Socialist Internationals – a Bibliography. The Database

Presentation, given at the XXXIV IALHI Conference in Dublin, September 2003

Two years ago, in the year 2001, the bibliography "Socialist Internationals – a Bibliography" was published, to mark the 50th anniversary of the re-foundation of the Socialist International in 2001. This work, compiled by Gerd Callesen, lists all known "publications of the various Social-Democratic and Socialist Internationals in the period from 1914 to 2000, whether they are printed or, as in some cases, mimeographed"[1]. Many efforts were made and a lot of people involved to compile this work, that understands itself as "the very first step to find out what was published and where access can be had"[2] to the publications listed in the bibliography.

The printed publication lists approximately 2000 titles from 39 Internationals, among these are 1800 monographic and 200 periodical publications. For each International a brief description of its history is given, followed by its publications that are listed in chronological order. Besides this, there is an introductory essay on the history of the Socialist International and a list of organizations that have contributed to this bibliography.

Publishing reference works nowadays always brings up the question in which format such a work has to be published, which is especially true for bibliographic publications. One still might prefer a printed bibliography to other reference material that is available only on CD-ROM or on the Internet. A database often cannot offer the same usability as a book as one always depends on computer hardware to use it online, and without Internet access it might be even completely unusable. On the other hand certain characteristics of online databases might more than outweigh the advantages of printed reference works. The reference period for the printed bibliography as well as the fact that for many years only few publications have been located leads to the conclusion that a regular updating process of this bibliography is necessary. Actually, the production of an online database as second or alternative version of this bibliography was already planned when the printed version was published.

Another aspect that makes the conversion of the printed bibliography into a database a reasonable project is the chance to acquire new information on publications that have not yet been located. The information of the existence of a bibliography on Socialist Internationals or generally of an International might be spread out easier on the Internet and thus initiate reactions by people or organisations that can provide new information on the Internationals or on single publications. And not only those people will find this new database who already know about its existence, everyone who searches for certain keywords that describe the scope of this project in Google[3] or other search engines will be able to find access to the database, e.g. searching for "socialist internationals" in Google results in a list of more than 3.700 web pages, and the first mentioned in this list is the homepage of this project[4]. And as there is no limitation on the access to the database everyone will be able to use it.

The main problem of the conversion of the printed publication into a database was the fact that the bibliography was based on a MS Word document. A simple conversion of this single but quite voluminous data set into an Internet database was impossible due to technical restrictions. Nevertheless, the Internet version of the bibliography had to be based on a database in order to provide those facilities that characterise a user-friendly application.

---

[1] See Callesen, Gerd: Socialist Internationals – a Bibliography, p. 7.

[2] Ibid., p. 11.

[3] http://www.google.com.

[4] Search performed on the 4th of August 2003 with http://www.google.com.

So the first step was to build up a new database that could serve as basis for the data sets that were meant to become the digital copy of the bibliography. In the past the Library of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation has gained experience in setting up databases on the basis of an application called Allegro[5]. This meant that it was not necessary to find a new software package for this project, instead we could make use of our technical knowledge and of our software resources.

The new Allegro database was created as a copy of our main catalogue, which contained many of those publications listed in the bibliography. First all titles for which the Library of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation is mentioned as holding library in the bibliography have been marked in the main catalogue, then this set of titles, i.e. data sets (as every bibliographic entity is represented by a single data set) has been copied into the new database. Thus we got a significant number of data sets as basis for further work on the bibliographic database. But although the FES Library already had many SI publications in its stock still a great number of titles were missing, and there was no way of using other resources for copying data sets of those titles into the new database. As a consequence it was necessary to catalogue all these titles anew.

At this point another problem was to be solved. Basically, cataloguing books or periodicals demand that these items are present during this process. Of course almost every item had already been catalogued for the printed bibliography and thus a bibliographic description of every document was available. Nevertheless, only the "autopsy principle", i.e. seeing the document when cataloguing it guarantees an adequate bibliographic description of this document, which in turn has a great impact on the functionality of the database, as the bibliographic information produced in this process is the basis for every database query. Nevertheless, in this case it was necessary to do without this principle without loosing librarian's accuracy. So on the basis of the bibliographic descriptions given in the printed bibliography new database entries for every item have been produced.

In this context it was a great help that microfilms or microfiches have been produced from many documents that have not been in stock of the FES Library before. This was one consequence of the conclusion that for several Internationals the holding institutions like the FES Library have only incomplete sets of publications in their stock. So both periodicals and monographic publications have been reproduced this way and can now be found in our library. Thus it was possible to catalogue documents listed in the bibliography using the newly produced microforms.

In addition, the bibliographic description of the existing items in our catalogue had to be modified for the new database due to different cataloguing 'philosophies'. In the introduction to the bibliography it is mentioned that "reports, protocols, etc., have not been included among the periodicals, but in general are registered individually in the bibliography"[6]. The German cataloguing rules though require a periodic description of such items. Thus there have been different bibliographic descriptions for a single document in our catalogue and in the printed bibliography, so the data sets of our catalogue for these documents had to be adapted to the description given in the bibliography, again without loosing relevant information.

