of a political alliance with the Liberal Party after 1900 over trade union law reinforced Labour's support for free immigration since it felt constrained not to oppose policies on which there was a strong Liberal commitment[25].

Perhaps most important of all in assessing the reasons for the differences in approach between British and American socialists was the sheer scale and variety of immigration into the United States compared with Britain. There is no space to discuss this in detail but the main facts are reasonably familiar. For example, at the turn of the century foreign-born residents in the United States represented some 14 per cent. of the total population; in England and Wales, just over one per cent. At the same time the foreign-born constituted 25 per cent. or more the population in 18 of the 28 largest American cities; in Great Britain only

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[24] **J. A. Garrard,** op.cit., p. 195; **B. C. Roberts,** The Trades Union Congress 1868-1921, London 1958, p. 181; The Clarion, 20 February, 1892; TUC Report, 1900, p. 54.

[25] **B. Gainer,** The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905, London 1972, p. 141-142; **J. A. Garrard,** op.cit., p. 90-91; Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee Minutes, 17 June, 1903; **F. Bealey, H. Pelling,** Labour and Politics 1900-1906, London 1958, p. 202; **B. C. Roberts,** op.cit., p. 180.

in one or two areas of London's East End was comparability achieved, and in the cities of Manchester and Leeds which had the largest concentration of aliens outside London, only about three per cent. of the inhabitants were born abroad. Finally, from 1880 to 1910 the proportion of foreign-born in manufacturing industry in the United States averaged about 30 per cent. of the work force; in Great Britain only in tailoring did the foreign-born constitute a significant proportion, 14%, of the employed[26].

It might be argued that the scale of immigration into the United States was sufficient in itself to account for the divergent response of British and American trade unions and socialist parties. This overlooks the possibility of higher levels of toleration in one community than in another, and of differences in the economic and cultural characteristics of the respective immigrant flows, which in turn can affect levels of tolerance. For example, the dominant Russian-Jewish component in British immigration was in marked contrast to the multiplicity of ethnic groups from all parts of Europe and Asia which comprised immigration into the United States. Many of these groups were regarded less favourably than the Jews, whose persecution by the Russian authorities often gained them sympathy[27]. In Britain too immigrant Jews were generally depicted sympathetically though they were subject to sharp criticism from Socialists like Robert Blatchford in his journal, The Clarion. The fact remains, however, that the composition of immigration could be decisive in shaping attitudes[28].

All in all there are a number of variables which influence opinion and ultimately policies. American socialists claimed before international socialist congresses that the United States faced an exceptional situation and that these special circumstances had to be taken into account when resolutions on immigration policy were discussed. Undoubtedly the volume and character of immigration into the United States was unprecedented in the modern world. Yet the preceding discussion suggests that the erosion of the principle of solidarity, which went much further among American than British socialists, was not simply a response to the character and size of immigration but was also connected with political and social factors and the relationships between various

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[26] **E. P. Hutchinson,** Immigrants and their Children 1850-1950, New York 1956; **B. Gainer,** op.cit., p. 2-4, 17-19; Reports of the Industrial Commission (57 Congress, 1 Sess., H. Doc. No. 184), vol. 15, XX; **B. R. Mitchell** with **Ph. Deane,** Abstract of British Historical Statistics, Cambridge, 1962, p. 24-27; **J. A. Garrard,** op.cit., p. 213; **G. Abbott,** The Immigrant and the Community, New York 1917, p. 200.

[27] Reports of the Immigration Commission (61 Cong., 3 Sess, S. Doc. No. 747), vol. 1, 99; **J. A. Garrard,** op.cit., p. 184.

[28] **K. Lunn,** op.cit., p. 48; The Clarion, 15 October, 1892, 17 November, 1894, 12 October, 1895.

components in the respective labour movements. In considering the probable response to immigration in various societies, therefore, one should be aware of the complexity and variety of forces helping to shape that response, which in turn are the product of the particular patterns of political and social evolution in those societies.

SUMMARY

This article examines the impact of immigration from eastern and central Europe in two of the main immigrant receiving societies in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the United States and Britain. It breaks new ground by focusing on a little-studied aspect of mass immigration, namely its impact on socialist opinion in the receiving countries.

Socialists were peculiarly exposed to the dilemmas created by immigration. On the one hand they traditionally supported the ideas and values of international working class solidarity. On the other their convictions were challenged by the demands of the indigenous labour force, whom they sought to represent, for protection against cheap labour from abroad.

In the face of this challenge socialists reacted in different ways. In the United States, despite a long tradition of hospitality to European immigrants, socialists became more antagonistic to newcomers than they were in Britain. After discussing the sometimes anguished debates between socialists, the article asks why there were these differences in response. Did they emerge as a consequence of the differences in character and volume of immigration in the two societies or were they the result of significant divergences in the prevalent social, political and demographic conditions?

The following analysis, based on a wide range of sources, suggests that there is no simple correlation between changes in immigration flows and changing attitudes to newcomers. There is, rather, a complex interraction of political, economic and demographic factors, not least the relative strength of socialist parties in the political spectrum, which determines the response of socialists to mass immigration.