



A STUDY ON THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

Ch.Bikshapathi,

Sr.Lecturer in Political Science,
Sardar Patel College,
Secunderabad.

Abstract

International Workingmen's Association was the first international platform for the workers to discuss their problems. Numerous associations, parties and individuals from various ideologies participated in this association. Many bodies were formed at national and international levels. The IWMA adopted rules and principles to achieve their objectives. The problems of workers from many nations were discussed and resolved. Marx and Engels played a key role and contributed to the Association.

Keywords: Emancipation, Congress, Council, Workers, Proletarians.

Introduction

The International Workingmen's Association, known as the "First International," was founded on September 28, 1864, it sparked a wave of fervour and movement across Europe. Its founding was a pivotal point in the 1860s labour movements, bringing together people from many political backgrounds to fight for class solidarity and the elimination of oppressive conditions. The First International initially encompassed a wide range of beliefs, with British trade unionism predominating. It placed a strong emphasis on economic issues and aimed to improve working conditions for employees without fundamentally opposing capitalism. Mutualists, who were influenced by Proudhon's beliefs, had a different perspective and supported strikes as a useful form of resistance in place of political participation.

This ideological variety encompassed not just reformist impulses but also utopian inspirations and cross-class concepts during the early years of the First International. As the organisation developed, it served as a forum for the expression of broad calls for the emancipation of oppressed populations. This overview of the First International illuminates its founding principles, the many objectives of its participants, and the complicated character of a movement that in the outset mirrored the intricate terrain of European labour conflicts in the 19th century.

The First International developed into a highly centralised organisation like a party structure. Individual members were grouped into local groups, which then created national federations, according to its organisational structure. This arrangement allowed members of certain groups and trade unions to be affiliated, which promoted teamwork. The Congress, which was held annually in various places and served as the forum for the formulation of fundamental policies and ideals, was the pinnacle of its power.

The General Council, which was chosen by the Congress and had its main office in London, was in charge of the International. It coordinated collections to fund strikes worldwide, nominated corresponding secretaries

for each country federation, and was essential in furthering the overall objectives of the International. This captures the essence of the First International's organisational structure and operations.

Formation

Edward Spencer Beesly convened an important meeting in St Martin's Hall in London. A diverse array of foreign labourers attended the gathering, including English Owenites, supporters of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and members of other radical European organisations and Karl marx. It was determined by those present to establish the IWMA.

A committee consisting of twenty-one people was constituted once the IWMA was decided to be established. The committee was composed of prominent individuals, including French and other European delegates, as well as trade union leaders from Britain, such as George Odger, George Howell, Cyrenus Osborne Ward, and Benjamin Lucraft.

The international workingmen's association IWMA was founded to act as a focal point for collaboration and communication amongst working class communities across international borders. The preservation, promotion, and total liberation of the working classes are the association's main goals.

General council

The General Council is made up of labourers who are represented by the IWMA from various nations. The Council is in charge of choosing the required offices, such as the general secretary, treasurer, and the secretaries of the various nations. Between the several local and national IWMA sections, the General Council serves as an international intermediary.

The General Council facilitates the IWMA's local and national branches to easily coordinate and communicate with one another. It makes sure that working-class movements in one nation are aware of developments in other nations, investigates the social conditions of European nations, and engages in discourse on matters of mutual concern. To keep members informed, the General Council releases reports on a regular basis.

The IWMA urges its members to unite disparate working-class groups into national entities in their own nations, understanding the value of unity and collaboration. Each nation's laws will determine how this rule is applied, and autonomous local societies are free to communicate with the General Council directly. Every section is free to designate their secretary to communicate with the General Council on its behalf.

Anyone can join the IWMA who uphold and defend its tenets. Ensuring new members adhere to the organisation's beliefs is the responsibility of local branches. The IWMA, which reflects the global comradeship among working men, places a strong emphasis on providing assistance to members who migrate internationally. Member organisations of the IWMA can continue with their existing structures and operations while taking part in the larger international movement. Every Congress has the authority to amend the General Rules, with approval of the two-thirds majority of the delegates present.

Special rules are to be used to handle any topics not specifically covered by the General Rules, these regulations are subject to amendment at each Congress. The fundamental structure and values of the International Working Men's Association are exemplified by these rules and principles. The organisation promoted equal rights, the end of class discrimination, and the liberation of the working classes with the goal of fostering global working class solidarity. One important component of it was its emphasis on collaboration and solidarity across various working-class groups across different nations.

