Class vs. Nation, Class and the Nation, Between Class and Nation? Labour's Response to the National Question, c.1870–1939 with Special Reference to Britain and Germany

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Few historians would doubt the huge influence of the metanarratives of "nation" and "class" on nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. Both had risen to prominence in the midst of the massive upheaval that followed nineteenth-century industrialization. Both were hugely successful defensive mechanisms promising stable identities and continuity in a rapidly changing world. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the nascent European labour movements began to build their political claims on the language of "class", while being shaped to a considerable extent by their respective national frameworks. The tension between this "national" framework and the more international aspirations of the language of class was present from the beginning of the modern labour movement. Examples from Britain and Germany show how organized labour constructed identities that attempted to reconcile the languages of these seemingly antagonistic concepts.

Peu d'historiens douteraient de l'énorme influence qu'ont eue les métanarratifs de « nation » et de « classe » sur l'histoire du XIX^e^ et du XX^e^ siècles. Tous deux avaient atteint la prééminence lors des bouleversements consécutifs à l'industrialisation du XIX^e^ siècle. Tous deux ont remporté énormément de succès comme mécanismes de défense, promettant des identités stables et la continuité dans un monde évoluant rapidement. Durant la deuxième moitié du XIX^e^ siècle, les mouvements ouvriers naissants d'Europe commencèrent à revendiquer la langue des « classes » sur la scène politique tout en étant façonnés dans une large mesure par leurs cadres nationaux respectifs. La tension entre ce cadre « national » et les aspirations plus internationales de la langue des classes était présente dès le début du mouvement ouvrier moderne. Des exemples de Grande-Bretagne et d'Allemagne montrent comment le travail organisé a construit des identités qui tentaient de concilier les langues de ces concepts en apparence contradictoires.

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FEW HISTORIANS would doubt the huge influence of the metanarratives of "nation" and "class" on nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. Both had risen to prominence (if not dominance) in the midst of the massive upheaval which followed in the wake of nineteenth-century industrialization. Both were hugely successful defensive mechanisms promising stable identities and continuity in a rapidly changing world. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the nascent European labour movements began to build their political claims on the language of "class", although the older language of "the people" often survived and merged with the new discourse of class in a variety of ways. At the same time, labour movements across Europe acted within national frameworks which came to shape their outlook to a considerable extent.

The tension between this "national" framework and the more international aspirations of the language of class was present right from the beginning of the modern labour movement. How did organized Labour construct identities that attempted to reconcile the languages of nation and class? Which difficulties did it encounter with those attempts? Finally, how did the languages of class and nation end up as seemingly antagonistic concepts? Those are the three questions that I wish to explore, mainly with relation to the British and German examples. Furthermore, in both countries the working classes were badly divided by strong ethnic identities that also affected the outlook of the labour movement. The relationship between class and ethnic identities is discussed with particular reference to Étienne Balibar's terms "class racism" and "self-racialisation". The "institutional racialisation of manual labour" was closely intertwined with the "self-racialisation of the working class", which was to have important consequences for the relationship between indigenous workers in Britain and Germany and those perceived as "foreign".[1]

In the course of the nineteenth century, the language of the nation became increasingly the property of the political right.[2] At the end of the eighteenth century, the idea of the nation had been tied firmly to an emancipatory agenda. In the American and French revolutions of the 1770s and 1780s in particular, it was primarily an anti-absolutist weapon. It stood for freedom, citizenship, and mass political participation. Liberal nationalism became a beacon of hope for those social groups marginalized and excluded from the centres of political power. Yet with the emergence of more conservative, integral nationalisms in the second half of the nineteenth century, nation-states emphasized exclusionary policies, especially against immigrants and national minorities, which excluded those groups from access to social welfare and citizenship rights. National and ethnic issues became increasingly

1 Étienne Balibar, "Class Racism", in Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 204–216.

2 Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Varieties of the Nation State in Modern History: Liberal, Imperialist, Fascist and Contemporary Notions of Nation and Nationality", in Michael Mann, ed., *The Rise and Decline of the Nation State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 210–226.

intertwined, and the national idea became tied to Social Darwinian notions of the "survival of the fittest". The language of the nation, as spoken by the political right, was explicitly non-inclusive. It fed on the delineation of strict boundaries: ethnic, gender, and class boundaries in particular. Liberal nationalism had, of course, never been entirely free of those borders. After all, even liberal nationalists rarely envisaged workers, or for that matter women, as equal partners in the nation. Their visions of national communities consisted by and large of communities of male, educated, well-to-do individuals sharing the same cultural code. Yet the theoretical universalism of liberal nationalism was abandoned by integral nationalism in favour of the open celebration of exclusionary mechanisms that left large sections of the population out in the cold.

