

L'inedito



LORENZO COSTAGUTA, JOHANNES S. LOTZE

## Multilingualism and Transnationalism in the Study of Socialist Movements: a Letter from Friedrich A. Sorge to Karl Marx<sup>1</sup>

Speaking at a public gathering in Amsterdam some days after the end of the 1872 Congress of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), Karl Marx commented on the controversial decision taken by the assembly to move the headquarters of the organization from London to New York. The days when European and American workers heralded the International as an innovative solution to growing exclusionary nationalism and labor exploitation were long gone. The 1872 assembly had spent most of its time dealing with in-fighting. Marx acknowledged that "many, even over friends, are not best pleased at this decision" (qtd. in Stekloff n. pag.), but he invited them to consider the issue more closely. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of US history and his expertise on US politics – cultivated during his time as a correspondent on European affairs for the *New York Tribune* and on US affairs for the Vienna paper *Die Presse* – Marx stressed that those opposing the move to New York "forget that the United States is pre-eminently becoming the land of the workers; that, year by year, half-a-million workers migrate to this new world, and that the International must perforce strike deep roots in this soil upon which the workers are supreme" (n. pag.).<sup>2</sup>

It is widely known that Marx had specific reasons to encourage the move of the IWA headquarters to New York. Observing the level that internal conflicts had reached in the organization, and fearing that anarchists could take control of it, Marx had arrived in the Hague (for the first and only congress he ever attended in person) animated by a firm conviction: that the International in Europe had run its course. From this conviction sprang

the unexpected proposal to move the IWA headquarters to the USA (Musto 36-51).

At the same time, there is no reason to suppose that Marx was not genuine in his hope that the IWA could blossom in the United States. In 1864, Marx had written a message on behalf of the International celebrating as “an earnest of the epoch to come” that “the single-minded son of the working class” Abraham Lincoln had been re-elected and would lead “his country through matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race and the reconstruction of the social world” (“Address of the International” n. pag.). Some years later, in *Capital*, he had celebrated the end of slavery and expressed his wholehearted endorsement of “the first fruit of the Civil War, the agitation for the eight-hour day, running with the seven-league-boot-speed of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California.”<sup>3</sup> Marx identified the United States as the quintessential land of capitalism, a country where “the capitalist economy and the corresponding enslavement of the working class have developed more *rapidly* and *shamelessly* than in any other country,” as he would write in 1881 (qtd. in Morais 6).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the social and economic conditions were not yet ripe, but the development of a powerful working class movement was a possibility that Marx had no reason to exclude.

The move of the headquarters to New York City gave an unexpected twist to the political career of a German American leader of the IWA who so far had played a crucial albeit controversial role in the American branch of the organization: Friedrich A. Sorge. A native of Bethau, Saxony, Sorge had landed in the United States in 1852. He established himself in Hoboken, an industrial town facing Manhattan on the New Jersey shore of the Hudson river, a place where he would remain until his death in 1905. Like thousands of Germans, he was forced to leave Europe after taking a proactive role in the 1848-1849 Springtime of Peoples. On his arrival in the United States, Sorge was a radical atheist with no links to the socialist movement. In 1857 he took part in the foundation of New York City’s “Communist Club” which, despite its name, had no links with the communist and socialist movement erupting in Europe (Herreshoff 68-70).<sup>5</sup> Still after the Civil War Sorge was best described as a Free Thinker with little interest in labor issues (Herreshoff 70; Foner 8). Nonetheless,

by the time the newly established New York City IWA General Council proposed him as the General Secretary of the organization in 1872, Sorge had become one of the fiercest supporters of Marx and Engels's historical materialism in the United States. Trusted by the two leaders, who considered him as one of the main sources of information on American matters for years to come, and through his leadership in the International and his role in the foundation of the Workingmen's Party of the United States in 1876, Sorge rose to the status of "father of modern socialism in America" (Foner 3-41).<sup>6</sup>

The letter that we publish in this issue of *RSA Journal* provides an insight into the process that turned Sorge into one of the founding leaders of Marxism in the US.<sup>7</sup> Long considered an offshoot of a story centered in Europe, in recent years the history of nineteenth-century American Marxism has found a new centrality. The use of transnational and global approaches has recast the US as one hub of a broad transatlantic network in which new ideas, practices and approaches were formed (see Bensimon et al.; Keil; Zimmerman). Moreover, the US and its specific socio-economic problems have acquired a new relevance in analyses of nineteenth-century conceptualizations of Marxist thought, not only by Karl Marx, but also by his followers, especially as regards race and class.<sup>8</sup>

This letter shows the enduring potential of using transnational approaches and multilingual sources in the study of nineteenth-century social movements. While transnational approaches have been adopted for at least three decades, much remains to be done. This is the case for Marxist studies as well, a field that very early promoted multinational approaches and the use of multilingual sources. The letter comes from the Marx-Engels archive at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. While all the outgoing correspondence of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels has been published and translated into English in at least two editions, their incoming correspondence has only rarely been subjected to a similar degree of research, editing, and publication. In 1953, International Publishers edited *Letters to Americans, 1848-1895*, a selection of the correspondence that Marx and Engels sent to socialists, radicals and persons of interest in the USA. The Amsterdam Marx-Engels archive contains much of the correspondence that the two socialists were answering. However, since none

of these letters have been edited or translated, one is left with a one-sided dialogue where it requires imagination to fill in the gaps and reconstruct the ongoing conversations between socialists and activists on both sides of the Atlantic.

