

This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

'Boycott the Nazi Flag'

Weiss, Holger

Published in:
Anti-fascism in the Nordic Countries

DOI:
[10.4324/9781315171210](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315171210)

Published: 30/01/2019

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Document License
Publisher rights policy

[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:

Weiss, H. (2019). 'Boycott the Nazi Flag': The anti-fascism of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers. In K. Braskén, N. Copsey, & J. A. Lundin (Eds.), *Anti-fascism in the Nordic Countries: New Perspectives, Comparisons and Transnational Connections* (pp. 124–142). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315171210>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

“Boycott the Nazi Flag”: the antifascism of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers

*This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge/CRC Press in Anti-Fascism in the Nordic Countries: New Perspectives, Comparisons and Transnational Connections [2019], available online:
[http://www.routledge.com/\[https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315171210\]](http://www.routledge.com/[https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315171210])*

Holger Weiss, Åbo Akademi University

Introduction

This chapter discusses the antifascist campaigns orchestrated by the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) in Northern Europe during the first half of the 1930s. The organisation was a short-lived transnational radical co-ordinating umbrella body for Communist-dominated/controlled trade unions of maritime transport workers established in 1930 during the ‘Third Period’ of the Communist International (Comintern). Officially presented as a radical and independent platform, the ISH was in reality a masked continuation of the Comintern’s Maritime Section, the International Propaganda and Action Committee of Transport Workers (IPAC Transport), and was financed through subsidies from Moscow. The ISH’s aim was to challenge the hegemony of the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) as well as the various national waterfront labour unions. The rationale behind this policy was the belief in Moscow that the former policy of a ‘unity front from below’, where the Communists had formed so-called revolutionary opposition groups within labour unions dominated by the Social Democrats, Reformists and Syndicalists, had to be replaced by a new approach. The main idea was to transform existing opposition groups into independent radical unions and to establish independent radical platforms for these organisations. (See further Weiss 2017).

The ISH had legal sections in all three Scandinavian countries. In addition, it operated illegally in Finland and the Baltic countries. However, the biggest

challenge for any historical reconstruction of the activities and campaigns planned and organized by the ISH in Northern Europe is the fact that none of the sections have any archives. What documentary material that existed in Denmark and Norway was either destroyed by the Communists or confiscated when the Germans invaded the two countries in April 1940. The archives of the Swedish section, on the other hand, was first transferred to the Swedish Communist Party in 1935 and, by order from the Comintern, together with the archives of the party to Moscow in 1937. On the other hand, the ISH campaigns have left some traces in contemporary local and national newspapers. At times, the secret police made some efforts to control Communist activity in the harbours and among seamen, resulting in surveillance reports and occasionally raids against the headquarters of the ISH sections. Therefore, my investigation on the ISH and its activities in Northern Europe will be based on unpublished and published documentary sources collected from the Comintern Archives in Moscow (RGASPI), the Bundesarchiv in Berlin (BArchB) and the British National Archives in Kew (TNA) as well as the national archives and the archives of the labour movement in Sweden (SNA; ARAB), Finland and Denmark (ARA).

The global campaigns of the ISH and their national and local articulations have hitherto received little attention in academic research. In part, this reflects the positions of seamen and harbour workers within mainstream labour union history. The organisation of seamen in trade unions, especially, was a challenge as union activity was mainly land-based while seamen worked on ships that seldom called at their home ports. Also, seamen were for long regarded as an unruly, individualistic and internationalist group who had few interests in organized union activities. A further challenge were the unemployed seamen living ashore. Especially during the 1920s and 1930s, they constituted a problematic group for the then existing reformist-led labour unions: receptive for radical, i.e., communist, agitation and propaganda, they could turn into a 'fifth column' at union meetings and push for a politicization of trade union activities. It comes as no surprise that many of the leading figures in the ISH had a background in the 'revolutionary industrial unionism' and the radical international syndicalism of the 'Wobblies', the Industrial Workers of the World

(IWW), before and during the Great War. (See further Cole, Struthers and Zimmer, 2017.) Another handicap was that both Social Democratic and Communist party and labour leaders regarded the waterfront as a secondary field of work – in sheer numbers, the maritime workers constituted but a small portion of the work force (Eiber 1997; Nelles 2001). Also, as Peter Cole and David Featherstone have underlined, apart from the Marine Transport Workers' Industrial Union, the official maritime trade unions in the USA, Britain and elsewhere were preeminently exclusionary and segregationist (Cole 2007; Featherstone 2008). Similar calls for multiracial spaces and organisations by ISH activists faced similar problems in the early 1930s (Featherstone 2015; for a general discussion, see Häberlein 2012).

Proletarian or radical international solidarity was part and parcel of radical and revolutionary maritime labour unions during the interwar period. David Featherstone's study on the hidden histories and geographies of maritime anticolonial, antiracist and antifascist agendas and activities highlights the complexities of radical (communist) articulation of class and race (Featherstone 2012). Focussing on the British and Black Atlantic context, he as well as Marika Sherwood, Hakim Adi and Christian Høgsbjerg have unearthed the discrepancy between the political call of colour-free and class-based radical maritime internationalism in public and in print by the ISH and the racial attitudes and everyday racism that a Black, Indian or Chinese seaman and harbour worker were confronted with in their workspace and by communist union and party leaders (Sherwood 1996; Adi 2010; Høgsbjerg 2011; Featherstone 2015).

Similarly, antifascism together with antiracism and anticolonialism were in the forefront of radical maritime internationalism in the Scandinavian countries. The politicization of proletarian solidarity, especially as articulated by the communist organizations, resulted in continuous calls for actions against imperialist believed and real onslaughts, for 'equal pay for equal job regardless of colour or race' and the fight against Fascism already during the 1920s.¹ Hitherto, however,

¹ See further *Die Internationale Gewerkschaftsbewegung in den Jahren 1924 bis 1927. Bericht des Vollzugsbüros der Roten Gewerkschafts-Internationale an den 4.*

little is known about the articulations and actions of radical maritime internationalism in the Scandinavian countries during the interwar period, not to speak about the antifascist activities and campaigns of the ISH and its sections in Scandinavia. Some traces of it are found in Dieter Nelles' seminal study on the ITF and Antifascism (Nelles 2001), Martin Estvall has analysed the Antifascist discourses in Swedish maritime journals during the 1930s (Estvall 2009), and Jepser Jørgensen has scrutinized the activities of the Danish section of the ISH after the Nazi takeover in Germany (Jørgensen 2017). Much more research exists on the ship sabotage activities of the so-called Wollweber Organisation, sometime referred to as the Anti-Fascist League, in the Nordic countries in the late 1930s (Szubanski 1960; Nørgaard 1986; Borgersrud 2001; Scholz 2012) but these activities had no links with the ISH or its national sections in Scandinavia as the latter ones had all been disbanded by 1935.