By constructing the nation as mirror opposite to the concept of class, integral nationalism also attempted to force upon the young labour movement the stigma of anti-nationalism. Yet large sections of the left never accepted any straightforward dichotomy between the ideas of "nation" and "class". Many labour movements the world over perceived themselves as heirs to liberal nationalism, championing the idea of a good progressive patriotism that was juxtaposed to a bad reactionary nationalism. For many nineteenth-century socialists, including Marx, the nation was a necessary step on the road to socialism.[3] The unified nation-state made sense economically, and it was on its territory that the ultimate liberation of the working class would take place. The class identities propagated by Labour were not opposed to national identities; they often complemented each other. After all, as Eric Hobsbawm famously remarked: "Men and women did not choose collective identification as they chose shoes, knowing that one could only put on one pair at a time."[4]

Hence, many labour movements attempted to invoke the languages of "nation" and "class" at one and the same time, in both their political practice and their theory. Thus, in the early twentieth century, the Australian Labour Party played a key role in constructing the meaning of the nation, tying it firmly to notions of the welfare state, tariff reform, and racialist "White Australia" policies.[5] In the United States, Labour republicanism vigorously defended the "American standard" combining national sentiment with democratic principle, a critique of monopoly power and demands for trade union rights as well as market regulation.[6] Left-wing populist republicanism in France frequently invoked the French revolution as an important reference

3 I. Cummins, *Marx, Engels and National Movements* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

4 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 123.

5 David W. Lovell, "Australian Socialism to 1917: A Study of the Relations Between Socialism and Nationalism", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, special issue no. 40 (1994), pp. 144–159; John Murphy, "Populism and Democracy: A Reading of Australian Radical Nationalism", *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 16 (1987), pp. 85–99.

6 Neville Kirk, "The Working Class in the United States: Between Radical Republicanism and the 'American Standard' ", in Stefan Berger and Angel Smith, eds., *Nationalism, Labour and Ethnicity, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 164–192.

point for specifically left-wing notions of *la patrie*.[7] In India, important sections of the labour movement supported the nationalist campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s because they could tie demands for a nation-state to demands for higher wages and better working conditions.[8] Furthermore, some of the most prominent theoreticians of the Social Democratic and Communist left realized the importance of national identity and wrote about it at length. Eduard Bernstein, Otto Bauer, V. I. Lenin, and Rudolf Rocker, to mention but a few, all paid considerable attention to the national question and came up with a wide variety of answers as to how national identities could best be reconciled with class identities.[9]

The period between the 1870s and the 1930s was crucial for the co-option of Labour into many European nation-states. Such co-option was often based on complex negotiations and intricate compromise. Class and national identities were often compatible, although such compatibility could sometimes be of a precarious nature. One of the biggest problems of the left was to delineate a progressive Labour nationalism from the various right-wing nationalisms that Labour opposed. It seems particularly appropriate to choose the British and German labour movements to illustrate the difficulties involved in this exercise, as they are widely regarded as being on opposite ends of the wide spectrum of possible relationships between Labour and nationalism. Britain is often seen as one of those countries (Australia, the United States, and France would be other examples) where a liberal national heritage remained dominant. Labour, thus goes the argument, found it relatively easy to buy into this heritage. By contrast, in Germany the decisive break with liberal nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century meant that Social Democracy found it more and more difficult to carve out a niche within the existing concepts of the nation-state. Social Democrats were thus forced to develop an alternative "oppositional" nationalism, that is to champion concepts of the nation distinct from and often in opposition to the dominant concepts of the nation championed by other political forces. Furthermore, where the national discourse in Britain is assumed to have been relatively homogeneous and stable, in Germany the manifold political ruptures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ensured a multiplicity of competing national discourses, many of which proved mutually incompatible.[10] In what follows I challenge briefly those comparisons that juxtapose assumptions about a reasonably unproblematic integration of British Labour

7 Brian Jenkins, *Nationalism in France: Class and Nation Since 1789* (London: Routledge, 1980).

8 Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *Imperial Power and Popular Politics: Class, Resistance and the State in India, 1850–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

9 See, more recently, Michael Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labour Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and Anarchist Theory* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

10 The classic case of contrasting British and German Labour's experiences with and subsequent attitude to the nation-state is John Schwarzmantel, *Socialism and the Idea of the Nation* (London: Harvester and Wheatsheaf, 1991).

with notions of an almost complete exclusion of the German labour movement from the nation-state.