Sorge was one of the most frequent American correspondents of Marx and Engels. The Amsterdam archive houses 71 letters sent by Sorge to Marx between 1867 and 1883 and 219 sent by Sorge to Engels between 1872 and 1895.<sup>9</sup> The letter we have transcribed, translated and commented upon is the first that Sorge sent to Marx. By means of this document we aim to reveal the potential of this archive while, at the same time, highlighting the technical and practical difficulties that researchers have to cope with in order to make these documents usable for historical analysis.

One fundamental technical difficulty in dealing with this correspondence is Sorge's use of a script known as *Kurrent*. When Sorge penned his first letter to Marx, two basic scripts were used in German-speaking lands, a situation that had existed since around the sixteenth century. One of them was called "Kurrentschrift" (running script), "German script," or simply *Kurrent*.<sup>10</sup> The other basic style was "Schulschrift" (school script), which, being written in "Latin" or "Roman" lettering, was also known as "Lateinschrift" (Latin script). Both scripts were in cursive writing, as opposed to the printed forms *Fraktur* (mirroring *Kurrent* in print, as it were) and *Antiqua* (the printed counterpart of Latin script). Educated German-language writers would use either *Kurrent* or Latin script, depending on the context. If they used *Kurrent*, they would often employ a particular form of "script switching," using *Kurrent* for German-language text but switching to Latin script whenever "foreign" words or names popped up in the text. This peculiarity can also be seen in Sorge's letter which uses *Kurrent* throughout but shifts to Latin script for the English sentence "It would be bad policy" as well as for the Italian phrase "E pur si muove."

*Kurrent* was used across a wide geographical range of German-speaking lands, such as Prussia or Saxony (where Sorge was born in 1828), and more linguistically mixed territories, such as the multilingual Habsburg Empire or the Kingdom of Bohemia.<sup>11</sup> Franz Kafka's father Hermann Kafka (1852-1931), for example, used *Kurrent* in the letters he wrote to his future wife Julie Löwy in 1882, a clear indication that he attended the German schools

of his time and place (which taught *Kurrent*) and not the Czech ones which taught a modified form of Latin script (Nekula 46-47). And while *Kurrent* is often simply referred to as “German script,” its use actually transcended the German-speaking lands. Scandinavians used an only slightly revised form, called *Gotiskskrift* (Gothic script), to write Norwegian and Danish. With numerous Germans emigrating to the USA in the nineteenth century (some in danger of their lives in Europe due to their revolutionary activities), *Kurrent* crossed the Atlantic and was used by emerging socialist US organizations – many of which remained rather limitedly German in membership, leadership, and language until at least the 1880s (Holmes 268).

In the historical ups and downs of *Kurrent* and Latin script in the German-speaking lands, language and politics were always intertwined. Most infamously, Nazi Germany proclaimed *Antiqua* and Latin script “un-German” (only to overturn this proclamation in 1941 due to the realization that people in Nazi-occupied countries could not decipher *Kurrent* or *Fraktur*). But already in Sorge’s days, script use was often highly politicized, with German nationalists ridiculing the use of *Antiqua* as “un-German,” culminating in Otto von Bismarck’s scornful remark that he would never read “German books in Latin letters” (qtd. in Shanley 232): “Deutsche Bücher in lateinischen Buchstaben lese ich nicht!” *Antiqua*, on the contrary, became associated with attributes such as “international,” “educated,” and “scientific”: more cosmopolitan Germans often favored *Antiqua* over the “national” style. Nevertheless, in terms of handwritten correspondence *Kurrent* remained the standard form, and both nationalists and international Marxists would use it, as Sorge’s letter demonstrates.

It should be pointed out that the technical difficulties intrinsic to Sorge’s letter are negligible in comparison to the problems one encounters when deciphering Marx’s own handwriting. After all, *Kurrent* is simply another symbol system to write German and other languages. And while some *Kurrent* letters (such as *e* or *b*) look different from their Latin counterparts, others (such as *m* or *u*) do not: given some practical archival training, researchers should be able to learn *Kurrent* without any particular problem. Transcriptions are especially unproblematic if the writing in question is clear and regular (which is the case with Sorge), without overly eccentric

