'Sectarian Secret Wisdom' and Nineteenth-Century Radicalism: The IWMA in London and New York

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"Sectarian Secret Wisdom" and Nineteenth-Century Radicalism

The IWMA in London and New York

Antony Taylor

The historiography of the First International Working Men's Association (IWMA) remains relatively fixed, and largely unaffected by the debates around radical continuity between independent radicalism and liberalism in Britain dating from the 1990s. The historiographical parameters of debate around the IWMA remain rooted in older ideas regarding the influence of Marx in Great Britain, the relative absence of theory and ideology in British political movements for parliamentary reform, the tendency towards "reformism" that appears particularly marked within the British labour tradition, and the failure or otherwise of perceived continental styles of socialism and political leadership in the United Kingdom.[1] Of the authors who posit an unproblematic unity between Chartism and related currents of reform opinion in Britain and subsequent liberalism, only Margot Finn engages directly with the impact and influence of the First International. For her the tendency for British radicals to identify and support movements of national self-realisation and separatism in Italy, Poland and elsewhere created an overlapping sentiment that was as much the common inheritance of liberalism, as of post-Chartist radicalism itself, surviving even the acrimonious debates surrounding the impact of the Paris Commune in 1871.[2] In addition, Eugenio Biagini has also gone some way towards reclaiming the Mazzinian tradition in the United Kingdom in a historiography that marginalises the impact of Marx and Marxisant opinion in favour of the imported political ideas that were anathema to Marx himself. For Biagini, the First International was a body with little traction in Britain that profited from

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1 E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964), pp. 239–249; Henry Collins, "The English Branches of the First International", in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History* (London, 1960), pp. 242–275.

2 See Margot C. Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848–1874* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 232 and 265 and Ch. 7.

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the anti-liberal politics of European governments but offers little indication about the popularity or otherwise of Marx's ideas amongst workers in Britain.[3] Indeed, as Detlev Mares has pointed out, the radicals who cohered around the IWMA in Britain were a heterodox community of internationalists, adventurers, former Owenites and Chartists, land reformers and advanced liberals. W.F. Cowell Stepney, an explorer and son of a Lieutenant Colonel in the British army, who advocated a collectivist society based on indigenous American culture, was not untypical of them.[4] The arguments about the foundation of the IWMA in Britain informed by the debates generated by the "liberal continuity" school of scholarship, must also be balanced against Marx's own tendency to "overclaim" about the importance and impact of the International in Europe and beyond.[5] In the United States, Tim Messer-Kruse has written a lengthy indictment of the First International that rescues the ideas of Section 12 of the International in New York, while condemning out of hand the impact of Marxisant ideas in the United States, and pre-supposing the detrimental impact of narrow doctrinaire Marxism of the variety espoused by Friedrich Sorge on the development of the United States labour tradition.[6] Here deeper arguments about the failure of popular radicalism in the United States emerge, taking the historiography of the First International into broader discussions about the relative absence of a labour tradition in the United States.

This chapter is not a direct comparison of the influence and support accorded to the First International in either Britain or the United States, or in urban centres like London and New York. Nor is it another crude denunciation of the failures and miscalculations either of the practical application of Marxist theory, or of Marx as a radical politician. Rather, rooted in recent re-considerations of the First International in the United States, and drawing on the literature relating to transnational labour history, it examines the links between the

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3 Eugenio Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860–1880* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 61. For the British followers of Mazzini see Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe, *Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats* (Woodbridge, 2013), Chs, 1–2.

4 Detlev Mares, *Auf der Suche nach dem "wahren" Liberalismus. Demokratische Bewegung und liberale Politik im viktorianischen England* (Berlin, 2002), pp. 52–60 and for W.F. Cowell Stepney, see his obituary in the *International Herald*, 29 November 1872, p. 3.

5 Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International* (London, 1965), pp. 63 and 67.