Anti-socialism was a prominent feature of German and British society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Social Democrats in Imperial Germany (SPD) were widely denounced as "fellows without a fatherland" and excluded from "respectable" bourgeois society. The Protestant and Catholic churches (the latter with considerable more success than the former) attempted to inculcate in their flocks religious sentiments which were supposed to work as a bulwark against socialism. With many Protestant ministers, religion and nationalism were in fact two sides of the same coin. The Imperial German state heavily recruited the educational system in its battle against Social Democracy. The Imperial German armies were widely perceived as "school of the nation", with Social Democrats systematically excluded from veterans' organizations from the 1880s onwards. Social Democrats in the Kaiserreich faced police harassment, unfair imprisonment, and dubious legal proceedings. However, even in the darkest years of the Anti-Socialist Laws (1878–1890), the repression of Social Democrats always had its limits in the rule of law. Bismarckian welfare reforms attempted unsuccessfully to wean workers away from Social Democracy. Powerful German employers could afford to keep socialist unions out of the workshops before 1914, and they largely financed vociferous anti-socialist organizations such as the Imperial League against Social Democracy. If many leading Social Democrats perceived parliament as the holy grail of people's sovereignty, the party's work in parliament was made difficult by its inability to find political allies. The SPD faced deep hostility from the Conservatives and National Liberals, whereas the small number of left liberals who favoured cooperation with the SPD did not make much difference: Social Democrats remained excluded from power at the national level of politics in Imperial Germany, and many well-functioning anti-socialist alliances in the German states and municipalities ensured that, even if the SPD was often the strongest party, it was kept at arm's length from exercising power.

All this clearly amounts to a good deal of exclusion from the nation-state. However, the picture in Britain does not really look a great deal better. Christianity was arguably more important to British than to German socialism, but the high politicization of the churches in the second half of the nineteenth century meant that the Labour Party had nowhere to turn for support. As in Germany, British schools were widely used to implant nationalism into the minds of children and youth. Militarism undoubtedly pervaded British civilian life to a lesser extent than was the case in Germany. The absence of compulsory military service clearly mattered. Nevertheless, in the 1900s about 22 per cent of all British men aged between 17 and 40 had some experience of military life. Perhaps more importantly, many workers encountered the army only during periods of extensive industrial conflict when it appeared to side with the employers. The police in Britain were widely per-

ceived by workers as an instrument of class rule, and the British judiciary based many of its controversial rulings at the beginning of the twentieth century on its firm belief that repressive controls needed to be enforced upon the labour movement. Britain, like Germany, was a pioneer of the modern welfare state, and we can observe similar attempts to establish, through social welfare, a kind of state control over large areas of working-class life. In Britain anti-socialists such as the Anti-Socialist Union also relied upon the generous support of business. Yet employers were not strong enough to keep unions at the gates of factories and workshops. However, as many of those unions were non-socialist, arguably there was less of a threat emanating from them. Ultimately, both British and German employers clearly followed strategies that aimed to pacify industrial conflict. British Labour's "parliamentary road to socialism" has been minutely documented,[11] but the party undoubtedly also faced considerable hostility from Conservatives and Liberals alike.

Between the 1880s and the 1920s, despite the manifold exclusionary practices, both Britain and Germany witnessed an increasing, albeit always contested, integration into the mainstream of the nation-state. Initial hostility and non-cooperation gave way to an increasing recognition that political parties representing millions of people could not simply be ignored in the age of mass politics. Social reform measures were introduced by Otto von Bismarck and David Lloyd-George before 1914 in an attempt to contribute to the solution of the "social question". While social reform cannot be reduced to efforts to stem the rise of socialism in both countries, the rise of the welfare state did give workers' organizations an increasing stake in the nation-state. The official nationalism propagated by the state apparatus in both Britain and Germany had an important impact on the labour movement. Wide sections of British Labour adopted the prevalent imperialist and monarchist discourses and came to perceive themselves as representatives of a British nation. As such, many Labour leaders remained wary of anything that smacked of Celtic nationalism or devolution. In Germany, Social Democratic republicanism could be shot through with considerable doses of monarchism, and the party's colonial experts Gustav Noske and Eduard Bernstein represented ideas of a "benign colonialism" which was to educate and "civilise" the native population rather than exploit and repress it. British Labour leaders could be proud of the glorious traditions of parliamentarism in their country, just as German Social Democrats were identifying with the legacy of 1848 and upholding notions of the rule of law. They castigated the Imperial German authorities for not adhering to those rules and for attempting to bend them wherever possible, but the Social Democrats' actions in parliament left no doubt: far from using the Reichstag as a mere propaganda platform to propagate the aim of revolution and the overthrow of capitalism, Social Democratic parliamentarians worked hard for the implementation of