features. Marx's handwriting, on the contrary (and no matter whether he writes in *Kurrent* or Latin script!), is highly idiosyncratic and its notorious illegibility has presented obstacles to generations of scholars. In Marx's lifetime, Jenny von Westphalen and Friedrich Engels were probably the only two people on earth who could make sense of his scrawls. During a particularly disturbing period of financial distress, Marx applied for work in a railroad office, but, as he wrote to Louis Kugelmann in Hanover on 28 December 1862, "I did not get the post because of my bad handwriting."<sup>12</sup> Already in 1835, Marx's teachers praised his knowledge of history and Latin but also remarked (in Latin!): "verum quam turpis littera", *what atrocious handwriting!* (qtd. in Heinrich 102). The elderly Engels taught a kind of Marxist palaeography to Social Democrats, such as Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein, who were to inherit Marx's voluminous papers. Thus, while some visual characteristics of *Kurrent* might seem odd to the untrained eye, Sorge's letter does not present any of these more severe palaeographic problems.

A similarity between this letter by Sorge and Marx's letters, however, is their multilingual nature. Sorge is writing in German but elegantly slips in an English sentence here, an Italian sentence there, and additional English words in between. Both Marx's and Engels's letters are known for their unusually high level of code-switching, especially from German to French to English, sometimes sprinting through all three languages in a single sentence.<sup>13</sup> That the multilingual Marx-Engels correspondence is still relatively understudied can partly be explained by this fact: any reader has to be *at least* trilingual. In addition to German, English, and French, there are numerous expressions from Latin, Italian, Spanish, and Russian. Marx effortlessly employed up to four languages in a single sentence (e.g. French, English, Latin, and German in this magnificent example): "Pauvre Moses, so egregiously *post festum* noch zum Märtyrer *in partibus infidelium* zu werden!" (qtd. in Bebel and Bernstein 316). *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* in Lawrence Krader's transcription (1972), rightly described as a "pathbreaking multilingual volume" (Anderson 197), thankfully left Marx's notes in their original languages, including passages in English, German, and Greek ("diese *demotae* wählten einen δῆμαρχος who had the *custody of the public register*" (qtd. in Krader 214). While the exact relation of



these notes to *Capital* is unclear, they might be seen as evidence of Marx's attempt to give his critique of political economy a more global scope that included non-European societies (Anderson 197).

Such multilingualism reflected Marx and Engels's cosmopolitan outlook. Furthermore, it was the practical consequence of their emigrant experience (Marx's code-switching from German to French to English mirrors his movement from Bonn and Jena through Paris and Brussels to London). Finally, Marx and Engels, as committed promoters of an international and at least potentially *anti-national* movement ("The working men have no country," *Communist Manifesto*), simply *had to be* multilingual. Engels, one year before his death in 1895, had newspapers in eight different languages on his desk (written in German, English, Italian, French, Polish, Bulgarian, Spanish, and Czech) to keep himself updated about socialist movements around the globe (Derfler 153). Although Sorge's letter does not reach these heights of multilingualism or the degree of code-switching seen in the Marx-Engels correspondence, its polyglot features nevertheless remind us of an important aspect of working-class internationalism of the late nineteenth century.

Sorge's "conversion" to Marxism started at some point after the American Civil War. Despite the unprecedented consequences of that deadly conflict, in 1865 Sorge's eyes were still fixed on the cause of German unification. Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox found Sorge amongst the leaders of the League for German Freedom and Unity, a group of revolutionary exiles ready to jump on the first boat to Europe as soon as social unrest against German rulers was about to start. However, when the end of the 1866 Six Week's War between Prussia and Austria made it clear that the unification of Germany would not happen through popular revolt but under Bismarck's iron fist, Sorge decided to abandon European matters for good and dedicate himself to American radical politics (Foner 8-9; Herreshoff 70-71).

The Communist Club, which resumed activities after the Civil War, was trying to forge links with the IWA. In July 1867, Sorge took matters into his own hands and sent a letter to Karl Marx, Corresponding Secretary of the German-language sections of the International, to ask permission to officially start a recruitment campaign amongst English-language

workers. The content of the letter offers insights into the beginning of militant Marxism in the USA through the perspective of one of its key protagonists. At first glance Sorge's letter seemed to stem from a merely practical necessity. The preparatory work for the German American section was under way, Sorge reassured Marx, but if the International was "to thrive and be successful here" it was necessary to take measures to "involve the more substantial part of the Anglo-American, English-speaking workers and like-minded persons and arouse their interest" in the project started in London. With this goal in mind, Sorge wrote Marx to ask for propaganda material in English to distribute to English-speaking workers. "Please do not be sparing with the number of papers and manuscripts to be sent," specified Sorge. Much work was needed to spread the word about working class internationalism in the land of the free.

