**Internationalism**

The term “internationalism” (*internationalisme*; *Internationalismus*) was coined in the mid-nineteenth century to denote those movements that called for involvement in events beyond national and imperial borders, for negotiated solutions to geo-political problems, and for the prevention of international disputes. The term also referred to the unprecedented social, economic and technological transformations that had gradually begun shrinking the globe by the late nineteenth century. Simultaneously descriptive and aspirational, “internationalism” suggested an existing state of affairs while also recommending a process that would bring about a more modern (and, it was presumed, superior) socio-political order.

Modern internationalism can trace its roots to the Enlightenment and the writings of Kant, Goethe, Rousseau, Voltaire, Comte and Madame de Staël. During the Paris Commune, it was immortalized in “L’Internationale,” which was written by a *Communard* and set to the French revolutionary tune of “La Marseillaise.” After 1871, socialist and non-socialist defenders of Captain Dreyfus in France (such as Emile Durkheim) were deemed internationalists, as were their followers, including some who responded to persecution with a form of Jewish internationalism. After the Congress of Berlin (1884), liberals who questioned the efficiency and morality of European empires also took up the term. Following J. A. Hobson, they argued that imperialism was both the cause and result of the expansion of modern capitalism and the source of many global conflicts. Hobson maintained that rather than pursuing empire, European powers should help colonies become strong, independent, nation-states, uniting with them to form an internationalist organization to settle interstate squabbles and protect free trade.

Hobson’s ideas influenced both Vladimir Lenin and Woodrow Wilson. After the Great War, Wilson strongly endorsed the creation of a League of Nations, which he hoped would guarantee free trade and global peace. Going against this vision, Lenin argued that imperialism could not be reformed; it must be overthrown through revolution. For supporters of Lenin, the term thus signaled the coming world revolution of proletarian communism, over and against the false internationalisms of imperialists, capitalists, and liberals. During the 1930s, the catchword was picked up by the Vatican and Catholic internationalists, by partisans of Popular Fronts and opponents of Franco’s *coup* in Spain, and by the German Nazi party, which saw internationalism as a menace on a par with Bolshevism, capitalism, and Judaism.

Despite the failure of myriad internationalists to prevent World War II, the term retained its popularity and complexity in the postwar years, referring simultaneously to supporters of the Communist International or Comintern; to US political and military “containment” of the USSR during the Cold War; to the rise of international bodies and international law exemplified by the new United Nations; and to transnational manufacturing and commerce. Only during the *détente* years would the word begin to decline in popularity and gradually be replaced by putatively less political, but nevertheless controversial, terms such as “globalization.”

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**For Further Reading**

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