Antifascism was at the heart of the transnational discourse of the ISH and its forerunner, the IPAC Transport. In contrast to the ITF and the reformist-led/dominated maritime trade unions, the key idea of the communists was that any union activity, be it a strike or a campaign, always had an international political agenda. When there was a strike by German or Polish seamen, the ISH issued a call for actions to all its member sections: boycotts to load/unload ships or refusal of enlisting on ships. Any local or national strike was to be used for trans- and international agitation and propaganda. An imperialist attack anywhere in the world called for national and local political action as a sign of international proletarian solidarity. The ports and maritime transport workers were identified as the core groups in international antifascist campaigns as they could block the shipments of war equipment, ammunition and troops. However, such 'political campaigns' were in most cases rejected by the reformist-led trade unions as unlawful 'wild strikes' and the reformist maritime trade union leaders as well as the ITF usually had little sympathy for such actions.²

Kongreß, in Moskau am 15. März 1928 (Moskau: Verlag der Roten Gewerkschafts-Internationale, 1928).

² See further *Die 5. Internationale Konferenz der revolutionären Transportarbeiter, abgehalten in Moskau im April 1928* (Moskau: Internationales Propaganda- und Aktionskomitee der revolutionären Transportarbeiter, 1928).

Not surprisingly, therefore, following the 'Class-against-Class'-tactics of the 'Third Period', the ISH and its sections used an antifascist rhetoric mainly in its attacks against the so-called 'social fascist' reformist leadership in the various national unions. On the other hand, antifascist activities and campaigns were first and foremost directed against militarist, right and extreme right wing countries ("fascist dictatorship"), i.e., Italy, Japan, and Germany but also Finland, the Baltic countries and Poland. The chapter concentrates on the latter form of antifascism and explores the establishment of anti-war committees in Scandinavian harbours during the Manchurian Crisis in 1931-1932, the intensification of agitation and propaganda work of the Interclubs in the Scandinavian countries among German seamen as well as on the ISH call to boycott ships carrying the Nazi German flag in 1933 and 1934. The chapter highlights the intertwined relationship between local and national campaigns launched by the ISH and its sections in the Scandinavian countries and Comintern policies on a global level. Nevertheless, the antifascist credo of the Comintern was never officially backed by the Soviet Union and by 1933/34, Soviet pro-German trade interest were in stark contrast to antifascist campaigns launched by the ISH. Last, but not least, the chapter unveils the tragedy of communist antifascist campaigns during the early and mid-1930s: while the communists were at the forefront in demonstrating against Japanese imperialism and German Nazism, they never managed to develop these campaigns into mass movements due to the fatal Comintern doctrine that targeted Reformism and Socialism as 'Social Fascist' and being the main enemy of the working class.

The ISH in the Northern Europe: legal units and illegal networks

Communist agitation and propaganda amongst the maritime transport workers was initially organized through the International Propaganda Committee of Transport Workers. Already in 1921, there had been a vision of a umbrella organization for radical maritime labour unions, i.e., a Red International of

Water Transport Workers' Unions.³ However, the plan was scrapped; instead, maritime work was to be organized through a special unit, known as the International Propaganda and Action Committee of Transport Workers (IPAC Transport) since 1928. The Propaganda Committee had two main objectives. The first aim was to create cells and sections among the crew on board the ships and among the harbour workers who were to serve as the core action units in case of a strike or other legal activity. Also, these units were to constitute themselves as 'revolutionary groups' in the local and national unions for seamen and harbour workers and were to maintain regular communications with the representative of the International Propaganda Committee in the country. The International Propaganda Committee, on the other hand, was to produce and publish the material for propaganda and agitation, such as manifestos and pamphlets. The second task was the establishment of so-called Port Bureaus in chief ports in the world. The Port Bureaus were to serve as the chief centres for communication and information among the national groups and the International Propaganda Committee.⁴

Initially, Port Bureaus were planned to be established in locations where legal Communist activities were possible, namely New York, San Francisco, Sydney, Liverpool, Hamburg, Buenos Aires and Marseilles. Once established, the Port Bureaus were also to undertake illegal work but for tactical reasons, these activities were to be run parallel to their legal activities. In order to reach out to Scandinavian seamen, the Port Bureaus in Hamburg and Liverpool were given the task to publish material in Norwegian. Last but not least, all material produced by International Propaganda Committee as well as the individual Port Bureaus was to be distributed to the other Bureaus in the network.⁵

³ Report of the meeting of the Provisional Council concerned with the organisation of a Red International of Water Transport Workers' Unions, held in Moscow, Hotel Lux, 28.4.1921, 534/5/149: 11, RGASPI.

⁴ The Most Urgent Tasks of the International Committee of Propaganda of the Transport Workers (no date [ca. 1921], 534/5/149: 61-63, RGASPI.

⁵ Proposition for Marine Transport Bureaus (no date [ca. 1921]), 534/5/149: 96-97, RGASPI.

The local node of the network was the International Seamen Club or Interclub. While eventually existing in all Soviet ports, there existed only in 14 Interclubs outside the Soviet Union by 1930, among others in Copenhagen.⁶ Ideally, the local Port Bureaus and the Interrclubs were to coordinate their work while at the same time being monitored through directions received from the headquarters of the International Propaganda Committee in Moscow. However, in practice, this hierarchical order had several tactical drawbacks, not least the question of establishing secure connections between Moscow and various the national units. Moscow-controlled Communist activities were viewed with utmost suspicion in most countries, resulting in Communist agitation and propaganda was either 'semi-legal', i.e., by making use of (fake) organisations whose activities had not been blocked by government regulations, or had been totally banned. In a few countries, such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries, were Communist activities legal. As a consequence, the official headquarters of the International Propaganda Committee was transferred to Hamburg and the Hamburg Port Bureau evolved as the node in the maritime network of the RILU and Comintern (Weiss, 2017: 266–268).

Maritime work of the RILU was totally reorganized an effect of the turn to the 'Class-against-Class' strategy of the Comintern in 1928. The new strategy was also adopted by the RILU at its Fourth World Congress in 1928 and was cemented by the so-called Strasbourg Theses in 1929. While the previous 'united front from below' tactics was based on the idea of Communist fractions within the sectoral labour unions and invited for Communist and non-Communist co-operation on the local and national level, the new Comintern policy brandmarked the Reformist and Social Democratic parties and trade union leadership as collaborateurs of the bourgeoisie exploiters of the working class. The new trade union strategy of the RILU called for the establishment of a revolutionary trade union opposition within the labour unions that were to assume control of the unions from within or, if it was not possible, to establish a

⁶ Abschrift. Internationaler Seemannsklub in/Adressen der Internationalen Seemannsklubs (no author, no date [ca. 1930]), R1501/20224: 7, BArchB.

new revolutionary organisation as a counter force to the existing union. (See further Tosstorff, 2004).

Starting from 1929, the first step towards the implementation of the 'Class-against-Class' strategy in maritime work was the transformation of the Communist fraction to a revolutionary trade union opposition in the national various national unions of seamen and waterfront workers. The second step was the transformation of the IPAC Transport into an umbrella organisation of the various revolutionary trade union opposition units. This was achieved in October 1930 with the establishment of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers or ISH (Weiss, 2017: 271–273).

Similar to the IPAC Transport, the headquarters or International Secretariat of the ISH was located in Hamburg in the building of the Port Bureau and Interclub at 8, Rothesoodstrasse. However, in contrast to the International Propaganda Committee, the ISH was projected to emerge as an umbrella organization of affiliated national revolutionary trade unions. Politically and tactically, the ISH was envisioned as the radical counterpart of the Reformist-controlled International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). The ITF and the Reformist, Social Democratic, Syndicalist or Socialist trade union leaders were attacked for being the lackeys of the shipowners, they were blackened as traitors of the working class and were accused for supporting the capitalist bourgeoisie and imperialists in their preparations for a war against the Soviet Union.⁷

Officially, the ISH presented itself as a new radical transnational and global labour union federation for maritime workers, i.e., a Maritime International, with sections on all continents. What constituted a national section, however, remained unclear. Similar to the Comintern and the RILU, a national section was a national maritime trade union that was affiliated with the ISH. However, only in Germany, France, Britain and in the USA did the revolutionary trade union opposition emerge as independent unions, i.e., the Einheitsverband der Seeleute, Hafendarbeiter und Binnenschiffer, the Fédération Unitaire des Marins et Pêcheurs,

⁷ [ISH appeal] 'An alle Seeleute und Hafendarbeiter!', 534/5/219: 12–16, RGASPI.

the Seamen Minority Movement and the Maritime Workers Industrial Union (Margain 2015; Weiss, 2017: 279).

A different situation prevailed in the Scandinavian countries. Apart from the communist-influenced Danish Stokers' Union, which cut its ties with the ITF and joined the ISH, all of the national unions of seamen, stokers or harbour workers remained its affiliation with the ITF and the reformist Scandinavian Transport Worker Federation. Although Communist maritime union activists started to apply the new RILU directives from 1929, progress was slow and it took some years before revolutionary trade union opposition groups had been established in the Scandinavian countries.⁸ The situation in Sweden was more complex than in Norway or Denmark. Here, there had been a rift in the Communist Party in 1929. While the majority under leadership of Karl Kilbom had cut their ties with Moscow, the minority continued as a section of the Comintern. In 1934, the Kilbom group established itself as the Socialist Party. As Håkan Blomqvist has underlined, most of the leaders of the Seamen's union belonged to the Kilbom-group, i.e., were 'Socialists' rather than Reformists, and were at loggerheads with the Communists and the RFO (Kennerström, 1974: 61–65; Blomqvist, 2010).

The slow pace of organized work in Scandinavia resulted in a critical evaluation at a meeting of ISH executive board in September 1931.⁹ The meeting resulted in the effective formation of the revolutionary trade opposition within the various national maritime unions, such as the *Søfolkenes og Havnearbejdernes revolutionære fagopposition* in Denmark, the *Sjøfolkens Revolusjonære Fagopposition* in Norway and the *Sjötransportarbetsarnas Revolutionära Fackopposition* in Sweden. Each of the national Communist – revolutionary – trade union opposition, shortened as RFO, was to establish its own

⁸ (Undated) Report regarding the *Søfyrbødernes Forbund i Danmark*, *Sømændenes Forbund i Danmark og Havearbejdernes Fællesforbund* (ca 1933/1934), *Søfyrbødernes Forbund i Danmark*, Kasse 1, 107 Richard Jensen, ABA [hereafter ABA/Jensen]; Borgersrud, 1994: 45–48; Bilaga 6. Konfidentiellt. Den röda fackliga oppositionen (RFO) organisation och verksamhet i Sverige, s. 23, Kommittén ang. statsfientlig verksamhet, SRA.

⁹ Zweite Plenartagung der Exekutive der ISH, 10-12.9.1931, 534/5/224: 52, RGASPI.

organisational structures including a national secretariat and local sections or groups, they were not per se independent bodies or trade unions. As a consequence, none of the Scandinavian RFOs ever applied for membership in the ISH as this could only have been done in the name of the union. On the other hand, the Scandinavian RFOs claimed in its public appeals and on the front pages of its journals and magazines to be the national sections of the ISH – as did the ISH in its own publication (Weiss, 2107: 281).

The Scandinavian countries were of strategic importance for the ISH – and, by extension, Moscow – in three aspects. First, the Norwegian merchant fleet was the third-largest in the world during the 1920s and 1930s. Although Norwegian shipowners and captains did their best to prevent Communist agitation and propaganda work onboard their ships, such work was not per se forbidden or illegal. Second, Swedish iron ore was a central raw material for war equipment. Third, the Danish islands were the key to the Baltic sea. However, a few obstacles had to be overcome: Norwegian merchant ships called seldom at home and the ISH International Secretariat was not locally present in the Scandinavian countries. The solution to both problems was the establishment of a parallel network, namely the Interclubs. Although such a club already existed in Copenhagen since the mid-1920s, the rest of them were established in late 1931 and after, among others those in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Esbjerg, Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim. According to ISH regulations adopted in 1930, the Interclubs were not part of the national sections but were to be financed and directed by the ISH International Secretariat. The objective with the parallel structure was that the national sections were to focus on agitation within the national maritime unions while the Interclubs were to focus on foreign ships and their crew.¹⁰

More complicated, if not fictitious, was the situation in Finland and the Baltic countries. Organized Communist activities were banned since the early 1920s,

¹⁰ (ISH instructions,) An alle Interclubs und sämtliche angeschlossene Organisationen, 4.4.1931, 534/5/221: 1–4, RGASPI; Resolution über die Tätigkeit des Hamburger Internationalen Klubs, no date, filed 15.IV.1931, 534/5/220, 155–161, RGASPI; Decisions of the II. Plenary Session of the Executive Committee of the ISH on the Activity and Tasks of the International Seamen's Clubs, September 1931, 534/5/224, 191–203, RGASPI.

what existed were various forms of illegal and underground political and trade union groups. In Finland, the communist were for a short while capable of highjacking the seamen's union in 1930 but the attempt failed as the reformist majority founded a new union and communist activities were banned by the government in late 1930 (Soukola, 2003). In Estonia, on the other hand, the communists were able to get in control of the seamen's union, the Eestimaaline Merimeeste Liit, in 1932 but this attempt, too, was blocked by the reformist majority by establishing a new union one year later (Mihkelsen, 1935). Still, the ISH would claim that it had sections in at least Finland and Estonia – or rather exile sections which published their journals, *Majakka* and *Majakas*, in Hamburg. In reality, however, the Finnish and Baltic sections existed only on paper; the magazines and appeals published in Finnish and Estonian were distributed to seamen through the Interclubs and then smuggled via various ports in the Baltic to liaison persons in Finland or Estonia.

Anti-Imperialism and Anti-War Campaigns of the ISH in Scandinavia

The Nazi takeover in early spring 1933 posed a challenge for international Communist organizations with headquarters in Germany. The ISH solved this problem by relocating the International Secretariat to Copenhagen in April 1933. The transfer to Copenhagen added a new objective to the international tasks of the ISH. While the organisation had in previous years launched two campaigns that were in tandem with the Imperial War Thesis of the Comintern, the new campaign of 1933, the Campaign Against the Nazi Flag, was profoundly anti-Fascist.