Yet by reading between the lines it is possible to observe Sorge's attempt to forge a personal bond with the most important leader of the International. For a start, this letter was actually addressed to the wrong person – there were more appropriate addressees for a request for information on English-language material, such as Johann Eccarius, who from 1869 took the role of English correspondence Secretary.<sup>14</sup> But more importantly, the letter clearly betrayed the not so veiled attempt by Sorge to credit himself as a member of the transatlantic German-American socialist community that animated the International, of which Marx was the putative if not fully acknowledged leader. In this light it is necessary to interpret not only Sorge's numerous mentions of the several acquaintances that he and Marx had in common (Berlin shoemaker and member of the IWA August Vogt; Sigfried Meyer, arguably the American contact who gave Marx's address to Sorge; and Wilhelm Liebknecht, German socialist leader and future co-founder of the Social Democratic Party of Germany); but also his mention of the order he had already placed for Marx's long-awaited "work," the forthcoming first volume of *Capital*.

It is interesting to note that Sorge's overture fell flat. Marx, adopting his usual wary and suspicious approach, never replied to the former's letter. In fact, it took him more than a year to send the requested credentials to Sorge, and he did it in a reply to Meyer, probably under pressure from

Meyer himself. As for Sorge's requests for pamphlets and other English-language materials, apparently they went unanswered for good.<sup>15</sup> Marx explicitly confirmed that Sorge was *not* in his trusted circle some months later, when, replying to Meyer's complaints on the excessive freedom with which Sorge had used his credentials, he retorted in anger that "it is your fault, if *Sorge* (who is *quite unknown* to me) received credentials... The way you put it in your letter, I was under the impression that Sorge was *your and A. Vogt's man*. So be more careful in the future!" (qtd. in Marx and Engels, *Werke* 560).<sup>16</sup> The relationship between Sorge and Marx did not really pick up until the summer of 1870, during which time Sorge sent *eight* letters to Marx within the span of a couple of months. Only at that point did Marx reply to Sorge with a short but polite letter. From then on, the correspondence continued unabated for the following decade and a half.<sup>17</sup>

A more thorough analysis of the Sorge-Marx correspondence would provide details of the controversial political role that Sorge played in the history of the First International in the USA before his appointment as General Secretary in 1872. The IWA did not really start to exist in the USA until 1869, two years after Sorge had sent his first letter to Marx. From that moment, the organization flourished both in immigrant and American circles. But before long two factions emerged. On the one hand, Sorge led a group of mostly German-American members inspired by a strict pro-trade unionist doctrine. Seeking a close alliance with organized American labor, this faction wanted to restrict the organization to wage workers only and gain a strong foothold among Irish workers, the largest immigrant community in the USA at the time. On the other hand, a composite group of English-speaking radicals sought to marry socialist-inspired labor activism with US-bred radical doctrines, from Spiritualism to democratic individualism to republicanism. Sorge's stubbornness in imposing a specific trade unionist-focused strategy played a part in causing an irreparable fracture between these two factions. Recent historiography has made a decisive contribution to correcting early Marxist histories of the International (see Lause; Messer-Kruse; Perrier; Cordillot).<sup>18</sup> Yet much continues to be the object of scholarly controversy, from the approach of German-American internationalists towards non-

white workers and women to their legacy in the history of American radicalism and trade unionism.<sup>19</sup> The correspondence of Sorge and of other German leaders of the International could further our understanding of this crucial period in the history of the American left.

# Letter by Friedrich A. Sorge to Karl Marx, 10 July 1867

## Diplomatic transcription

### Page 1

Hoboken, 10 Juli 1867.

Werther Herr!

Es wird Ihnen durch den „Vorboten“ bekanntgeworden sein, daß wir hier in New York, von dem Hoboken ein Vorstädtchen ist, eine Section der International W. A. zu bilden im Begriff sind, u. hat der New Yorker Kommunistenklub die Vorarbeiten begonnen, so daß die Begründung einer amerikanischen Zweigassociation, wenn auch in nuce, als gesichert zu betrachten ist. Da dieses Unternehmen vorläufig nur auf Deutsche Amerikaner berechnet ist, haben wir uns mit J. Ph. Becker, unserm alten Kämpen in Genf, in Verbindung gesetzt u. werden uns vorerst der dortigen Sektionsgruppe deutscher Sprache anschließen. Doch hoffe ich, daß die S. A. hier so stark werde, daß in nicht zu ferner Zeit wir eine eigne deutsch=amerikanische Sektionsgruppe bilden u. dann direkt mit dem Generalrath in Beziehungen treten. Etwa bei Ihnen anfragende amerikanische Interessenten mögen Sie direkt an mich reichen, u. bitten wir um Ihre freundliche Förderung der Sache auch in der Neuen Welt, um den Kampf gegen die von der Alten Welt ererbten Erwerbs= u. Besitzverhältnisse aufzunehmen.

Doch zu dem Hauptpunkte meines Schreibens: Es ist, wenn die Internationale hier gedeihen u. erfreulich wirken soll, nothwendig

daß das gewichtigere Element der anglo=amerikanischen, englisch  
redenden Arbeiter u. Gesinnungsgenossen hereingezogen u. dafür  
interessirt [*sic*] werde. Dieserhalb habe ich schon mit einigen meiner  
Freunde englischer Zunge Rücksprache genommen u. will sie veran=  
lassen, eine Sektion zu bilden. Dazu aber sind mir die Schrift=  
stücke der I.W.A. unentbehrlich, als da sind: Manifeste,  
Statuten, Beitrittsbedingungen u. vor allem das Organ  
derselben

Page 2

derselben in englischer Sprache. Es ist mir augenblicklich keine andre Adresse von Beamten der Ass. in London bekannt, u. darum richte ich an Sie, werther Herr, hiermit die Bitte, die Uebersendung der gewünschten u. benötigten Schriftstücke, wo möglich mit begleitender Instruction (gleichviel ob in englischer oder deutscher Sprache), schleunig zu vermitteln. Mit der Anzahl der zu übersendenden Blätter u. Papiere bitte nicht zu knausern. It would be bad policy.

Wenn möglich senden Sie die Sachen unfrankirt. Wenn das nicht geht, so belasten Sie mich damit, u. ich werde es dann übersenden, sobald es der Mühe lohnt. Doch werde ich, sobald die Sache in Gang, Andre für mich in die Arbeitsstelle eintreten lassen, da mir die deutschamerikanische Sektion genug Arbeit machen wird. Veranlassen Sie ja die möglichst detaillirte Uebersendung von Instructionen.

Es rührt sich auch in Amerika. Die Arbeiter fangen an, sich ein Wenig zu fühlen u. ihre Bestrebungen ziehen jetzt die Augen aller Politiker auf sich, u. das ist eben in den Vereinigten Staaten schlimm, da es keine nichtswürdigere Sorte von Menschen giebt, als die amerikanischen Fachpolitiker. "Es geschehen Zeichen und Wunder", möchte man sagen, denn kürzlich hat Einer der einflußreichsten Politiker, Senator Wade von Ohio, eine Rede gehalten die fast kommunistisch klang. Das Geschrei der (bourgeois) Presse wurde darob auch so heftig, daß man sich beeilte, explanations u. interpretations folgen zu lassen. E pur si muove!!

Mit aufrichtiger Hochachtung

Ihr  
F.A. Sorge  
Bez. 101, Hoboken, N.J.  
via New York, USA.

Herrn Karl Marx  
London.

Page 3

P.S. Meine Wohnung ist für ein Jahr bis zum nächsten May N. 54 Fifth Street Hoboken. A. Vogt aus Berlin ist seit 2 Wochen hier bei mir u. bedauert sehr, Sie nicht in Hannover aufgesucht zu haben. Dem wackern Liebknecht geht es sehr schlecht in Leipzig, wie Sie d[ur]ch Meyer werden erfahren haben. Ich habe ihm empfohlen, auch zu uns nach Amerika zu kommen, schon seiner Kinder wegen. Auf Ihr Werk (bei O. Meissner) freuen wir uns sehr u. haben bereits nicht unansehnliche Bestellungen d[ur]ch Buchhändler L. W. Schmidt von hier gemacht. Unser alter braver Fr. Kamm ist letzten Mai gestorben. Ueberhaupt hat uns der Tod seit wenigen Jahren viele der bravsten, bewährtesten Kämpfer hinweggerafft. Es ist Zeit, daß ein neues, junges Geschlecht erstehe. Es ist vielleicht von Interesse für Sie, ein Statut unsers [*sic*] Komm. Kl. zu besitzen, u. lege ich zu diesem Zwecke ein Exemplar bei. Mit herzlichen Wünschen für Ihr u. Ihrer Familie Wohlergehen

d. I.  
A Sorge



# Letter by Friedrich A. Sorge to Karl Marx, 10 July 1867

## Annotated translation<sup>20</sup>

Dear Sir!

As you will have seen from the *Vorbote*,<sup>21</sup> we are currently involved in forming a section of the International W. A.<sup>22</sup> in New York, of which Hoboken is a little suburb. The Communist Club [*Kommunistenklub*] of New York has started the preparatory work, so that the founding of an American branch organization, even if only *in nuce*, can be seen as secured. Since this project is, for the time being, only aimed at German-Americans [*Deutsche Amerikaner*], we got into contact with our old fighter J. Ph. Becker<sup>23</sup> in Geneva; and we will, for the moment, associate ourselves with the German-language section group [*Sektionsgruppe deutscher Sprache*] there. I hope, however, that the S.A.<sup>24</sup> will become so strong here that we will form our own German-American section group in the near future and contact the General Council [*Generalrath*] directly. Should interested parties from America make enquiries to you, refer them directly to me. Moreover, we ask for your kind support of the cause in the New World, too, in order to take up the fight against the work and property relationships [*Erwerbs- u. Besitzverhältnisse*] inherited from the Old World.