Inaugural Address

The inaugural starts off by recognizing the suffering of the working class, in spite of considerable industrial and commercial expansion between 1848 and 1864. In 1850, it was predicted that pauperism would end if England increased its imports and exports by 50%. This forecast, however, was not realised since poverty persisted throughout the community.

The predicament of the Irish people is examined, with the north's inhabitants being driven out by machines and the south's sheep farming industry. The population of humans decreased as a result, even though there were fewer sheep. It is discussed between the living circumstances of agricultural labourers in Scotland and England with those of convicted criminals in these two locations. Remarkably, it demonstrates that in terms of working hours and conditions, the criminals did better.

An official investigation conducted during the American Civil War's cotton famine found that a weekly intake of 28,000 grains of carbon and 1,330 grains of nitrogen was deemed sufficient to "avert starvation diseases." This poor nutrition was quite similar to what cotton workers endured throughout the crisis.

A sizable section of the agricultural population under investigation was insufficient in both carbonaceous and nitrogenous diets, and these problems were brought on by extreme poverty. Extended workdays are mentioned as a noteworthy issue as well. The income and property tax returns are cited, demonstrating that although agricultural labourers continued to live in poverty, the wealthiest people witnessed a significant rise in their income.

The Inaugural Address addresses the topic of uneven land distribution by talking about the concentration of land in the hands of a small number of male landed proprietors. The inaugural address highlights the Ten Hours' Bill's accomplishments in reducing manufacturing workers' working hours. One notable achievement is the working class's efforts in enacting this law.

The co-operative movement and the creation of cooperative industries was made possible by the efforts of workingmen. These cooperatives proved that large-scale manufacturing was possible without the exploitation of labour by a class of masters.

The address makes the case that cooperative labour alone will not be sufficient to address the problems of exploitation and economic inequality. The working class needs to hold political power in order to address these problems.

In order for the working class to achieve their freedom, the Inaugural Address highlights the significance of political organisation and international solidarity. It emphasises that to oppose any measures that are detrimental to their interests, the working class has to be informed about diplomatic moves made by their governments and participate in international politics.

"Proletarians of all countries, unite!" is the well-known rallying cry that ends the address. It demands that the working class come together and work together internationally to confront their shared issues and attain their independence.

These ideas capture the main issues, difficulties, and objectives of the working class in Europe during a moment of profound economic and social transformation.

Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels's Contribution:

Karl Marx was invited to join the IWMA General Council after attending the inaugural conference. Marx was nominated for President, but he turned it down in favour of George Odger, who won the presidency.

Karl Marx consented to write the IWMA's General Rules and to summarise the organisation's goals. Marx underlined that the workers themselves should emancipate the working classes and that the fight was for equal rights and the elimination of all forms of class discrimination rather than for privileges. He emphasised that the subject of labour emancipation was a worldwide social issue that called for the cooperation of developed nations, not one that was specific to any one nation or area.

Marx clashed with Pierre Joseph Proudhon and his adherents, who were charged with harbouring utopian fantasies and detesting labour unions. Marx intended to handle this matter in a diplomatic manner. Karl Marx's IWMA opponent Mikhail Bakunin suggested merging his International Alliance of Socialist Democracy with the IWMA, essentially making him co-president. Despite the rejection of this plan, the Alliance went on to become an associated organisation in 1868.

Friedrich Engels became a member of the General Council but declined to become treasurer, believing that working class people should manage financial affairs. In the months that followed, a number of radical Europeans, including Ferdinand Lassalle, Wilhelm Liebknecht, August Bebel, Élisée Reclus, and others, came out in favour of the IWMA. The IWMA supported strikes that were occurring around Europe, helping the striking workers in Paris to win their victory by providing financial support from British trade unions.

Conclusion

The First International was a revolutionary worldwide workers organisation created in 1864 and headed by prominent members of the French and British trade unions. Karl Marx was not part of its formation at first, but he played a prominent role later. The International established a highly centralised organisation made up of national federations, local organisations, and individual members. The General Council, while its annual Congress developed the organisation's guiding principles. The First International's lasting contribution to the

worldwide struggle for workers' rights is its creative approach to transnational workers' solidarity, which opened the door for other labour movements to unite.

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