6 Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International, 1848–1876: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), Ch. 1. His ideas conflict with the older orthodoxy about the role of the First international in the United States in Samuel Bernstein, *The First International in America* (New York, 1962), pp. 109–127. For the background see Neville Kirk, *Labour and Society in Britain and the USA*, 2 vols (Aldershot, 1994), II, pp. 219–229.

radicals of Section 12 in New York, and analogous and related radical traditions in Britain where there is evidence of overlapping ideas, communities and goals that remained untapped by internationalist radicals of the period.[7] Like the British followers of the IWMA, Section 12 in New York gained much of its momentum from its alliance with a broad community of allied radical organisations, forging strong links with former anti-slavery campaigners and drawing in the new women's suffragist and civic benevolence organisations that emerged during and in the aftermath of the civil war.[8] With a membership that was less ideologically fixated on the currents of European socialism imported by German émigré radicals than the German migrant sections, prominent in its ranks were bohemians, land, dietary, and currency reformers. The section's iconic figureheads were the women's suffrage campaigners and free love advocates, Victoria Woodhull, and her sister, Tennessee Claflin.[9] (fig. 22.1) These diffuse political elements indicate the degree to which the IWMA failed to connect up with existing currents and trends within international radical movements, and highlight the existence of a shadow International, revolving around the groups and organisations marginalised or held up as unimportant to the goals of the IWMA by the General Council in London. Referring to such British tendencies, Marx dismissed groups like the O'Brienites as cultish and "conceited" about their "sectarian secret wisdom" relating to currency reform.[10]

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7   See Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 11–21, Neville Kirk, "Transnational Labour History: Promise and Perils", in Leon Fink (ed.), *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labour History* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 18–22, and Shelton Stromquist, "Rethinking Working-Class Politics in Comparative Transnational Context", in Donna T. Haverty-Stacke and Daniel T. Walkowitz (eds), *Rethinking U.S. Labor History: Essays on the Working-Class Experience, 1756–2009* (London, 2009), pp. 82–110.

8   Ellen C Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of the Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca, New York, 1978), Ch. 5 and Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven, Conn [etc.], 1990), Chs 5–6.

9   See Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, pp. 113–115, Mark Lause, "The American Radicals and Organised Marxism: The Initial Experience, 1869–1874", *Labor History*, 33 (1992), pp. 55–80, Jamie Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800–1862* (Stanford, 1999), Chs 5 and 6 and Dr W.A. Alcott, "Vegetarianism in the United States" *The Vegetarian Advocate*, 2 vols (1848–50), II, p. 95.

10   Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 29 July 1869 in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works: Letters 1868–70*, 50 vols (London, 1988), XXXXIII, p. 334 and Keith Robinson, "Karl Marx, the International Working-Men's Association and London Radicalism, 1864–1872" (Ph.D., University of Manchester, 1976), p. 200 [hereafter "Karl Marx, the International Working-Men's Association and London Radicalism"].

Despite the opposing political cycles that saw the First International peak in Britain in the mid-1860s, at a time when branches of the International in the United States had still barely formed, this differing chronology disguises a shared common political culture, and reveals some of the tensions that led to the decline of the International after the expulsion of New York Section 12 in 1872. At a period in which there was an apparent political caesura in radical politics in Britain in the 1860s following the demise of the Chartist platform and the emergence of a broadly-defined popular liberalism, as opposed to the proliferation of radical groups in the US in the aftermath of the American Civil War, scrutiny of the IWMA provides the opportunity for discussion of radical continuity, or even revival, in Britain in the 1860s and 1870s.

Traditionally the IWMA in a British context has been interpreted in the light of the developing relationship between radicals and trade societies. As an organisation that forged relationships with the trades, the IWMA is seen as a body that reflected the new producerist ethic of reformers articulated during a period of campaigning around the inclusion of the productive classes within the franchise.[11] This perspective grew out of debates confined to the General Council of the IWMA and fails to take sufficient account of other prevailing strands of internationalism in Britain that overlapped with the grass-roots organisation. In the United States, the legacy of the IWMA has similarly been interpreted through the inheritance bequeathed to trades unionists like Samuel Gompers. These perspectives have dominated the debate about the significance of the International and help relegate other tendencies within this body to the fringes of the discussion. In much of the scholarship they reinforce the point, articulated by Marx, that certain elements within British, European and North American radicalism were retrograde, unformed, or useful only for strategic purposes to counterbalance the claims of the competing radical and national groups that made up the organisation. Most of these criticisms are well known, but merit recapitulation here. Writing of the followers of the former Chartist, Bronterre O'Brien (1805–1864) in London, Marx described them as: "the sect of the late Bronterre O'Brien, and are full of follies and crotchets, such as currency quackery, false emancipation of women, and the like. In spite of their follies", he continued, "they constitute an often necessary counterweight to trades unionists on the Council. They are more revolutionary, firmer on the land question, less nationalistic and not susceptible to bourgeois bribery in

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11   Iorwerth Prothero, *Radical Artisans in England and France, 1830–1870* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 111–119, Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 71–118, and Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, p. 229.

one form or another. Otherwise they would have been kicked out long ago."
Similarly, John Weston, a former Owenite and founder member of the International in 1864, was dismissed by Marx's follower, Johann Georg Eccarius, on
the grounds that "he seems to know no other basis for labour movements than
the hackneyed phrase truth and justice."[12] Such views replicated the attitudes
of the Rev Charles Maurice Davies, who, visiting the O'Brienites in the early
1870s, included them in a study of dissident and marginal religious bodies, and
described them as a "mystic" organisation. Their presence in the IWMA also
allowed opponents of the International in Britain to dismiss its members as
proponents of "quackery and sham."[13] Groups like the O'Brienites were "kindred souls", according to Marx, of the New York Section 12 radicals, described
by Samuel Gompers as "dominated by a brilliant group of faddists, reformers,
and sensation-loving spirits."[14] "All kinds of bourgeois swindlers, free lovers,
spirit-rappers, spirit-rapping shakers" was Frederick Engels' characterisation
of the branch's membership.[15] Such ideas conformed to Marx's well-known
hostility to "sects" in all their forms and their reactionary potential, reiterated
in the closing stages of the International. In Britain, Maltman Barry, Marx's
close ally who became a delegate on behalf of the British Federal Council to
the Hague congress in 1872, expressed his fear that those who wanted to set up
the separatist Council hoped to convert it into nothing more than "a pothouse
forum or an electioneering machine."[16]

These comments suggest a sharp divide in regard to visions of the radical inheritance, and misinterpret the significance of the movements Marx depicted

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12   Marx to Friedrich Bolte, 23 November 1871, in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works:
      Letters 1870–73*, 50 vols (London, 1989), XXXXIV, p. 252, Collins and Abramsky, *Karl Marx
      and the British Labour Movement*, p. 249 and Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, p. 50.
      A more positive view of Weston is expressed in George Jacob Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an
      Agitator's Life*, 2 vols (London, 1906), II, pp. 263–264.

13   Rev Charles Maurice Davies, *Heterodox London or Phases of Free Thought in the Metropolis*, 3 vols (London, 1874), II, p. 236, and the *International Herald*, 8 August 1872, p. 3. The
      O'Brienites remained a fixture of London radical club-life into the 1890s; see William
      Stephen Sanders, *Early Socialist Days* (London, 1927), p. 21.

14   Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor,* 2 vols (New York, 1925), I, p. 55 and Marx
      to Friedrich Bolte, 23 November 1871, in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works: Letters
      1870–73*, p. 252.

15   Frederick Engels, "The International in America" in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels: Collected
      Works 1871–74*, 50 vols (London, 1988), XXIII, p. 179. For the historiography surrounding
      Marx's categorisation of the early European socialist organisations as sects, see Pamela
      Pilbeam, *French Socialists before Marx: Workers, Women and the Social Question in France*
      (London, 2000), Ch. 1.

16   Collins and Abramsky *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, p. 300.

as sects. The "hobby" politics of Section 12 of the First International embraced issues of long standing radical importance in the United States including an 8-hour working day, abolition of private bank notes, anti-censorship, enfranchisement of women, free love, spiritualism, residual Fourierism, the protection of children from sexual exploitation and land reform.[17] Such platforms existed on the fringes of accepted knowledge but received the benediction of salvationist American preachers like Henry Ward Beecher, reported in *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* as asserting that "all isms were truths crumpled up, yet to be unfolded into symmetry and beauty."[18] Moreover, issues like workers' universal languages and currency reform, which Marx used to deride these agitations, were an important element in the pedigree of urban radical culture, cementing together the different groups involved and, in both contexts, with an inheritance that had long roots in the political platforms of early nineteenth-century radicalism.[19] The idea for an international language, for example, was debated at the Apollo Club, New York, on the same platform where Victoria Woodhull launched her candidacy for the Presidency in 1872.[20] In Britain, in particular, such ideas remained an important element in organisations that made the transition post-1848 into mid-century radical politics, and provided a bridge into the early socialist agitations of the 1880s. In the United States, the period marked the beginnings of the emergence of the Greenback Labor platform campaigning around the purification of financial mechanisms and proposing an anti-monopoly and anti-banking stance. Greenback labor ideas made some impact on currency reform notions in Britain, appearing in Land and Labour League programmes in the 1870s and featuring as a marked element of William Harrison Riley's articles in the *International Herald*.[21]

These aspects of radicalism provided evidence of overlapping cultures and co-joined aims that bore out Marx's contention that there were similarities in the comparative context of labour between Britain and the United States. The

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17   See, for example, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 15 February 1873, p. 3, 29 March 1873, p. 8, 5 April 1873, p. 4 and 19 April, 1873, p. 9.

18   Ibid, 5 April 1873, p. 5. For "isms" and "ites" in the US labour tradition, see Robin Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* (Princeton, NY, 2007), p. 206.

19   W.D. Rubenstein, *Elites and the Wealthy in Modern British Society* (Brighton, 1987), Ch. 11 and Andrew Large, *The Artificial Language Movement* (London, 1985), pp. 58–65.

20   Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York [etc.], 1908), p. 180 and *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 11 May 1872, p. 1.

21   Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861–1881* (London, 1965), p. 218, Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America* (Cambridge, 1997), Ch. 1 and the *International Herald*, 20 September 1873, p. 4.

move of the headquarters of the IWMA from London to New York in 1872 was a reflection of the shared objectives Marx believed were apparent amongst internationalist radicals operating in the migrant contexts of urban Britain and the United States.[22] In Britain the broader setting for radical culture has barely been assimilated into discussion of the continuities between mid-nine-teenth century radicalism and liberalism, which has concentrated instead on political programmes and points of doctrine. As in the United States, there was a penumbra of alternative organisations and cultural values surrounding movements for reform and surviving outpourings of political energy (like the Chartist movement) that co-existed with more stable agitations, but provided a conduit for the transmission of radical values to agitations that remained outside the liberal consensus.[23] Marx had contact with all such elements in the British and US labour traditions, and thought them insufficient to effect real political change, but, despite his misgivings, favoured some over others. The O'Brienites he tolerated, yet the tendency that features most frequently in his correspondence are representatives of the Tory radical strand in British popular politics. As James Owen notes, an emphasis in continuity debates between Chartism and liberalism has somewhat excluded the marked Tory radical inheritance in British reform politics.[24] Collins and Abramsky, however, emphasise that Marx worked closely with the Russophobe, David Urquhart, while the sometime Tory election agent, Maltman Barry, was a disruptive and damaging presence in the closing stages of the International, recalled in the 1890s as playing the part of "a black shadow on the labour movement ever since the old International."[25] Poorly attuned to the alternative radical tradition, Marx was also guilty of equating the activities of Section 12 in New York with other groups that sought to promote autonomy from the General Council of the IWMA, notably the followers of Bakunin.[26]

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22   Frederick Engels, "On the Hague Congress of the International", in *Marx Engels Collected Works, 1871–74*, 50 vols (London, 1988), XXIII, pp. 178–183.

23   Mark Bevir, "The Social Democratic Federation, 1889–1885: From O'Brienism to Marxism", *International Review of Social History*, 36 (1992), pp. 207–229.

24   James Owen, *Labour and the Caucus: Working-Class Radicalism and Organised Liberalism in England, 1868–1888* (Liverpool, 2014), pp. 15–16.

25   *Justice*, 1 October 1892, p. 1 and Collins and Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 239–240. For Maltman Barry, see the *International Herald*, 14 September 1872, p. 7, the *National Reformer*, 13 May 1877, p. 297, and Paul Martinez, "The People's Charter and the Enigmatic Mr Maltman Barry", *Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin,* 41 (1980), pp. 34–45.

26   Collins and Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, p. 299 and for the diverse anti-authoritarian movements that campaigned for devolved structures in the

The First International, then, throws into sharp relief the international connections between those who espoused a universalist bohemian approach to reform drawing together alternatives that transcended national boundaries, but fell short of the expectations of Marx and the more purist objectives of his followers on the General Council of the First International. In Britain, in particular, as the trade union members of the General Council drifted away from the organisation in its later stages, so these tendencies became more pronounced.[27] A mixture of different crusades, they were cemented by common causes around the abolition of slavery during the American Civil War (which united many American and British reformers under a common banner)[28] and various quests for spiritual enlightenment, notably spiritualism itself. Spiritualism in particular could look for a similar lineage to members of the First International, tracing its origins back to the visions of the Fox sisters in Rochester, New York State, in the year 1848, which spiritualists represented, not as a moment of international liberty and revolution, but rather as a highpoint of spiritual intervention in the material world.[29] 1848 was also the year of the first women's rights conference in North America at Seneca Falls.[30] Suffragism and women's rights agitations were similarly transnational in composition during this period, cementing the international celebrity status of the feminist campaigner and Section 12 member, Victoria Woodhull. Indeed, Woodhull hoped to merge the International and the women's suffrage organisations in the United States.[31] Internationalist in outlook and nature, Section 12 of the International in New York, and the O'Brienites recognised aligned affinities that allowed members to strike up a relationship. The O'Brienites campaigned against Section 12's expulsion from the International and harboured representatives of the section who visited the Hague Congress of 1872 to plead the case

IWMA, Max Nomad, "The Anarchist Tradition", in Milorad Drachkovitch (ed.), *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864–1943* (Stanford, 1966), pp. 57–92.

27 Robinson, "Karl Marx, the International Working-Men's Association and London Radicalism", pp. 184–197.

28 Philip S. Foner, *British Labor and the American Civil War* (New York, 1981) and Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, p. 71.

29 *Teddy Ashton's Northern Weekly*, 12 May 1900, p. 818, Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–1910* (London, 1986), Ch. 1 and Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writings, 1848–1930* (Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 6–7.

30 Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, pp. 40–41.

31 Amanda Frisken, *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theatre and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004), pp. 32–49 and for Woodhull's reputation outside the United States, the *International Herald*, 25 May 1872, p. 4.

for its reinstatement.[32] Newspapers like the *International Herald* and *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, which were mouthpieces for the IWMA, were representative of these shared interests.[33] Alongside land nationalisation the *International Herald*, under the editorship of William Harrison Riley, also advocated numerous ideas anathema to Marx including women's suffrage (which Marx always saw as a subordinate aim to the rectification of the balance between capital and labour) and ran speculative pieces about a utopian future in which spiritualism was part of the scientific curriculum, international languages had become mainstream, and there was a systematic colonisation of Mars. As part of this *mentalité* it also condemned lawyers in a view that echoed a "primitive rebel" attitude towards the law, and supported schemes for spiritual land communes.[34] For its part, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, reported spirit manifestations, advocated supernatural wonders and espoused mesmerism.[35]

At the heart of both contrasting contexts of the First International in London and New York was the image of the metropolis itself. The emergence of IWMA branches was made possible by the context of major urban centres. In 1872 the IWMA had 11 active branches across south and east London.[36] As Marcel van der Linden has demonstrated, the unique context of great cities incubated refugee and émigré "sub-cultures" amongst which internationalising tendencies flourished.[37] A combination of febrile crowd politics, a concentration of political refugees and emigrants, a proliferation of open spaces that favoured a geography of popular protest, a weak institutionalised liberalism, and the absence of responsible non-corrupt city-wide civic government that might provide an outlet for local discontents, meant that London was a late outpost of Chartist radicalism where a sub-stratum of advanced radical opinion bridged the gap between Chartist-inspired radicalism and early labourist organisations.[38]

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32   Collins and Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, p. 239 and Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, pp. 179–181.

33   Articles from *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* frequently featured in the *International Herald*: see the *International Herald*, 8 June 1872, p. 6.

34   Ibid, 13 April 1872, pp. 4–5, 27 April 1872, p. 8, 11 May 1872, p. 5, 1 June 1872, p. 4, 18 January 1873, p. 1 and 29 March 1873, p. 2.

35   *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 29 March 1873, pp. 10–11, 5 April 1873, p. 4 and 15 February 1873, p. 15.

36   *International Herald*, 23 November 1872, p. 8.

37   Van der Linden, "The First International", pp. 13–14. For radical émigré culture in London see Christine Lattek, *Revolutionary Refugees: German Socialism in Britain, 1840–1860* (London, 2002), Chs 7–8 and Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, I, pp. 71–74.

38   Antony Taylor, "Post-Chartism: Metropolitan Perspectives on the Chartist Movement in Decline, 1848–1880", in Matthew Cragoe and Antony Taylor (eds), *London Politics, 1760–1914* (London: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 75–96.

In Britain, in particular, the middle years of the nineteenth-century saw radical energies concentrated in London, and the movement in the regions declining or becoming subsumed within liberalism and Toryism. The First International in Britain collapsed once the General Council splintered in London: the regional branches in Manchester and Nottingham had insufficient support to maintain distinct identities against a background in which the movement had contracted in the capital.[39] New York, where most of the same factors were apparent, demonstrated similar tendencies: both Samuel Gompers and Walt Whitman saw New York as the cradle of the labour movement in the US and the incubator for progressive and reform campaigns.[40] In New York, as well, once much of the energy around New York Section 12 had dissipated following its expulsion and Woodhull's own move away from conventional politics, the movement splintered into numerous and undirected anti-poverty campaigns, leaving only an orphaned IWMA branch in Philadelphia to limp on until 1876.[41] (fig 18.1)

In the context of this inchoate urban environment, the loose nature of radical culture meant that clubs and meeting places became fixed points around which a sequence of different organisations and splinter groups revolved. Maltman Barry's comments about the relegation of a British Federal Council to a "pothouse" level of debate in IWMA affairs, misunderstood the centrality of meeting places and long-standing places of assembly in British metropolitan radicalism. There was a shared culture here that united shifting groups with an inherited and overlapping associational life. Patterns of radical community organisation that emerged as part of the activity of the First International bore the stamp of previous agitations for reform and often involved the same people. Fetes, dinners, receptions and teas had a long radical lineage that resurfaced in the IWMA as part of a broader metropolitan alternative culture.[42] Frequently the same venues were used to house allied or sometimes competing organisations.[43] Marx's misconceptions about the impact of the IWMA in Britain on organisations like the Reform League and the

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39   *Manchester Guardian*, 9 February 1871, p. 5. The Manchester IWMA only became active in 1872 and was overly reliant on weaker trades like the bricklayers, see the *International Herald*, 22 June 1872, p. 6 and 14 September 1872, p. 5.

40   Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, p. 245.

41   Ibid, pp. 224–226 and Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York, 1999), pp. 1025–1026.

42   Finn, *After Chartism*, p. 230.

43   Antony Taylor, "'A Melancholy Odyssey among London Public Houses': Radical Club-life and the Unrespectable in Mid-Nineteenth-Century London", *Historical Research*, 78 (2005), pp. 74–95.

Land and Labour League may partly be explained by this phenomenon: until
1866, the General Council of the IWMA met in the headquarters of the Marquis
of Townsend's Universal League for the Elevation of the Industrious Classes
whose programme it largely shared; later after 1867 it assembled at the Eclectic
Institute, Soho, the gathering place of the O'Brienites.[44] The same aspect to
radical politics featured in New York. Meeting places like the Social Reform
Hall on Grand Street, and, later, the Brooklyn "Spread the Light Club" preserved
a community of radicals together able to campaign in the intervals between
larger popular agitations.[45] Against the background of a shifting and fluid met-
ropolitan environment, continuity of places of assembly and personnel, rather
than nomenclature and labels, were an important solvent of radical agitations.
Often it was styles of political communication, emblems and symbolic body
language expressive of a set of radical allegiances, but not of any one grouping
in particular – ribbons, US flags, banners, red rosettes etc. – that held these as-
sociations together more than the names of actual organisations which often
commanded little loyalty. As Detlev Mares has demonstrated, radical symbols
like the cap of liberty, which resurfaced on the first membership card issued
for North American branches of the IWMA, and amongst those supporting the
Communards in London, was indicative of the importance and relevance of a
political imagery that bound the radical community together, even when their
symbolic associations were contested or their uses challenged. Such symbols
were again on display in Tompkins Square in New York in 1872 at a demonstra-
tion of the unemployed, allowing the General Council of the IWMA to claim
the meeting as an internationalist rally.[46] Given the short life spans of larger
umbrella organisations in big cities, the collapse of the IWMA may have been
as much about short "shelf-life" as internal disagreement. Equally, confusion
about the exact date of the foundation of the Reform League and the different

44   *Bee-Hive*, 30 July 1864, p. 1, F.M. Leventhal, *Respectable Radical: George Howell and Vic-
      torian Working- Class Politics* (London, 1971), p. 52 and Gary R. Entz, *Llewellyn Castle: A
      Workers' Cooperative on the Great Plains* (Lincoln, NE, 2013), pp. 57 and 62.