But let me proceed to the main point of my letter: if the International is to thrive and to be successful here, it is necessary to involve the more substantial part of the Anglo-American, English-speaking workers and like-minded persons and arouse their interest in it. Therefore, I have already conferred with some of my English tongue friends [*Freunde englischer Zunge*], with a view to prompting them to form a section [*Sektion*]. For that purpose, however, the papers of the I.W.A.<sup>25</sup> are indispensable to me, in particular: manifestos, statutes, membership conditions, and most of all its English-language organ [*das Organ derselben in englischer Sprache*]. I currently do not

know of any other [postal] address of officials of the Ass.<sup>26</sup> in London, and so I address the request to you, dear Sir, to arrange the shipment of the desired and required papers, if possible with accompanying commentary (no matter whether in English or in German), as soon as possible. Please do not be sparing with the number of papers and manuscripts to be sent. *It would be bad policy.*<sup>27</sup>

If possible, send the items under pre-paid postage. If that doesn't work, charge me with it, and I will transfer it [the money] to you, at your convenience [*sobald es der Mühe lobnt*]. As soon as the matter is under way, however, I will [step aside and] appoint someone else to this position, because the German-American section will give me plenty of work.<sup>28</sup> Make sure to send instructions which should be as detailed as possible.

Things are moving in America, too. The workers are beginning to "feel themselves" a little [*fangen an, sich ein Wenig zu fühlen*; i.e., feel or realize their existence as members of a class] and their endeavours are now attracting the attention of all politicians. Well, and this is fatal in the United States, as there is no more worthless sort of people than the American professional politicians [*Fachpolitiker*].<sup>29</sup> "Behold the signs and miracles",<sup>30</sup> one might say, as recently one of the most influential politicians, Senator Wade from Ohio,<sup>31</sup> delivered a speech that sounded almost communist. The resulting outcry of the (bourgeois) press became so furious that one hastened to follow up with *explanations* and *interpretations*.<sup>32</sup> *E pur si muove!*<sup>33</sup>

With sincere respect

Your<sup>34</sup>

F.A. Sorge

District<sup>35</sup> 101, Hoboken, N.J.  
via New York, USA.

Mr Karl Marx  
London.

P.S. My accommodation will be for one year, until next May, no. 54 Fifth Street Hoboken. A. Vogt<sup>36</sup> from Berlin has been here with me for

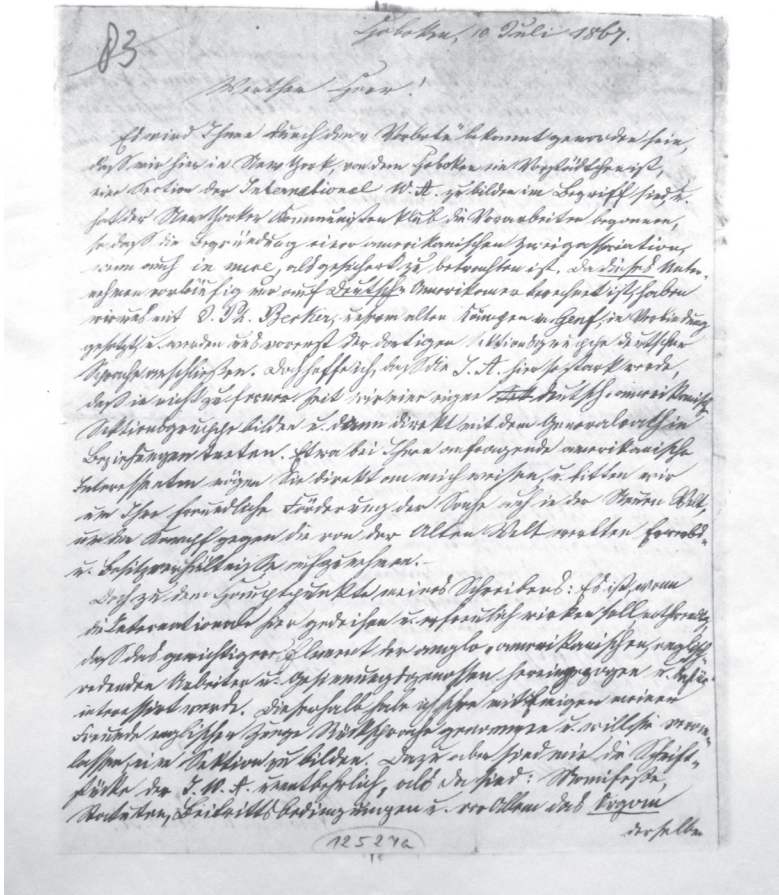
the last 2 weeks and is sorry for not having called on you in Hannover. The brave [*wacker*] Liebknecht<sup>37</sup> is doing very miserably in Leipzig, as you will have learnt from Meyer.<sup>38</sup> I have recommended to him to come to us to America, too, for the sake of his children if nothing else. We are much looking forward to your work<sup>39</sup> (with O. Meissner<sup>40</sup>) and have already placed orders with book dealer L. W. Schmidt from around here.<sup>41</sup> Our old honest [*brav*] Fr. Kamm<sup>42</sup> died last May. As a matter of fact, death has carried off many of our bravest [*bравsten*], most reliable fighters. It is about time that a new, young generation arises. It might be of interest to you to possess a statute of our Communist Club [*Komm. Kl.*] and I enclose one exemplar to this purpose. With cordial wishes for your welfare and that of your family

Yours  
F A Sorge

Letter by Friedrich A. Sorge to Karl Marx, 10 July 1867  
in facsimile<sup>43</sup>

Page 1:

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Page 3:

D 4095

-83/3

P.S. Dieser Bescheinigung ist für ein Jahr gültig, wenn nicht  
 N. 54 Ficht Str. Hohen. A. Nagel und Sohn ist seit 2  
 Wochen für die vier Bedienten, die in der Handwerker  
 Straße zu sehen. Dem räumlichen Licht hat sich nicht  
 in Langgasse, mit demselben Namen verbunden, sondern  
 ist nun umgefallen, und zu dem neuen Anwesen zu kommen, die  
 sieben Wochen lang. Das ist der Fall bei P. Kessner  
 für ein Jahr, und ist zu sehen, das ist nicht eine besondere  
 Bescheinigung. Das Licht hat L. M. Schmidt von sein  
 gemacht. In der alten Bescheinigung kann ich nicht sehen, was  
 gemacht. Nach demselben ist und der hat seit einigen Jahren  
 in der Langgasse, und ist die neue Bescheinigung gemacht. Die  
 die die in der Langgasse, und ist die neue Bescheinigung  
 Bescheinigung für ein Jahr. Das ist der Fall bei P. Kessner  
 die Langgasse zu demselben Namen, die in der Langgasse  
 Bescheinigung für ein Jahr. Das ist der Fall bei P. Kessner

125272

L. C. & S. Lotze

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The authors wish to thank Alex Bryne and the board of *RSA Journal* for the support received in the preparation of this article.
- <sup>2</sup> On Marx and the USA, see Blackburn, and Zimmerman.
- <sup>3</sup> Our translation. Original in Marx, *Das Kapital: Zweite verbesserte Auflage* 306: "Die erste Frucht des Bürgerkriegs war die Achtstundenagitation, mit den Siebenmeilenstiefeln der Lokomotive vom Atlantischen bis zum stillen Ocean ausschreitend, von Neuengland bis nach Kalifornien."
- <sup>4</sup> Karl Marx to Friedrich A. Sorge, 30 June 1881.
- <sup>5</sup> August H. Nimtz emphatically defines the club as "arguably the first Marxist organization in the Western hemisphere." But other sources seem to suggest that the links with the European movement were limited to say the least. In 1868, the Marxist pioneer Joseph Weydemeyer sent a letter to Karl Marx introducing the vicepresident of the club, Albert Komp, and giving a mild endorsement of the club's activities ("something good might come out of it," wrote Weydemeyer, qtd. in Obermann 181). It is not clear if Marx ever picked up Weydemeyer's suggestion to establish a link with the club. See Nimtz.
- <sup>6</sup> This phrase comes from Selig Perlman. Philip S. Foner uses it as the title for his essay on Sorge. See Commons et.al 2: 207; Foner 3.
- <sup>7</sup> Full bibliographic details of the letter in Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Papers, inventory numbers D4095, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.
- <sup>8</sup> See Anderson; Blackburn; Costaguta; Kulikoff; Mezzadra and Samaddar; Pradella, "Postcolonial Theory;" Pradella, "Marx and the Global South".
- <sup>9</sup> Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Papers, inventory numbers D4095-4165, L5762-5980, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. The majority of these letters have been digitized and are accessible at <<http://search.iisg.amsterdam/Record/ARCH00860>>.
- <sup>10</sup> A good sociolinguistic introduction to the *Kurrent* script and its political implications is Augst.
- <sup>11</sup> See Prokopovych et al.; an example on *Kurrent* and Latin script use can be found on p. 230.
- <sup>12</sup> Marx and Engels, *Werke* (30): 309: "Meine schlechte Handschrift war der Grund, daß ich die Stelle nicht erhielt."
- <sup>13</sup> The most comprehensive study from a linguistic viewpoint is probably still Ferguson, discussing numerous writers but keeping a strong focus on Marx and Engels.
- <sup>14</sup> Even though Sorge endeavored to pre-empt this possible objection by specifying he knew no other addresses in London of people connected to the International.
- <sup>15</sup> Karl Marx to Sigfrid Meyer, 4 July 1868, in Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 32, 550-51.
- <sup>16</sup> The letter in which Meyer complains about Sorge's behaviour is not present in Marx's

archive. Its content, however, can clearly be inferred from Marx's replies. Quoted passage (our translation) from Karl Marx to Sigfrid Meyer, 4 July 1868: "so ist es Ihre Schuld, wenn *Sorge* (der mir *durchaus unbekannt* ist) die Vollmacht erhalten. [...] Nach der Fassung Ihres Briefes glaubte ich, *Sorge* sei *Ihr und A. Vogts Mann*." Also in Zukunft mehr Vorsicht. And see also Karl Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, October 28, 1868: "As for *Sorge*, no further action is necessary. My letter to [William] Jessup clarifies the temporary character of the credentials" (our translation; in Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 32, 575: "Was den *Sorge* betrifft, ist keine weitere Aktion nötig. Meine Zeilen an Jessup erklären den temporary Charakter der Vollmachten").

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich A. *Sorge* to Karl Marx, May; July 9, 11, 21; August, 4, 19, 1870; Karl Marx to Friedrich A. *Sorge*, September 1, 1870. These letters can be found in Marx and Engels, *Werke*, vol. 33.

<sup>18</sup> Schlüter established the "Marxist canon" on the history of the First International in the USA.

<sup>19</sup> For contrasting views on the legacy of *Sorge's* trade unionism, see Messer-Kruse 1998 and Costaguta 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Translators' additions in brackets. Original German words in brackets and italics. Parentheses in the original.

<sup>21</sup> *Vorbote* (or *Der Vorbote*, "The Harbinger"): monthly central organ of the German section of the First International, published in Geneva from 1866 to 1871.

<sup>22</sup> Workingmen's Association.

<sup>23</sup> Johann Philipp Becker (1809-1886), who, in the 1860s, became a prominent figure in the IWA (International Workingmen's Association), or First International, founded in London in 1864. He became a close friend of Karl Marx and especially Friedrich Engels.

<sup>24</sup> "Socialist Association"?

<sup>25</sup> International Workingmen's Association, or First International. See above.

<sup>26</sup> *Ass.*: abbreviation for (International Workingmen's) Association.

<sup>27</sup> This sentence in italics is not a translation; it is inserted *in English* in the original.

<sup>28</sup> *Andre für mich in die Arbeitsstelle eintreten lassen*: lit. "make other people enter this position on my behalf." Apparently this refers to the position or general task of dealing with the German-language and/or English-language papers that Marx is asked to send.

<sup>29</sup> *Fachpolitiker*: this term is certainly meant in a derogatory sense.

<sup>30</sup> *Es geschehen (noch) Zeichen und Wunder*: biblical phrase popularised by Luther's translation. "Zeichen und Wunder" (signs and wonders/miracles) appears several times throughout the Lutheran Bible, e.g. in Exodus 7:3: "Aber ich will das Herz des Pharao verhärten und viele Zeichen und Wunder tun in Ägyptenland." King James version: "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt."

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin F. Wade (1800-1878) was a Radical Republican from Ohio, very influential



in this early phase of Reconstruction. See Trefousse.

<sup>32</sup> The two words in italics are not translated but inserted *in English* in the original.

<sup>33</sup> Italian in the original. “And yet it moves!” Phrase attributed to Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) in the context of his being forced to renounce his claim that the Earth moves around the Sun, rather than vice versa.

<sup>34</sup> Original has “d.I.,” an abbreviated closing formula: “der Ihrige.”

<sup>35</sup> The original apparently has “Bez,” which could be an abbreviated form of “Bezirk,” “district.”

<sup>36</sup> August Vogt, shoemaker from Berlin, formerly member of *Bund der Kommunisten* and since January 1866 a member of the *Berliner Sektion der Internationalen Arbeiterassoziation*. Sigfrid Meyer (var. Siegfried, Siegfrid, Sigfried) was another member of this new Berlin section (Eichhoff 84). There are letters by Marx to both Vogt and Meyer.

<sup>37</sup> Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1900), one of the principal founders of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), father of Karl Liebknecht (born 1871, murdered in 1919 by paramilitary Freikorps troops who worked in cooperation with the new German SPD government under Friedrich Ebert).

<sup>38</sup> Sigfrid Meyer. See footnote on August Vogt above.

<sup>39</sup> This certainly refers to Marx’s anticipated publication of the first volume of *Das Kapital* which was indeed published by Otto Meissner shortly after this letter by Sorge was written. (The letter is from July 1867; the first edition of *Das Kapital* came out in September 1867.)

<sup>40</sup> Otto Meissner (var. Otto Carl Meißner; born 1819 in Quedlinburg, died 1902 in Hamburg) founded the publishing house Otto Meissner Verlag. He published the first edition of Marx’s *Das Kapital* in 1867.

<sup>41</sup> *Buchbändler L. W. Schmidt*: compare the cover page of the first German-language edition (and first edition *per se*) of *Das Kapital* which reads: “*Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Oekonomie*. Von Karl Marx. Erster Band. *Buch I: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals*. Hamburg / Verlag von Otto Meissner. 1867. New York: L. W. Schmidt, 24 Barclay-Street.” Barclay Street is in downtown Manhattan, a few steps from City Hall Park.

<sup>42</sup> This can only be Fritz Kamm who co-founded, in 1857, the *Kommunistenklub* of New York.

<sup>43</sup> The authors wish to thank the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, for the authorization to reproduce these images.

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