---

[5] For more information see http://www.biblio.tu-bs.de/allegro/index.htm; for Internet databases based on Allegro see http://www.biblio.tu-bs.de/allegro/ac-dbs.htm.

[6] See Callesen, Gerd: Socialist Internationals – a Bibliography, p. 9

Finally, all documents listed in the bibliography have been catalogued and indexed in the new database. In addition to these documents I have started to add new acquisitions of our library of the Internationals that are still publishing books or periodicals to the database. However, until now it is unclear how a regularly updating of the online bibliography can be organised. As long as only acquisitions of the FES Library are concerned this will cause no problems, as I have direct access to both databases/catalogues and can directly verify if new publications have been added to our main catalogue that also fit into this bibliographic database due to the publishing organisation. But maintaining a regular and comprehensive updating process would require the same information from all the other holding institutions. There are several ways how this could be arranged, e.g. regular searches in the online catalogues of the contributing organisations for newly catalogued publications of the Internationals or voluntary notifications of those institutions on new acquisitions, sent to our library. Anyway, such a modus operandi would again considerably increase the value of this online bibliography, so it is desirable to find a solution for this problem as soon as possible.

At the moment there are two ways to access this online database: either it is possible to enter the URL[7] directly into the address bar of the Internet browser or, without knowing the complete URL, one can start on the library's homepage, where a link called "special catalogues" will lead to a list of catalogues and databases that also lists this online bibliography with a link to its homepage. Certainly it is always possible to find this database by using any of the popular search engines.

The homepage of this online bibliography links to its different parts. Firstly there are links to two different search masks (called "basic search" and "index search"), then links that lead to the introduction of the bibliography, to the list of the Internationals and to the list of libraries and organisations. Finally, there is a link to the whole bibliography as pdf file, which is identical to the printed edition.

The list of Internationals contains all Internationals mentioned in the bibliography. It lists the Internationals by their English names and presents the Internationals in the same order that has been chosen for the printed publication. The name of each International is followed by two links: the first called "list of publications" leads to the list of publications of this particular International. These publications are presented alphabetically, at first the monographic publications followed by the periodicals. Contrary to the printed bibliography it was not possible to divide this list into chronological sections. The software used for this application simply is not capable of a multi-level sorting of publications. This does not mean though that a chronological sorting is impossible. The search result of a basic or index search can be arranged alphabetically, chronologically or by type of publication (monographs – periodicals). The complete list of publications of a particular International though can only be arranged alphabetically.
The second link called "organisational information" leads to the description of the particular International, which is also given in the printed version. Besides this, different versions of the Internationals' names are mentioned.
Due to additional information given by Gerd Callesen the International Association of Socialist Lawyers has been added to this list, in the printed version of the bibliography it was mentioned only in the introduction.

The list of libraries and organisations lists all the institutions that have provided bibliographic information for the bibliography. As in the printed version this list is organised alphabetically

---

[7] http://library.fes.de/library/english/si.html

by the abbreviations used for every organisation. Besides the abbreviations the current contact details (address, telephone and fax, e-mail and - missing in the printed version - the URL of the homepage) are given. At times these information might change for a certain organisation, therefore this list will be updated regularly, and indeed, compared to the printed edition some details already had to be changed and updated.

The introduction to the bibliography by Gerd Callesen has been converted almost unmodified for the Internet application. Minor updates have been made (e.g. new URL for the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, or the IALHI contact address) and some additional comments were included to supplement the given information with respect to the online database.

The possibilities offered by the two search masks might be regarded as the real surplus value of the online bibliography, as they allow for new ways of searching for publications. The basic search (or Boolean search as Boolean logic can be used for this search mode) enables the user to search with search terms that can be associated with different search aspects (keyword, personal name, title, corporate name, place/publisher). It is possible to combine different search terms with different search aspects in a single query. The result of such a query is a list of titles that contain all the search terms used for this particular search. This list is sorted alphabetically if only titles of one International have been found, the sorting for every list of titles can be changed though (by year of publication, by title or by type of publication). If the result of a search contains publications by more than one International the titles are sorted alphabetically for each International. Unfortunately, in these cases it is impossible to sort the Internationals likewise alphabetically due to the technical problems described earlier, although this might be possible in the future when a newer version of the software used for this database is available. However, this is only a minor problem as the lists generated as a result of a query are usually not too long.

As in the printed edition holding statements are given at the end of each entry (if no holding organisation is known no holding statement is given, unlike to the printed version, where these titles are marked with an asterisk). The holding statements are given as links that lead to the contact details of the particular organisation, which can be found in the list of libraries and organisations alike.

The second search mask, the index search, offers only one input field for the search term, together with a pull-down menu where the index for the query can be chosen. The indexes that can be chosen are identical to the search aspects of the basic search. The result of an index search though is not a list of titles. Instead, a sector of the index chosen for the particular query is presented, where each term listed is a hyperlink that leads to a list of titles where this term appears. The index search might be of special interest if different spellings of a search term for a particular search are possible. The index shown as a search result indicates which different spellings appear in the database.

It would be a great success if the accessibility of the database on the Internet could help to acquire new Information on the Internationals and their publications. Hopefully, the project "Socialists International – a Bibliography" will gain in usability and value by the database.

Marcus Sommerstange, Library of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation