

This important book deals with two subjects, though it is impossible to separate them in practice. The first is the history of the First International in Britain, a topic hitherto curiously neglected in the voluminous and growing historiography of that body. The second is a more general contribution to the analysis of Marx' political and theoretical development in the period of the International, and of its importance in the formation of Marxism. The second is naturally of wider interest than the first.

Traditionally the questions asked about the peculiar combination of Marx and the extremely moderate British trade union leaders and Radicals on the General Council, have been why they got together at all, and why they remained together. There has never been much mystery about why the British left should have been willing in principle to cooperate in an International with foreign revolutionaries. There was a long and powerful tradition of solidarity with foreign democrats, and a strong conviction that the cause of democracy was indivisible. The revival of radical and democratic movement in Britain (which was closely linked with trade unionism) had been stimulated by a series of such organised actions of solidarity, with the Italian revolutionaries, with Poland and with the North in the American Civil War. The International strengthened these feelings by offering British workers concrete assistance from the continent in their own trade unionist struggles – by discouraging the import of foreign strike-breakers. Whether this was ever a serious danger may be debated, but there is little doubt that, as the authors point out, the success of the General Council during the London tailors' strike of 1866 "established the International as a force in the labour movement". Why Marx himself came into the organisation originally, is less clear, for he was unknown to most British trade union leaders. The authors show that in fact he was invited among the "distinguished exiles and friends of the people" on the initiative of the French, who may well have known more about him. The attitude of the British towards the later International has been the subject of some controversy. It used to be argued that the Paris Commune and Marx' passionate defence of it antagonised the British moderates, but this can no longer be maintained. In spite of the almost universal press attacks on the Commune and Marx' pamphlet on it, no British trade union disaffiliated from the International, and the resignations of Odger and Lucraft (who had been fervently pro-Communard as late as May 23d) were untypical.

The authors make a more novel contribution to the study of the International in Britain with their analysis of its actual support in this country. This virtually reached its peak in 1867, when perhaps 6 0/0 of trade unionists were affiliated.

The International was always weak in the major industries (except building), and in the provinces which were their centre. Moreover, after the Reform Act and Royal Commission of 1867, the political and trade unionist rights of British workers appeared to be safeguarded by the normal processes of British politics, and the incentive to join the less favourably situated continentals diminished. This did not in itself turn the British leaders against Marx. On the contrary, they supported Marx internationally against Proudhonists and Bakuninists, thus (as the authors acutely point out) ensuring the triumph of Marxism within the International. (They would not have done so against the Mazzinians but Marx had carefully avoided facing them with this choice in the Inaugural Address.) Nevertheless the International both ceased to expand in Britain, and lost much of its practical attraction for the British. Its independent organisation in Britain after 1871 never amounted to much.

It is impossible to deal here with all aspects of Marx' thought during this period on which Collins and Abramsky express opinions – often original, often controversial, and more than once convincing. However, the detailed and acute analysis of the *Inaugural Address* may be mentioned, as also the briefer, but equally acute analysis of the International's silence on the Paris Commune – until after its defeat –, and the interesting remarks about the sharp decline in Marx' output in the last ten years of his life. If I understand the authors' argument correctly, it may be summarised as follows: Marx' strategy in the 1860s in no sense implied the abandonment of the revolutionary perspectives of the *Manifesto*, though for tactical reasons these were not openly expressed in the *Inaugural Address*. The survival of a strong working class movement in Britain, its rise in other countries, and the evident upsurge of the international left, did not, however, offer immediate chances of a working-class conquest of power. They did, however, offer the possibility of constructing a powerful international proletarian movement which, if not excessively weakened by its immaturity or theoretical diversion, could one day play a decisive political role. By 1871 his hopes had been shattered, not so much by the Bakuninist and other opposition within the International, but *first*, by the failure of the General Council to secure control over the British trade unions (whose role Marx had not initially appreciated at all clearly) and *second*, by the failure of the Paris Commune. With the labour movements of the two most advanced countries of Europe liberal-reformist or utterly defeated, no early international revival was to be expected. The best that Marx could do was to turn the Commune into "an inspiration and a legend" for the unpredictable, certain, but probably remote revival of the movement. Under the circumstances the International itself lost its importance, and could be allowed to die, rather than to fall into the hands of the Bakuninists. Marx himself was profoundly shaken by this disappointment and the remarkable barrenness of his last decade was due to this shock. »The revolution had come and the International had proved powerless . . . Marx

could not face the prospect of a long period of painfully slow development, as he had faced it in his thirties." He wrote and did remarkably little between the fall of the Commune and his death, though for the first time in his life he had both time and money for work.

Whether Collins' and Abramsky's arguments are acceptable or not, certain gaps remain which they have not satisfactorily explained, such as the repeated proposal to transfer the General Council to Brussels in 1870. Though the book will doubtless be criticized on this as well as on other grounds, it remains an important contribution – and for Britain a unique one – to the study of the International, and indispensable to all students of the subject. It need hardly be added that the British sources have been exhaustively utilized. German readers may be specially interested in an Appendix which tentatively exculpates Eccarius from the charges of espionage long raised against him.

Birkbeck College,
University of London

E. J. Hobsbawm