45   Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, p. 766 and Robert Allen, "'We Do Hold that Land, Light, Air
      and Water are the Free Gifts of Nature': The Spread the Light Club of Brooklyn, 1880–1882",
      paper presented at the Academic Association of Historians in Australian and New Zea-
      land Business Schools, Auckland University of Technology, 2013.

46   Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, p. 90, Detlev Mares, "'Criminally Senseless': Rit-
      ual and Political Strategy in Mid-Victorian Political Radicalism", in Jorg Neuheiser and
      Michael Schaich (eds), *Political Rituals in Great Britain, 1700–2000* (Augsburg, 2006), pp.
      75–91 and for Tompkins Square as a site of popular assemblies, Lisa Keller, *Triumph of
      Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London* (New York, 2009), pp. 172–181
      and the *International Herald*, 11 May 1872, p. 7.

organisations (whether republican, land reform, anti-poverty or pro-Amnesty for Fenian prisoners) its component elements dissolved into, is reflective of the same phenomenon.[47]

Race, ethnicity and sectarianism are issues that have been particularly highlighted in the context of Section 12 of the First International. Rooted strongly in residual abolitionist campaigning organisations and culture, Section 12 espoused tolerance and cross-racial alliances. For its mouthpiece, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, the social revolution it advocated was a continuation of "the irrepressible conflict" over slavery predicted by William H. Seward before the civil war.[48] In 1872 it held a joint demonstration in New York with a Black militia unit, the Skidmore Light Guard, to mourn the suppression of the Paris Commune that attracted Cuban refugees and exiles.[49] For Messer-Kruse, the major impact of a purified International in New York under Friedrich Sorge (from which local radical traditions were excluded) was to accentuate the division between radicals who espoused an inclusive attitude towards other religious groups and identities, and an inflexible and exclusionary trades unionism, typified by Gompers, that sought to expel women, Black workers and the Chinese from the workplace in favour of a predominantly White, male workforce. In 1870, Tompkins Square was the site of a rally mobilised by the trades to protest against the recruitment of Chinese labourers by local employers.[50] For Messer-Kruse, the real legacy of the suppressed Section 12 was in a movement like the Knights of Labor that was non-sectarian in nature and aspired to bridge the racial divide to recruit Black members and sections.[51] In recent studies of the US labour tradition these issues of race are given heightened prominence.[52] In Britain, issues of race and identity were obscured by the emphasis Marx placed on the political possibilities in Ireland, which he saw as a lever to radicalise stagnant English politics and to create a united proletariat, shorn of artificial divisions.[53] The IWMA in London had two Irish sections in Marylebone

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47   John Bedford Leno, *The Aftermath* (London, 1892), p. 55.

48   *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 5 April 1873, p. 3.

49   Frisken, *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution*, pp. 44–45 and Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, I, pp. 57–58.

50   John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore, MD, 1999), pp. 178–179.

51   Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International*, pp. 230–234 and Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park, PA, 1996), pp. 46–52 and 92–101.

52   Archer, *Why Is There No Labor Party in the United States?* Ch. 2 and David R. Roediger, *Working towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants became White* (New York, 2005), pp. 82–92.

53   Sean Daly, *Ireland and the First International* (Cork, 1984), Ch. 2.

and Soho and the IWMA itself a branch in Cork established by the republican demagogue, John De Morgan.[54] The over-emphasis on Ireland caused tensions between the different wings of the reform community, particularly over issues relating to the Paris Commune. The shooting of the Archbishop of Paris alienated many Irish Catholics from the secular, republican traditions of French politics, and from the platform of the IMMA. In Cork meetings of the Irish branch were broken up and disrupted.[55] The emphasis on Ireland (both in London and New York) reinforced the insularity of the IMWA, causing rifts with Irish sympathisers and superseding in Britain wider issues of identity and ethnicity in areas like London with mixed migrant populations or with a politics coloured by imperial issues. Representations from the IWMA were conspicuous by their absence during the controversy surrounding Governor Eyre's brutal suppression of the Morant Bay rising in Jamaica in 1865, although the *International Herald* did campaign against the government's decision to meet his legal fees after his trial.[56] Despite the increasing presence of a politicised Jewish community in both cities, there was little attempt to engage with their interests. Partly this was a structural issue; Jewish workers in London were seldom unionised, but, equally, some of the emphasis placed on Jewish finance by the currency reformers, anti-monopolists and anti-banking campaigners that increasingly comprised the membership of the IWMA in Britain in its later years led to the profession of anti-semitic sentiments by organs like the *International Herald* in articles about "sweating" and "usury" that militated against the development of such relationships.[57]