The Imperialist War Thesis had been outlined already at the Eighth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) in 1927 and were officially sanctioned at the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI in 1929. The thesis laid the foundations all international campaigns launched by the Comintern or the RILU. The core argument was that the imperialist powers, first and foremost the United Kingdom and France, were planning for a military invasion of the Soviet Union and the destruction of the Bolsjevik revolution and that all workers of the

world were called to defend the 'Fatherland of the Workers' (*Inprekorr*, VII:61, 1927: 1285; Degras, 1971: 64-67). This doctrine was fundamental for the ISH and its international activities right from its start. In effect, the Anti War Thesis laid the foundations of its international campaign for the establishment of Anti-War Committees in harbours and onboard ships. The task of the committees was to check and report about the export and shipment of war material. When and if possible, the committees were obliged to do their utmost to boycott such shipments (*Rotes Gewerkschafts-Bulletin*, 78/9, 13.12.1930).

The test case for the ISH came during the 1931–32 Manchurian Crisis. While Soviet foreign policy officially applied strict neutrality, the Comintern and the RILU started an international solidarity campaign against Japanese imperialism and militarism. Similar to the campaign of the Communist parties and labour unions, the ISH campaign rested on two pillars: the Imperial War Thesis and the Class Against Class policy. Thus, the ISH and its national sections had a dual message in their appeals – a positive one calling for international solidarity for China and a negative one by attacking the ITF and the Reformist union leadership for supporting Japanese imperialism as they opposed the boycott of war equipment to Japan ('ITF och kampen mot kriget', *Ny Dag* 4.12.1931; Borgersrud, 1994: 55).

The Hands off China campaign of the ISH had two phases in the Scandinavian countries. Initially, the campaign resulted only in the ISH call on actions against Japanese imperialism in late 1931. The Danish revolutionary trade union groups were urged to stop all transport of war equipment via Danish harbours and on Danish ships.¹¹ In Sweden, the national congress (landskonferens) of the maritime revolutionary trade union opposition discussed the war in the Far East ('R.F.O.:s landskonferens', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Dec 1931). However, it seems as not much was achieved in both countries. In fact, international inactivity of the Communist union activists resulted in a new appeal by the European Bureau of the RILU in February 1932, calling explicitly the maritime

¹¹ [ISH pamphlet] *Søfolk! Havnearbejdere!* [4 p.; ca. 1932], ABA/Jensen.

workers to boycott and stop the transport of war equipment to the Far East.¹² The renewed call – or rather instructions – resulted in local activities. Anti-war meetings were organised in several locations in Sweden and a local anti-war committee was organised in Gothenburg in March 1932 ('Mot det imperialistiska kriget', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Feb-Mar 1932; 'Kamp mot kriget–Bilda antikrigskommittéer!', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Apr 1932). In June, a national anti-war committee had been established in Gothenburg with local branches in several ports (*Stormklockan*, 9-16.6.1932). Similar activities had taken place in Denmark and Norway and a 'Scandinavian Anti-War meeting' was planned to be held in Elsingore in June 1932 ('Till Helsingör', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, June 1932; Borgersrud, 1994: 61).

Not surprisingly, the Communist Hands off China campaign received little backing by the ITF, the STF and Reformist trade union leaders in Scandinavia. The ITF and its leader Edo Fimmen opposed the call as it had not been sanctioned by the League of Nations (Nelles, 2001). The Swedish leadership, for example ('Internationell orientering', *Sjömannen*, May 1932; reprinted in *Eldaren*, June 1932), openly rejected the ISH call for a boycott and denounced it as a Communist charade – why stop the transport of war equipment to Japan when Russian railway workers were at the same time assisting in the transport of Japanese soldiers and weapons in Manchuria?

Anti-Fascism and the Campaign against the Nazi Flag

Anti-Fascism had been part and parcel of Communist political rhetoric since the 1920s. Initially, the attack was directed against organisations and regimes with a reactionary and ultra-nationalist agenda but with the turn to the Class-against-class policy, Social Democratic parties and Reformist labour unions were denounced as traitors of the working class and branded as 'Social Fascist'. The Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933 added an international perspective in

¹² Rote Einheitsfront gegen den räuberischen Überfall auf China und gegen das imperialistische Kriegskomplott gegen die Sowjetunion und Sowjet-China (February 1932), R1501/20442: 469, BArchB.

Communist Anti-Fascism: While earlier appeals warned the working class of the lure of Fascism, the Anti-Fascist struggle against the Nazi regime in Germany was to be an international task. This change of policy was to be manifested through a unified front of the international working class and was made public in an appeal by the Executive Committee of the Comintern in early June 1933 (Weber, Drabkin, and Bayerlein, 2015: 960–962).

Anti-Fascism constituted the third pillar of the ISH. However, similar to other Communist organisations, Anti-Fascism was initially only used in political rhetorics, not as a guiding line for international activities. Thus, the Anti-Communist laws in Finland, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the attack of the Guomindang regime in China against the Chinese Soviet were all branded as Fascist ('Fascist-Kup i Finland', *Laternen*, July 1930). However, apart from the Hands off China campaign, the ISH never called for international campaign against – in Communist vocabulary – Fascist regimes, such as Finland, Estonia or Poland. Instead, the ISH International Secretariat's main focus was on the anti-war campaign against Japan as late as February 1933.¹³ The activities against Nazism and Fascist regimes was regarded to be the task of the national sections, i.e., the German one and the exiled/illegal Italian one ('Die ISH der Wasserkante an das Wassertransportproletariat: Kämpft in der antifascistischen Aktion gegen den Mordterror der Nazis, für Arbeit und Brot!', *Hamburger Volkszeitung*, 16.7.1932).

The ISH was to change its stance towards Anti-Fascist campaigns after Reichstag fire in February 1933 and the suppression of the German Communist Party in March 1933. The consequences were troublesome for the ISH – its biggest and best organized section was declared illegal and had to build an underground organisation. Anti-Fascist action became a fight for survival for the ISH International Secretariat in Copenhagen. Its objective was twofold: to publish and disseminate illegal publications in Germany as well as to call for international boycott of the Nazi flag. While the former task was to be

¹³ ISH appeal in Swedish, January 1933, SÄPO Äldre Aktsystemet Volym 294 Pärm VIII C 3, SRA; ISH-Antikriegsarbeit Feb 1933, R1507/2085: 86-91, BArchB.

coordinated in cooperation with the Danish section, the latter one was to be organized through local Anti-Fascist Action Committees to be established by each of the ISH national sections.¹⁴

The International Secretariat published its first call for an Anti-Fascist Front in mid-March. One week later, the Danish section published a translation of the call. The main tenor of the call was the urge to move from agitation to open action: seamen and harbour worker all over the globe were to form a united front in support for the German proletariat. Last, but not least, the maritime workers were invited to send delegates to the planned European Anti-Fascist Labour Conference of the RILU which was to convene in Copenhagen in April 1933.¹⁵ The congress was to protest against the situation in Germany but to discuss the conditions of the proletariat under 'Fascist' dictatorship in general, including the situation in Finland, Latvia, Greece and Yugoslavia.¹⁶ However, the Danish authorities rejected the idea of an Anti-Fascist congress in Copenhagen. Eventually, the RILU congress merged with the initiative of the World Committee for Peace and Against Fascism to organize an Anti-Fascist Congress in Paris in June 1933.¹⁷

While the Danish comrades and the Danish section cooperated closely with the International Secretariat, anti-Fascist agitation was slow to take momentum in Sweden. This was due to the Swedish section being engaged in the national seamen's strike from early to late March 1933. A first appeal for the formation of Anti-Fascist Action Committees on board Swedish ships and in the harbours was only issued in early April. Anti-Fascist agitation had been late, the appeal noted and, not surprisingly, directed at the same time a stiff critique against the Social

¹⁴ A. Shelley to all sections of the ISH and Interclubs, Copenhagen 8.3.1933, KV 2/2158: 6a, TNA.

¹⁵ *Anti-Fascist Front: ISH News Items* No. 9. (Copenhagen, 18.3.1933), HO 144/20657, TNA; *Anti-fascistisk Front – ISH:s Meddelelseblad* nr 9 (23.3.1933), ABA.

¹⁶ 'Für einen antifaschistischen Arbeiterkongreß Europas!', *Internationale Gewerkschafts-Pressekorrespondenz* 3:17, 4.3.1933, 458/9/84: 147, RGASPI; ISH: Einberufung eines Antifaschistischen Arbeiterkongresses Europas, SÄPO Äldre Aktsystemet Volym 118 III B3 s 101 111D: 175, SRA.

¹⁷ KV 2/2158: 16a, TNA.

Democratic party and labour movement: "Experience from every Fascist country tells us that Fascism has come into power with the help of the treacherous Social Democracy." ('Bilda antifascistiska kommittéer i varje fartyg och hamn', *Ny Dag* 11.4.1933.) In contrast, the Swedish seamen's union and its newspaper were remarkably silent on this issue in 1933 (Estvall, 2009).

The ISH changed its anti-Fascist tactics in April 1933 when the German authorities ordered the German merchant fleet to carry the Nazi flag. The ISH International Secretariat issued a directive to all its sections, calling for a global boycott of Nazi symbols and urged harbour workers to refuse to unload and load ships that carried the Swastika flag. Already during the First of May Demonstrations, the German consulates in Fredrikstad, Kristiansand, Haugesund and Narvik in Norway as well as those in Esbjerg and Kolding in Denmark were attacked and the Swastika flag forcefully removed ('Hakkorsflaggan nedriven', *Norrskensflamman* 2.5.1933). The Swedish bourgeois press was relieved: no incidences had occurred in Sweden ('Hakkorsflaggan nagel i ögat på demonstranter', *Svenska Dagbladet* 2.5.1933). The first actions against German ships took place in Antwerp on 9 and 10 May, soon followed by incidences in Oslo and Bergen, Gothenburg and Stockholm, Copenhagen and Esbjerg, Constanța and Galați (Rumania), Barcelona, Le Havre and New York. The most effective actions occurred in harbours that were in control by ISH sections, namely Seville, Dunkerque and Marseilles, where harbour workers boarded German ships, hailed the Swastika flag, beat the captain, refused to unload the cargo and demonstrated by singing the International and shouting 'Red front!'. The news about the successful boycotts was used by the Communist press in Sweden to spur for similar actions in Swedish ports. ('Hamnarbetarnas aktioner mot hakekorsflaggan", *Ny Dag* 28.6.1933) The Danish Havnearbejdernes RFO circulated flyers in the port of Copenhagen urging the harbour workers to boycott German ships.¹⁸

¹⁸ (Flyger issued by Havnearbejdernes RFO), Ned med hagekorset, ABA/Jensen; (Flyer issued by Søfolkens og Havnearbejdernes RFO), Til Alle Danske Havnearbejdere, ABA/Jensen.

The actions against German ships in Scandinavian ports gained momentum in late May. Unemployed seamen boarded a German ship in Copenhagen and carried away the Swastika flag; in another action they tried to distribute anti-Fascist literature to the German crew.¹⁹ A common form of boycott by harbour workers was to refuse to unload a German freighter as long as it carried the Swastika flag, as was the case in Odense, Oslo, Trondheim and Örnsköldsvik ('Hamnarbetare i strejk mot hakekorsbåt', *Ny Dag* 28.6.1933; 'Strejk mot hakekorset i Örnsköldsvik', *Ny Dag* 29.6.1933, 'Hakekorsflaggan skars ner i Sundsvall', *Ny Dag* 7.7.1933; Borgersrud, 1994: 78). In Oslo, the boycott by the dockers to unload the German freighter *Holstenthor* extended over several days. At first, the local section of the Norwegian dockers union tried to counteract the "spontaneous" blockade of the German ship by sending a new group to unload the ship but when the Swastika flag was raised again, the Norwegian workers refused to continue their work and the German crew members had to finish the job ('Holstenthor blev utlosset', *Arbeiderbladet* 27.5.1933; 'Anti-Hitler Utbrudd', *Nordisk Tidene* 30.5.1933). At this stage, the boycotts against the Nazi flag in several Swedish (Sundsvall, Gothenburg) and European (Antwerp, Rotterdam, Barcelona, L'Orient, Gdingen and Groningen) ports were hailed in the Norwegian press ('Hakekorsflagge tåles ikke. Havnebyens arbeidere virer det ned", *Arbeiderbladet* 10.6.1933). The German embassy in Norway reacted by sending an official inquiry to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and asked to receive detailed reports about the attacks (Borgersrud, 1994: 77–78; Borgersrud 2001: 43); in fact, such activities were in line with similar reports about the activities of German political refugees in Norway which were sent to the German police authorities (Selliaas 1982). When the dockers in Åbenrå (Aabenraa) in southern Jutland refused to unload a German freighter in August, the incidence resulted into a diplomatic crisis between Germany and Denmark (Mikhelsen 2018, 90). Consequently, the Danish secret police opened investigations about the activities of the ISH and its section in Denmark in 1933 (Jano 1996: 7, 11).

¹⁹ 'Københavnske søfolk i aktion mod hagekorset' and 'Søfolk i Köbenhavn demonstrerer mod hagekorset!', *Udkiggen: Organ for søens og havnens arbejdere* 1 (1933), ABA.

The ISH boycott was received with mixed feelings by the Reformist and Social Democratic union leadership. In Norway, the boycotts were declared to be breeches in the industrial peace ('Holstenthor blev utlosset', *Arbeiderbladet* 27.5.1933). The Swedish union leaders were equally negative; in their mind the boycott was nothing else than an unauthorized 'wild' strike and an illegal protest. The negative stance by the union leadership resulted in smearing of the opposite parties in the union journals. The Communist journal *Hamn- och sjöproletären* accused the union leaders to prevent actions against a German freighter in Kalmar (*Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, July 1933: 6); the union journal *Sjömannen*, on the other hand, sarcastically noted that the "successful" boycott of the German oil tanker Kah-Mal in Stockholm was not surprising as it was carried out by Communist harbour workers employed by the Soviet-owned Naftasyndikatet ('Hakekorsflaggan fick 'stryka' flagg!', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Sept 1933: 2; 'Sillénaktion med 'positivt' resultat. Den första i Sverige', *Sjömannen*, Oct 1933: 401). However, Reformist actions, such as the lowering of the Swastika flag onboard the German steamer Gertrud in the port of Gothenburg in September received no comment in the Communist press – especially as it turned out that the action had been carried out by the chief editor of the *Sjömannen*, Waltenin Eliasson ('Tysklands 'kränkta ära' ingenting värd. Hakkorsflagga nedhalad från tysk båt i Göteborg', *Sjömannen*, Sept 1933: 363–364; 'Svensk halade ned flaggan i Göteborg', *Aftonbladet*, 14.9.1933). Also, when the Communist press fiercely criticized the Swedish government for granting permission for a shipment of Swedish-made Bofors ammunition to Germany ('Reformistisk bojkott', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Nov 1933: 8), the Reformists sarcastically countered that there existed no boycott of German ships and no attacks on the Swastika flag in Soviet ports ('Om kryssningar, konsekvens och hakkorsflaggor', *Sjömannen*, Nov 1933: 415).

Similar critical remarks were raised in the Norwegian Social-Democratic press. While harbour workers throughout Europe were protesting against the Nazi flag, no calls for boycotting it were raised in the Soviet Union. German freighters carrying the Swastika flag were unloaded in Leningrad and in Odessa and there were no protests against the Nazi flag on May 1st outside the German consulates

(‘Hakekorsflagge tåles icke. Havnebyens arbeidere virer det ned’, *Arbeiderbladet* 10.6.1933). Still, the campaign continued both in Swedish and Norwegian ports and local boycotts by harbour workers occurred in Holmsund and Follafoss in early August (‘Fascistflaggan ströks i Djupvik. Strejk mot hakkorsflaggan i Norge’, *Norrskensflamman*, 11.8.1933). At this point, the campaign had also spread to Iceland. In August 1933, demonstrators attacked the German consulat in Siglufjörður and torne down the Nazi flag while German vessels flying the Swastika flag were boycotted in Reykjavik in September and November 1933 (see further the chapter by Kristjánsdóttir and Järvstad in this volume). The action in Reykjavik in November was, together with similar activities in French, Belgian and Dutch ports, hailed by the illegal Finnish section as signs of a successful campaigns.²⁰

The weak spot of the ISH campaign was that it had never been designed as a boycott on German foreign trade. Although the Labour and Socialist International and the International Federation of Trade Unions had issued an appeal for an international boycott on Nazi Germany in August 1933, the Comintern had dismissed the proposal and instead called for an intensification of the boycott of German ships and the protest against the Swastika flag (Weber, Drabkin, Bayerlein, 2015: 1039–1042). Even more strange was the official policy of the Soviet Union towards Nazi Germany and the renewal of the trade treaty between the two countries. For the Swedish maritime trade union leadership, this was nothing else but a revealing the hypocrisy behind the Communist calls for a unified antifascist front (‘Bojkotten mot Hitler-land och Kominterns mystiska inställning till bojkotten’, *Sjömannen*, Nov 1933: 382).

The second form of anti-Nazi activities by the ISH was the dissemination of illegal publications to underground cells and groups in Germany. This was organised through special liaison persons in the Interclubs. Key nodes in the

²⁰ ‘Protesterauksia hakaristilippua vastaan’, *Kipinä* [Winter 1933/34], , SÄPO Äldre Aktsystemet Volym 295 VIII C 3 Interklubb och Röd Marin, Pärm 3, SRA.

dissemination network were Copenhagen, Rotterdam and Antwerp.²¹ Interclubs in those harbours with frequent visits of German ships received additional staff members to boost agitation and propaganda work in German.²² The Interclub in Copenhagen emerged as the operative centre of the clandestine activities when Ernst Wollweber, the leader of the German ISH section, moved to Denmark in August 1933 (Eiber, 1997: 591). The Interclubs in Sweden emerged also as hubs for anti-Nazi agitation and propaganda among German crew members. While the German authorities regarded the boycotts of German ships as a mere nuisance, the attempt to spread Communist propaganda among German seamen was seen as highly problematic. German captains were therefore ordered to counteract Communist infiltration by all means, among others denial of permission to leave the ship as an attempt to prevent seamen to visit the Interclubs.²³

Apart from the actions against the Swastika flag and the dissemination of illegal literature to Germany, the ISH launched an international campaign in support of its Secretary General Albert Walter. Together with the German Communist leadership and thousands rank-and-file party members, Walter had been jailed by the German authorities in their clampdown on the German Party in March 1933. The most visible international campaign orchestrated by Communist international organisations such as the International Red Aid was that in support of Party leaders Ernst Thälmann and Ernst Torgler as well as the Bulgarian Communist Georgi Dimitrov, the latter two being accused for the Reichstag fire. Albert Walter, in turn, evolved as the martyr of the ISH who was tortured by the Nazis in the Fulsbüttel concentration camp outside Hamburg ('Albert Walter torturas', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Nov 1933). Time and again, the journals of the national ISH sections were to remind their readers about the plight of Walter and reprinted the demand of the ISH Secretariat for his freedom ('Resolution för att Albert Walter friges (11.3.1933)', *Ny Dag* 13.11.1933; 'Kräv Albert Walter fri!'

²¹ Ernst Wollweber, *Lebenserinnerungen*: 184, NY 4327/10 Nachlass Ernst Wollweber, BArchB.

²² Leo, Bericht 8.6.1933, 534/4/460: 141, RGASPI.

²³ Behrends, Preussische Geheime Staatspolizei an die Leitung der Auslandsorganisation der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei, Berlin 20.8.1936, 458/9/135: 56, RGASPI.

Storm: Organ för Sjötransportarbetarnas RFO 1, 1934). When possible, the campaign was made visible also in public. For example, two huge banderols covered the exterior of the Interclub in Stockholm during autumn 1933, demanding the freedom of Torgler and other 'Antifascists' and blaming the Nazis for the Reichstag fire. By the end of the year, however, the Swedish police removed them regardless the protest of the Interclub ('Polisövergrepp mot Interklubb', *Ny Dag* 22.12.1933).

Postscript: Protesting Against War and Fascism and the Collapse of the ISH

The extensity and impact of the ISH campaign against the Swastika flag in Scandinavian ports is difficult to assess. Although the actions were visible and effective demonstrations, the boycotts never stopped the unloading or loading of a German ship. As a short-lived protest they were effectful but as the campaign had no political effect, the ISH leadership changed its approach by the end of the year and integrated the Boycott the Swastika Flag Campaign into its activities in support of Soviet China. The new campaign was to be designed as a general anti-Fascist demonstration.²⁴

Events in the Far East had taken a new turn in 1933 when the Chinese national government under Chiang Kai-shek launched its attack against the Chinese Communist strongholds in Jiangxi Province, known as Soviet China. The ISH International Secretariat received orders from Moscow to launch a new international campaign in defense of Soviet China in October 1933.²⁵ Due to the ISH Secretariat facing operational problems at that time, its call for the reactivation of the Anti-War Committees and the blockade of ships with war equipment for Japan and nationalist China were published only in December.²⁶

²⁴ Ernst Wollweber, *Lebenserinnerungen*: 184, NY 4327/10 Nachlass Ernst Wollweber, BArchB.

²⁵ Henri (Luigi Polano) to Genosse Schmidt, 22.10.1933, 534/5/236: 125–126, RGASPI.

²⁶ [ISH pamphlet] *Forsvar Sovjet-Kina – stop al Transport af Krigsmaterial* (december 1933), SÄPO Äldre Aktsystemet Volym 118 III B3 s 101 111D: 99, SRA.

Flyers in Danish, i.e., prepared by Danish comrades at the ISH Secretariat, soon circulated in the port of Gothenburg while the Swedish RFO-journal *Hamnarbetaren* urged its readers to back the struggle of the Chinese proletariat and to stop the transport of war equipment to the 'Chinese imperialists', i.e., Chiang Kai-shek.²⁷ Similarly, the (illegal) Finnish mimeographed journal *Kipinä*, hailed the successful actions of the stevedores in Le Havre in November 1933 as an example to inspire the radical harbour workers for similar expressions of international proletarian solidarity in Finland.²⁸

The conflict in China intensified in 1934 and the Communists had to abandon their strongholds in Jiangxi in October and started to retreat to Shaanxi Province (the 'Long March') where they established a new basis for their operations. The RILU European Secretariat in Paris tried at this point to reactivate and coordinate its anti-war activities and established a Planning Committee consisting of the ISH Secretariat – which had relocated to Antwerp and operated as an underground and illegal unit from there while using its address in Copenhagen as a legal camouflage – as well as representatives of the International Propaganda Committees of railway workers and metal workers.²⁹ The task of the ISH Secretariat was to open up connections with the ITF and to invite them in unified anti-war activities.³⁰ The national sections of the ISH, especially those in Scandinavia, were urged to intensify their anti-war campaigns, notably to stop the transportation of war material to the Far East ('Masstransport av krigsmaterial', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Feb 1934). Focus was on Sweden as Gothenburg was the largest export harbour of war material in Scandinavia. If the ISH and the ITF were to join hands, local joint Anti-War Committees were to be established that effectively could monitor and block any transport of military

²⁷ ISH flyer, dated December 1933, F X:6 Kommunistiska handlingar 1930-1933, Stockholmspolisens kriminalavdelning Rotel 6 med föregångare, SÄPO, SRA; 'Sovjet-Kina', *Hamnarbetaren. Organ för hamnarbetarna* 1:1 (1934): 3–4, SÄPO Äldre Aktsystemet Volym 295 VIII C 3 Interklubb och Röd Marin, Pärm 3, SRA.

²⁸ 'Satamatyöläset Le Havressa antavat loistavan esimerkin kietäytymällä sotatarvikkeiden lastauksessa', *Kipinä* [Winter 1933/4], SÄPO Äldre Aktsystemet Volym 295 VIII C 3 Interklubb och Röd Marin, Pärm 3, SRA.

²⁹ René, Bericht 24.4.1934, 534/4/493: 224–225, RGASPI.

³⁰ Confidential instructions to the leading functionaries of the ISH-sections, 8.11.1934, 534/5/241: 271–274, RGASPI.

equipment ('Krigsmolnen tätnar', *Hamn- och Sjöproletären*, Nov 1934). Nevertheless, the ITF rejected the invitation of the ISH. This came as no surprise for the ISH leadership; in fact, now they could once again claim that the Reformists had spoiled unified anti-war activities.³¹

Communist Anti-Fascist rhetoric and Anti-War activities had at this point merged and the ISH leadership declared in June 1934 that the forthcoming demonstration on August 1st was 'Against the Imperialist War and Against Fascism'.³² A fierce battle raged in the Seamen's union in Sweden during the year as the Communist RFO made a serious attempt to oust the Reformist and Socialist leadership. In Denmark, the Seamen's RFO was at loggerhead with the Reformists during the seamen's strike. The Class Against Class Doctrine seemed as solid as ever: Communist Anti-Fascist rhetoric continued to brand the Reformist and Social Democratic/Socialist union leadership as Social-Fascist ('Fortsätt aktionen! Mot den bruna mordpesten!', *Storm: Organ för Sjötransportarbetarnas RFO* 1, 1934; Lundvik, 1980: 12–13).

One year later the national sections of the ISH had ceased to exist in the Scandinavian countries. The attempt by the Communists to replace the Reformist and Socialist leadership of the Swedish Seamen's union failed miserably at the union's national congress in September 1935 (*Sjömannen*, Sept 1935; *Sjömannen*, Oct 1935). Even worse, by that time the Swedish RFO did not even exist anymore. A critical analysis by the Swedish Communist Party on the impact of the RFO's maritime work concluded that it remained minimal; in fact, about 130 Communists had been excluded from the Seamen's union already in 1933 for their membership in the RFO. The Party therefore asked the Comintern's Scandinavian Secretariat for permission to abolish the maritime RFO in February

³¹ René, Bericht 10.12.1934, 534/4/493: 273–274, RGASPI.

³² Appel fra I.S.H.'s Eksekutivkomite – Lad 1. August blive en kampdag imod den imperialistiske Krig og den blodige Fascisme!, ABA.

1935.³³ Although the ISH International Secretariat initially rejected the proposal,³⁴ the Comintern agreed about the liquidation of the RFO in March.³⁵

The liquidation of the Swedish RFO was part and parcel of the Comintern's break with the Class Against Class doctrine and its (re-)turn to a united front policy, i.e., the Popular Front, which was endorsed at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in August 1935. The Popular Front doctrine also meant the deathblow of the ISH as it was planned to be amalgamated with the ITF. In fact, this process had already started in 1934 in an attempt by the Comintern and the RILU to redefine the 'Class-Against-Class' strategy. In a resolution issued by the XIII Plenum of the ECCI in December 1933, the communist parties were urged to focus on the workers on the waterfront in the struggle against the transportation of war materials, against the attack of "shipowning capital and fascism" and on work among transport workers. The Central Committees as well as the leading organs of the Communist fractions in the trade unions parties were each to appoint a member with the task to organise this work as well as to establish control commissions in the harbours. The role of the ISH was not commented apart from that it was to receive assistance from the Comintern in its demonstrations against vessels flying fascist flags and its work on German, Japanese and Italian ships. The parties rather than the ISH were given the task to organise the seamen and harbour workers; it was the task of the party and the Communist fraction in the trade unions to lead the attack against the ITF.³⁶ The ISH, in turn, was to abandon its confrontation with and attacks on the ITF. Instead, it was to down-scale its activities and to prepare its merger with the ITF. The outcome of this process was an ill-defined attempt to introduce a return to the 'united front' strategies (Borgersrud 2001: 44, 49). Not surprisingly, the ITF responded negatively to the feelers of the ISH Secretariat.³⁷ Still, first steps were

³³ ZK der Kommunistischen Partei Schwedens an Skandinavisches Ländersekretariat, 27.2.1935, 495/15/205: 55–57, RGASPI.

³⁴ Letter from Georges and André, 19.2.1935, 534/5/242: 47–57, RGASPI.

³⁵ Über die Reorganisierung der RGO der Seeleute und Hafendarbeiter Schwedens, 534/3/1041: 252–253, RGASPI.

³⁶ Resolution on work among Seamen and Harbour Workers, 15.12.1933, 495/4/272: 58–60, RGASPI.

³⁷ Letter to the RILU Executive Bureau, 12.12.1934, 534/5/241: 300, RGASPI.

taken in the USA where the MWIU was dissolved in 1934 (Nelson, 1990: 101; Pedersen, 2000: 319). While such tactics had been implemented in France and Spain already in 1934,³⁸ they received official backing first at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in 1935.