11 See especially Ralph Miliband's classic *Parliamentary Socialism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961).

practical reforms that would make Imperial Germany a more democratic and a more socially just society. In Britain, as James Hinton has emphasized, a strong tradition of "Labour voluntarism", which relied on working-class associational culture rather than the state, became increasingly overshadowed in the twentieth century by a parallel tradition of "Labour Jacobinism", which attempted to construct "citizenship in a positive relationship between working-class organisations and a powerful, transforming state".[12] Ultimately both labour movements felt alienated from the nation-state, and yet, at the same time, both increasingly felt that they had a stake in the nation, that they belonged to and even best represented the community of people making up the nation. In fact, Marcel van der Linden, comparing the attitudes of different European working-class parties towards the nation-state, found the British and German parties identifying relatively strongly with their respective nation-states.[13]

If what we witness in the first three decades of the twentieth century amounts to slow, if uneven, integration, one would expect an increasingly positive positioning of Labour within the national discourse. The strong internationalism of socialist parties across Europe was tied to the manifold experience of alienation and exclusion from the nation-state. Marx's powerful suggestion that workers did not have a fatherland made sense to many of those to whom such a fatherland was denied by the ruling classes. Yet, of course, famously, Marx's thinking on the national question was fraught with contradictions. On the one hand he interpreted nationalism as an instrument of the ruling classes by which to defeat movements for social emancipation. On the other, however, he also carefully distinguished between progressive "historical" nations and backward nations which had no right to demand an existence for themselves. Marx's most influential disciple among Second International Marxists, Karl Kautsky, was always prone to treat the national question with derision and a good deal of oversimplification. He predicted, for example, that nations would simply fade away as the internationalization of capital proceeded and that the different national languages would become mere dialects.[14]

Yet, long before the Marxist turn of the SPD at Erfurt in 1891 (primarily the result of persecution under the Anti-Socialist Law), Ferdinand Lassalle, founder of the first socialist party in Germany in 1863 and, next to Marx and Engels, the most influential theoretician of German Social Democracy in the

12 James Hinton, "Voluntarism Versus Jacobinism: Labor, Nation and Citizenship in Britain, 1850–1950", *International Labor and Working Class History*, vol. 48 (1995), pp. 68–90.

13 Marcel van der Linden, "The National Integration of European Working-Classes (1871–1914)", *International Review of Social History*, vol. 33 (1988), p. 286. I have discussed the many ambiguities of integration and exclusion of British and German labour at greater length in Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900–1931: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). See also Stefan Berger, "British and German Socialists Between Class and National Solidarity", in Berger and Smith, eds., *Nationalism*, pp. 31–63.

14 Karl Kautsky, "Die moderne Nationalität", *Neue Zeit*, vol. 5 (1887), p. 541.

nineteenth century, attempted to merge the Social Democratic and national agendas. Only if workers were fully integrated into the nation-state as citizens, according to his argument, would they feel loyal to the nation-state. If they were fully integrated as citizens, then the substitution of a socialist for the existing capitalist economy would logically follow.[15] In the 1890s and 1900s the father of revisionism and self-declared Marxist Eduard Bernstein argued that identification with the democratic, socially responsible nation-state was the precondition for any true internationalist friendship.[16] These lines of thought, intertwined, as they were, with the political practice of participating in a national political framework, contributed to the willingness of Social Democrats to interpret the war of 1914 as a war of "national defence" and "national survival". The SPD's culture and milieu had already been heavily militarized before 1914. This, after all, was a party in which leading members carried nicknames such as "the General", "the Emperor", and the "Red Czar". Party conferences were referred to as "army manoeuvres", and the individual party member became a "party soldier".[17] In the Weimar Republic, widely perceived as a Social Democratic creature, democratic patriotism became almost commonplace among SPD members. Social Democratic theorists such as Hermann Heller and Rudolf Hilferding emphasized the importance of democratic and parliamentary structures for the evolution of socialism in Germany and attempted to reconcile Social Democrats further with the German nation-state. Even the Communist left, which perceived the Communist International as the true fatherland of the working class, was prone to mobilizing the national question for its own purposes: hence the Communists' drastic denunciations of the Versailles Treaty and their participation in the struggle against the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. In the interwar period, only the anarchist left firmly rejected nationalism as the "religion of the modern state".[18] However, even anarchists were infected with the nationalist virus, and some of the " 'founders' of anarchism sometimes displayed the worst excesses of ethno-nationalism".[19]

The British Labour Party, of course, never took a Marxist turn, although several of its leaders had read Marx and were influenced by Marxist thinking. As a self-consciously British party, Labour could tag onto a tradition of "radical patriotism" ranging back to the late eighteenth century. Hence the party could and did portray itself as defending the "ancient liberties of the freeborn Englishman". Leading left-wing writers such as H. M. Hyndman,

15 Shlomo Na'aman, *Lassalle* (Hanover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschichte, 1970), pp. 377–408.

16 Manfred B. Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism: Eduard Bernstein and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 189–197.