The point that the doctrines and organisational initiatives introduced by the General Council of the First International were an uneasy fit with national radical traditions in both Britain and in the United States has been made many times. Indeed, much of the hostility to the International expressed by working-men's organisations and the mouthpieces that reflected their interests, demonstrate the hostility this distance could evoke: "a wealthy exotic that can never take root and flourish on English soil" was the verdict of the *Bee-Hive* on the First International.[58] Paradoxically, however, as members of trades societies

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54   *International Herald*, 10 March 1872, p. 5.

55   *Bee-Hive*, 3 June 1871, the *International Herald*, 27 April 1872, p. 6 and Collins and Abramsky, *Marx and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 244–245.

56   Hall et al, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, pp. 200–204 and the *International Herald*, 20 July 1872, p. 6.

57   *International Herald*, 25 May 1872, p. 4, and 27 September 1873, pp. 4–5, the *Bee-Hive*, 20 April 1867, p. 1 and Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 168–174.

58   *Bee-Hive*, 9 November 1872.

vacated the organisation in Britain, it became more truly representative of the metropolitan radical tradition in its appeal to currency reformers and to a heterodox radical community. This pluralism of different voices in London discomfited the General Council and lay behind its decision to relocate to New York where the more narrow and doctrinaire environment following the expulsion of Section 12 favoured Marxisant purists.[59] Thereafter, the IWMA in the United States became perceived as an exclusive mouthpiece for renegade European refugees, an image it bequeathed to subsequent labour organisations. Both sets of circumstances in London and New York indicate the importance of local traditions of radicalism (that often appeared marginal to the aims of the First International) to the survival of residual radical sub-groups in large urban centres. Rather than living "the latter part of their lives in the odour of sanctity of the Liberalism of Mr Gladstone", as George Lansbury remarked of the apostate British trade union members of the IWMA, veterans like John De Morgan, and William Harrison Riley popularised the transcendentalist philosophies of Walt Whitman in Britain, embarked on communal living experiments, and engaged with the ideas of the US populist movement.[60] The main body of O'Brienites, too, who had been the mainstay of the International in its later stages, embraced an emigrationist philosophy and initiated a scheme to create a perfect society in Kansas.[61] It was these contributions to the ethical socialist and "New Life" movements that helped define the alternative cultures of the 1880s and 1890s in Britain and the United States and that more properly provides a legacy for the underappreciated and marginalised radical traditions of the IWMA.

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59   Collins and Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 264–265.

60   George Lansbury, *My Life* (London, 1928), p. 32, Robert Allen, "'The People's Advocate, Champion and Friend': The Transatlantic Career of Citizen John De Morgan (1848–1926)", *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), pp. 684–711 and for W.H. Riley's later career, the *Labour Leader*, 3 August 1906, p. 170. The belief systems and ideas that overlapped with mid-nineteenth century radical alternative culture and expressed themselves in the US populist movement are described in Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 262–266.
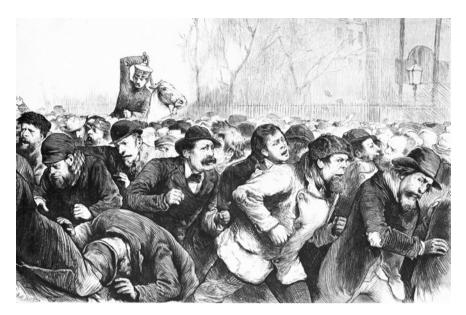
61   Entz, *Llewellyn Castle*, Ch. 2.

FIGURE 18.1   *Riots by the unemployed in New York, 1874.*
SOURCE: "'THE RED FLAG IN NEW YORK'. RIOTS BY THE UNEMPLOYED IN
TOMPKINS SQUARE, NEW YORK IN 1874" (*FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED
NEWS*, 31 JANUARY 1874, P. 344). PRIVATE COLLECTION OF ANTONY
TAYLOR.