The weak – if not non-existent – position of the ISH was finally revealed during the campaign against the Italian aggression and war against Ethiopia in 1935. While the ISH Secretariat was quick to respond to the call to organise a embargo against Italian ships and even tried to mobilise a world-wide anti-war and ‘Hands-off Abyssinia’ campaign, its attempt to enlist the ITF for unified action failed miserably (Weiss, forthcoming). Initially, the ITF Secretariat did not even bother to respond to the ISH’s calls and, after several futile attempts, the ITF declined any further co-operation with the ISH.³⁹

Moscow’s plans of the ISH to establish a ‘world unified front’ together with the ITF never came to fruition. In the mind of the ITF, the ISH had by 1935 outplayed its role, if it ever had any. In February 1936, the Danish stoker unions, the last remaining national sections, cut its ties with the ISH and returned to the ITF.⁴⁰ The final countdown to the dissolution of the ISH is not even documented. It appears that the ISH Secretariat ceased operations by mid-1936. Thereafter, the ISH existed only on paper and was liquidated by the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in June 1937.⁴¹

References

Adi, H. (2010) ‘The Comintern and Black Workers in Britain and France 1919–37’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 28: 224–245.

³⁸ Die RGI über die Einheitsfront und die Einheit der Gewerkschaftsbewegung, 2.10.1934, 495/4/313: 98–100, RGASPI.

³⁹ Letter from Tillon to Comrade Jusofowitch, 11.10.1935 & 12.10.1935, and mimeographed pamphlet: *For the Unity of the Transport Workers in the Struggle Against War – Correspondence between the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) and the International Transport-Workers’ Federation (ITF) regarding Mussolini’s attack on Abyssinia*, 534/5/243: 116–118, 173–177, RGASPI.

⁴⁰ Report by Richard Jensen, 7.2.1936, 534/3/1089: 24–75, RGASPI.

⁴¹ Protokoll (A) Nr 155 zusammengestellt auf Grund fliegender Abstimmung unter Mitgliedern des Sekretariats des EKKI am 27.6.1937, 495/18/1206, RGASPI.

- Blomqvist, H. (2010) 'Klassintresse och antinazism inom sjöfarten', *Historisk tidskrift*, 130 (2): 338–343.
- Borgersrud, L. (1994) Wollweber-organisasjonen i Norge. Unpublished PhD thesis in history, University of Oslo.
- Borgersrud, L. (2001) *Die Wollweber-Organisation und Norwegen*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag.
- Cole, P. (2007) *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Cole, P., D. Struthers and K. Zimmer (eds., 2017) *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW*. London: Pluto Press.
- Eiber, L. (1997) *Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Hansestadt Hamburg in den Jahren 1929 bis 1939. Werftarbeiter, Hafnarbeiter und Seeleute: Konformität, Opposition, Widerstand*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Degras, J. (ed., 1971) *Communist International 1919-1943 Documents, Volume III. 1919-1943*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Estvall, E. (2009) *Sjöfart på stormigt hav: Sjömannen och Svensk Sjöfarts tidning inför den nazistiska utmaningen 1932-1945*. Växjö: Växjö University Press.
- Featherstone, D. (2008) *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Featherstone, D. (2012) *Solidarity. Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism*. London: Zed Books.
- Featherstone, D. (2015) 'Maritime Labour and Subaltern Geographies of Internationalism: Black Internationalist Seafarers' Organising in the Interwar Period', *Political Geography* 49: 7–16.
- Häberlein, J. C. (2012) 'Between global aspirations and local realities: the global dimensions of interwar communism', *Journal of Global History* 7: 415–437.
- Høgsgjerg, C. (2011) 'Mariner, Renegade and Castaway: Chris Braithwaite, Seamen's Organiser, Socialist and Militant Pan-Africanist', *Race & Class* 53: 36–57.
- Jano, T. (1996) 'Politiets overvågning af DKP 1932–1941', *Arbejderhistorie* 1: 1–20.
- Jørgensen, J. (2017) Revolution, Radical Anti-Fascism and Transnational Solidarity. The Danish Seamen and Harbour Workers' Revolutionary Opposition, 1933–1934, paper presented at the 53rd International Conference of labour and Social History (ITH), Linz, Austria, 21–23 September 2017.

Kennerström, B. (1974) Mellan två internationaler. Socialistiska partiet 1929–37. Kristianstad: Arkiv avhandlingsserie 2.

Lundvik, B. (1980) *Solidaritet och partipolitik. Den svenska arbetarrörelsen och spanska inbördeskriget 1936-39*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Margain, C. (2015) 'The International Union of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) 1930–1937: Interclubs and transnational aspects', *Twentieth Century Communism* 8: 133–144.

Mihkelsen, J. (1935) 'Sjöfolket I Estland', *Merimies-Sjömannen*, 4: 4–5.

Mikkelsen, F. (2018), 'Denmark 1914–1939: Popular Struggle in the Age of Mass Politics', in Nyzell, S. (ed.) *Popular Struggle and Democracy in Scandinavia 1700 – Present*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 73–102.

Nelles, D. (2001) *Widerstand und internationale Solidarität. Die Internationale Transportarbeiter-Föderation (ITF) im Widerstand gegen Nationalsozialismus*. Essen: Klartext-Verlag.

Nelson, B. (1990) *Workers on the Waterfront. Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Nørgaard, E. (1986) *Krigen før krigen. Wollweber-organisationen og skibssabotagerne*. Lyngø: Bogans forlag.

Pedersen, V.L. (2000) 'George Mink, the Marine Workers Industrial Union, and the Comintern in America', *Labor History*, 41: 301–320.

Selliaas, A-E. (1982) 'Politisk politi i Norge 1914 – 1937', *Tidsskrift for arbeiderbevegelsens historie* 2: 53–91.

Sherwood, M. (1996) 'The Comintern, the CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons', *Science & Society* 60: 137–163

Scholz, M. (2012) 'Wollweberligan', K. Bosdotter (ed.), *Faror för staten av svåraste slag: politiska fångar på Långholmen 1880–1950*. Stockholm: Libris, 240–253.

Soukola, T. (2003) *Riistorauhaa rikkomassa. Suomen Merimies-Unionin ja sen edeltäjien vaiheita 1905–2000*. Helsinki: Weilin+Göös.

Szubanski, Rajmund (1960) *Sabotage Operations of the Prewar Anti-Fascist League*. New York: U.S. Joint Publications Research Service.

Tosstorf, R. (2004) *Die Profintern. Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937*. Paderborn: Schoenigh.

Weber, H., Drabkin, J., Bayerlein, B. (2015) *Deutschland, Russland, Komintern. II. Dokumente (1918–1943), Teilband II*. Berlin/München/Boston: De Gruyter.

Weiss, H. (2017) 'The International of Seamen and Harbour Workers – A Radical Global Labour Union of the Waterfront or a Subversive World Wide Web?', in Weiss, H. (ed.) *The Global Dimension of Radical International Solidarity Organizations during the Interwar Period*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

Weiss, H. (forthcoming 2018) 'Against Japanese and Italian Imperialism: The Anti-war Campaigns of Communist International Trade Union Organizations, 1931–1936', *Moving the Social: Journal of Social History and the History of Social Movements*.