17 Günther Hauk, "Armeekorps auf dem Weg zur Sonne. Einige Bemerkungen zur kulturellen Selbstdarstellung der Arbeiterbewegung", in Dietmar Petzina, ed., *Fahnen, Fäuste, Körper. Symbolik und Kultur der Arbeiterbewegung* (Essen: Klartext, 1986), pp. 69–89.

18 One of the key texts here was Rudolf Rocker, *Nationalism and Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1936).

19 Carl Levy, "Anarchism and Nationalism in Europe, 1870–1939" (paper presented at the European Social Science History Conference, Amsterdam, April 12–15, 2000).

leader of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), and Robert Blatchford, editor of the influential *Clarion* newspaper, were not shy to champion the national idea, and the party's own programmatic statements often reflected its explicit commitment to the nation-state.[20] The two most popular hymns in the Labour Church movement of the 1890s were "God Bless Our Native Land" and "God Save the Working Man". Cartoons in the socialist press often depicted the national saint, St. George, as defender of the poor and the workers.[21] In and immediately after the war, Labour's ethno-nationalism reached unprecedented height. While "the German" was perceived as "twentieth-century Attila", British Labour propagandists produced tomes of confessions of absolute loyalty to Britain.[22] In light of all this, Tom Nairn has in fact argued that the Labour Party, through its Britishness, was one of the few institutions/ ideologies to paper over the deep cultural, linguistic, and social differences in the multi-national state.[23] Yet it was also on the Celtic fringe that socialists attempted to fuse socialism with Welsh, Irish, and Scottish nationalism.[24] Even on the small Communist left in Britain, there was often a vague notion that, in Raphael Samuel's words, "Communism, though not intended as such, was a way of being English, a bridge by which the children of the ghetto entered the national culture."[25]

Yet this can be at best only one side of the story. After all, Labour's thinking on nationalism was deeply influenced by the writings of theorists of imperialism such as J. A. Hobson and Norman Angell. Time and again they had denounced the "new imperialism" after 1895, warning in particular of its illiberal and militarist effects on Britain. Following Angell and Hobson, British Labourites, just like German Marxists, came to the conclusion that nationalism was ultimately an ideology of the ruling classes to defeat movements for social emancipation. Hence it is not surprising that, as Paul Addison has noted, the majority of Labour Party supporters "behaved like outsiders in a country that belonged to someone else".[26] A Mass Observation report as late as 1938 came to the conclusion that the majority of workers were uninterested in national affairs. So-called "national crises" only regis-

20 *Appeal to the Nation* (London: The Labour Party, 1923); *Labour and the Nation* (London: The Labour Party, 1928).

21 Paul Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881–1924* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1998).

22 For several examples, see Friedrich Weckerlein, *Streitfall Deutschland. Die britische Linke und die "Demokratisierung" des Deutschen Reiches, 1900–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

23 The others being royalty, imperialism, and racialism. See, in particular, Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy* (London: Verso, 1994).

24 David Howell, *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

25 Raphael Samuel, "The Lost World of British Communism", *New Left Review*, vol. 154 (1985), p. 53.

26 Paul Addison, "Britain and the Politics of Social Patriotism", in S. Aster, ed., *The Second World War as National Experience* (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1981), p. 48.

tered with workers if directly linked to things that mattered in their everyday lives, such as food prices, rents, and employment conditions. The rapid decline of National Labour in the 1930s and the quick recovery of the Labour Party demonstrated the limited appeal of left-wing nationalism among the wider working-class electorate.

For both the British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, it became a particularly vexed question how to position themselves towards immigrants and national minorities who were often perceived as a direct threat to national cohesion and unity. Imperial Germany was a "labour importing country" where foreigners had no civil rights and were kept as a dependent and disposable labour force.[27] Imperial German governments became famous for their ruthless Germanization policies which attempted to destroy any outlets for "foreign" cultural identities. On one hand immigrants and national minorities had no better champions than Social Democrats, who campaigned steadfastly to give foreigners the same rights as Germans and to adopt more liberal and tolerant policies towards national minorities. On the other hand, however, German Social Democrats found it very difficult to accept national ambitions of the Polish, Danish, and Alsatian national minorities within the boundaries of the Reich. The SPD tended to reduce those national questions to questions of the equality of citizenship within the existing German nation-state. Perhaps even more importantly, Social Democrats were also prone to perceive "foreigners" as difficult to organize and as strike-breakers who were constantly willing to undercut wages. Hence some Social Democrats also demanded further restrictions on immigration and the preferential employment of German workers.

Yet such reactions have also to be set into their proper context, namely the close interrelationship between ethnic nationalism and what Étienne Balibar has called the conscious "institutional racialisation of manual labour" by the ruling classes: government, the state apparatus, and employers.[28] Under the conditions of capitalist wage labour, the new proletariat became the target of a new racism in Europe, what Balibar has termed "class racism".[29] A new "race of labourers" was increasingly defined by social scientists and public administrators by their allegedly hereditary material and spiritual poverty, their propensity to criminality, congenital vice, dirtiness, sexual promiscuity, and degeneracy. Richard Evans's masterly social history of Hamburg in the nineteenth century demonstrates time and again how the German middle classes felt morally superior to workers and at the same time feared the workers' disregard for their own bourgeois norms and society. In the city's housing and health reforms after the cholera epidemic of 1892, class racism

27 Martin Forberg, "Foreign Labour, the State and Trade Unions in Imperial Germany, 1890–1918", in W. R. Lee and Eve Rosenhaft, eds., *State, Social Policy and Social Change in Germany, 1880–1994*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Berg, 1997), p. 112.

28 Balibar, "Class Racism", p. 210f.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 209.

played a very important role.[30] In late nineteenth-century Britain, notions of "backwardness" and "decay" promoted a more rational organization of the working-class poor. The "physical deterioration" of workers was often expressed in terms of "racial degeneracy".[31] Social progress began to be discussed in terms of "racial progress" or "racial decline". The rise of the eugenics movement in Britain and Germany had its origins in class racist assumptions and theories. The very bodies of workers were perceived as fragmented and mutilated, the subject of the violence of machinery that further debilitated the workers' existence.[32] The debilitation was biologized and became hereditary, which made it necessary to think about ways of ensuring the "health of the nation". Excluded from normal humanity, workers were also not regarded as worthy of citizenship. In the course of the nineteenth century, the ruling classes in advanced capitalist countries in Europe and North America increasingly attempted to remove the label of "dangerous classes" from the workers and to de-racialize their discourse on workers. Instead, the discourse and label were transferred increasingly to immigrants, foreigners, and colonial subjects.

Yet race and racism, as Balibar also insists, were never just used as tools of the ruling classes to exclude workers and combat class consciousness among them. Workers responded to their institutional racialization with self-racialization. English workers organized around symbols of English ethnic and national origin against Irishmen, Jews, Blacks, Germans, and all those who were constructed as "different". By the same token, German workers organized around symbols of German ethnic and national origin against Poles, Jews, Alsatians, Danes, and other minorities or "foreigners". Yet ethnicity and race was not the only focus of the workers' self-racialization. By stressing the importance of their class origin and putting the highest value on manual labour (despising all other forms of labour), they produced various forms of "workerism" mainly directed against members of other social classes. In fact, in this way "the signifiers of class racism" were turned back against the middle classes.[33] Both "workerism" and working-class racism hence had their deeper roots in the self-racialization of the working class. For good reasons workers came to perceive themselves as a closed body. It helped them to preserve gains that had been won in the past. It maintained the cohesion of their organizations and the traditions of their struggles. In practice, workerism and working-class racism were often closely interlinked. Thus the uprising of Welsh miners and transport workers in 1910–1911 was not only directed against employers but was accompanied by

30 Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830–1910* (London: Penguin, 1987).

31 Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: A Social History of Britain, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), especially pp. 230–244.

32 Balibar, "Class Racism", p. 211.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

fierce attacks on Chinese laundries and Jewish shops. The unmitigated hostility of the SPD's main daily newspaper, *Vorwärts*, against the capitalist system was accompanied by occasional outbursts against "Russian garbage cossacks" and "uncleanly Pollacks".

During the 1920s employers in the German shipping industry consciously replaced Germans with foreign workers because the latter were less expensive and less militant. As Hartmut Rübner has demonstrated, the Social Democratic unions failed to see this connection and instead chose to adopt the racialist discourse. They reappropriated the language of race to fight job insecurity, increasing health risks, declining real wages, and deteriorating union membership. Recourse to the "national interest" thus made unions collude with employers in the segmentation of the work force along national/racial lines.[34] There are illuminating comparisons to be made with the British shipping industry in the interwar period. British employers, like their German counterparts, employed a number of racist strategies and constructed racial differences in order to lower wages. The British National Union of Seamen, again like their German counterparts, failed to expose these practices. Instead the union colluded with employers and, as Laura Tabili has shown, introduced a racist discourse to maintain established wage hierarchies, prevent any rank-and-file radicalization, and strengthen the union's position *vis-à-vis* the employers.[35]

Equally striking similarities are revealed by a comparison of the attitudes of the Lanarkshire Miners' Union and the Alte Verband (the Social Democratic miners' union founded in 1889) in the Ruhr towards Polish and Lithuanian-speaking workers before 1914. In Scotland and the Ruhr the self-perception of the indigenous miners as "independent colliers" prevented solidarity with the unskilled immigrant. Furthermore, the language problem, debates about higher accident rates due to the employment of foreigners, and complaints about their alleged uncleanliness, drunkenness, and taste for fighting all proved important barriers to any smooth integration of these migrants into their host societies. Yet, ultimately, the Scottish unions could mobilize and integrate the immigrants, while the Alte Verband could not. The latter soon faced a rival in an independent Polish union organization, which was by no means less militant but retained a fierce independence from its German counterparts. There are many reasons for this: the number of migrants into the Scottish coalfield was in the hundreds; in the Ruhr it was in the hundreds of thousands. The German union movement was already divided according to different ideologies, whereas the British union move-

34 Hartmut Rübner, "Lebens-, Arbeits- und gewerkschaftliche Organisationsbedingungen chinesischer Seeleute in der deutschen Handelsflotte. Der maritme Aspekt der Ausländerbeschäftigung vom Kaiserreich bis in den NS-Staat", *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1997), pp. 1–41.

35 Laura Tabili, *"We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

ment was not. But perhaps the most important reason for the different success rate of indigenous Scottish and German unions in organizing the migrants lay with the different reaction of the state. After all, the ruthless Germanization policies of the Imperial German state simply had no equivalent in Britain.[36]

Britain in fact had a long tradition of comparatively liberal immigration laws. Yet in the first decade of the twentieth century things began to change. Mechanisms of exclusion began to be introduced which were aimed at discriminating against foreigners and immigrants, "the other" against whom the indigenous worker could be positively contrasted. A wave of Russian Jewish immigration served as reason for the government to introduce an *Aliens Act* in 1905. The act was extended both in 1914 and 1918. The 1908 *Pensions Act* for the first time introduced pensions for citizens over 70. They were means-tested. Persons with a criminal conviction and those on poor relief were excluded (the latter until 1911), and initially even a reference of good character was required before any payments could be made. Furthermore, only a person who "for at least twenty years ... has been a British subject, and has had his residence ... in the United Kingdom" qualified for a British pension.[37] Such disqualification of foreigners had no parallel in the first German pensions law of 1889. However, German pensions, unlike British ones, were not financed out of central taxation. Workers and employers alike paid contributions that entitled them to a pension. The size of their pension depended on the payments made from their wages.[38]

Officially the Labour Party always argued against restricting immigration. Many Labour leaders believed firmly that Britain had to remain the "home of freedom". However, at the same time they also widely perceived foreign immigrants as potential blacklegs and wage-cutters who would be difficult to organize in the labour movement. Hence the Trades Union Congress (TUC) passed several resolutions hostile to immigration in the 1890s and 1900s, and two of the most committed internationalists of the Labour Party, Bruce Glasier and Keir Hardie, found themselves arguing against further immigration into Britain at about the same time. Glasier, like many others, clearly felt threatened by images of uncontrollable waves of wild foreigners descending on Britain's shores: "neither the principle of the brotherhood of man nor the principle of social equality implies that brother nations or brother men may crowd upon us in such numbers as to abuse our hospitality,

36 Kenneth Lunn, "Reactions to Lithuanian and Polish Immigrants in the Lanarkshire Coalfield, 1880–1914", in Lunn, ed., *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society, 1870–1914* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980), pp. 308–342; on the Ruhr, see John Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labour Movement: Xenophobia and Solidarity in the Coal Fields of the Ruhr, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

37 *Public General Statutes*, no. 8 (London: HMSO, 1908), chap. 40, p. 176.

38 I am grateful to Peter Hennock for pointing this out to me. For the details of the German act, see Erich von Woedtke, *Das Reichsgesetz, betreffend die Invaliditäts- und Alterversicherung, vom 22. Juni 1889*, 4th ed. (Berlin: J. Guttentag, 1889).

overturn our institutions or violate our customs."[39] Cities with large-scale Jewish immigration witnessed high levels of working-class anti-semitism in the early twentieth century,[40] and few Labour leaders were bold enough to envisage class solidarity between black and white workers. Ben Tillett, the British dockworkers' leader, conceded that both suffered from capitalist exploitation, but he was adamant that there could be "no comradeship between these two sets of slaves; for ever the black is black — and the white is white."[41]

In Britain and Germany alike, the labour movement's opposition to immigration and its pandering to ethno-nationalist sentiments were particularly strong, where indigenous workers felt directly threatened by "foreign" competition. Examples are provided by the British boot and shoe operatives, tailors, and furniture makers, as well as clerks who turned on German immigrants in the 1880s and 1890s. In Germany the perfect example would be the building trade, where time and again German workers were dismissed and replaced by foreigners. The sole reference to job competition, however, cannot adequately explain the attractions of ethnic and racial identities for workers. As David Roediger has shown for the United States, issues of race are not reducible to issues of class. The construction by workers of "whiteness" and its "other", namely "black", was a response to the imposition of a new work ethos by the new capitalist economy and to a sense of dependency on wage labour. A post-revolutionary and strongly republican white working class in the making was at the same time based on the racist exclusion of blacks as unfit for citizenship. Class and race policies went hand in hand to produce demands for inclusion into the nation-state by white workers and to produce barriers against the inclusion of blacks.[42] Historians of the European working class would do well to take those insights on board and to ask, more than they have done so far, what workers had to gain by actively constructing themselves as members of a more privileged race. Working-class agency in racism remains an important topic for labour studies.

On the whole, as I hope I have demonstrated, only a minority on the British and German left saw any clear-cut dichotomy between the concepts of class and nation. Labour leaders in both countries often perceived themselves as heirs to a progressive liberal nationalism which allegedly had been betrayed by its erstwhile champions, the liberal middle classes. While the latter had become the main propagators of various illiberal state and integral nationalisms, Labour in Britain, and arguably even more so in Germany,

39 Cited in Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890–1960* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 196.

40 A. Lee, "Aspects of the Working Class Response to the Jews in Britain, 1880–1914", in Lunn, ed., *Hosts*, p. 118.

41 Logie Barrow, "White Solidarity in 1914", in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), vol. 1, p. 281.

42 David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

came to construct alternative notions of national belonging that tended to be closely intertwined with class identities. A brief comparison of Britain and Germany suggests that it is too simplistic to juxtapose notions of a non-socialist labour movement in Britain, which did not espouse strong class identities and therefore found it easier to appropriate existing constructions of the nation-state, with notions of an orthodox Marxist movement in Germany, excluded and alienated from the Imperial German state and therefore anti-national in its orientation. Instead the comparison shows a perplexing web of exclusionary and inclusionary mechanisms at work in both countries. Strong forms of institutionalized anti-socialism stood next to Labour's commitment to a national welfare state; the unfair treatment of Labour by the law courts and the police stood next to its firm belief in parliamentarism and the rule of law. Such ambiguities were reflected in the theoretical approaches of the Social Democratic left towards the nation-state: in Germany the fluidity of Marx's thinking about the nation increasingly gave way to a more positive endorsement of the national idea in Lassalle and Bernstein. Labour in Britain could adapt to a tradition of radical left-wing patriotism, yet this did not prevent the widespread alienation of Labour from official variants of nationalism. British and German Labour's forever shifting attempts to buy into aspects of a diverse and bewildering range of national identities produced particularly vexed contradictions when it came to their positioning *vis-à-vis* immigrants, national minorities, and foreigners. Championing the latter's civil rights on one hand, Labour leaders and their working-class constituency on the other hand also shared in the racialist discourse which came to dominate attitudes towards those groups around the turn of the century. Class and race identities increasingly became inseparable in Labour's response to both the racialization of the immigrant/ foreigner and the racialization of manual labour. In the nineteenth century, Britain and Germany witnessed acute forms of class racism that accompanied the rise of ethnic nationalism. Appeals to workers to organize around ethno-national identities resulted in a self-racialization of the working class, which could be directed against the ethnic "other" as well as against the social "other". In the complex interlinkage between class and race the question of agency is crucial: what did workers and their representatives hope to gain by playing the race card? The majority tried in their very different ways to combine class, ethnic, and national identities. In the end, at least up until the outbreak of the Second World War, both the British and the German labour movements ended up somewhere between class and nation, incapable of neatly distinguishing between a good left-wing patriotism and a bad right-wing nationalism and unable to ensure any smooth acceptance of Labour into the existing nation-state. Only under the conditions of war and the emerging West European Pax Americana thereafter did things begin to change.