

## “Friendly Spirit, Comradeship, and Good-Natured Fun”: Adventures in Socialist Internationalism

CHRISTINE COLLETTE

---

**SUMMARY:** This essay compares and contrasts two British organizations, the Workers’ Travel Association (1921–1966) and the British Workers’ Sports Association (1930–1957). It considers their motives, their relationships with the labour movement domestically and internationally, and how far they were able to maintain the international activities to which they aspired.

---

For historians of the international labour movement, the international adventures of the Workers’ Travel Association (WTA) and the British Workers’ Sports Association (BWSA) repay study because they broaden our understanding of contemporary perceptions of internationalism and how internationalist ideals could be put into practice.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the contrasting fortunes of WTA and BWSA indicate some of the advantages and constraints experienced by groups operating independently, but forming part of the wider British labour-movement world. The time scales of the two bodies were roughly parallel, the WTA being formed in 1921 and the BWSA in 1930, as a rival to the British Workers’ Sports Federation founded in 1923. The WTA became Galleon Travel in 1966, one of the many tourist agencies which aimed at the mass market.<sup>2</sup> The BWSA ceased activity in 1957.<sup>3</sup> Financially, the WTA was much the more

1. Perceptions of internationalism were discussed at the Swedish Labour Movement and Archives centenary conference, “The International Labour Movement on the Threshold of Two Centuries”, October 2002; Gerd Callesen’s unpublished paper for this conference usefully refers to internationalism as “a plethora – an ideal, a policy, and a method”.

2. There are two main collections of WTA records, Workers’ Travel Association Records, Trades Union Congress, London, [hereafter WTAR] (WTA Annual Reports quoted below are from this collection); and Records of the WTA, Kent Archive Office, Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, U2543 [hereafter RWTA]. See also Francis Williams, *Journey into Adventure: The Story of the Workers’ Travel Association* (London, 1960). I wrote briefly about WTA and BWSA in Christine Collette, *The International Faith: Labour’s Attitudes to European Socialism, 1918–1939* (Aldershot, 1998).

3. BWSA records are found in General Secretary’s Papers, Labour Party Archives and Study Centre, John Ryland’s Library, University of Manchester. (There are two files in the archives, the unlisted and the listed file. The former is referred to hereafter as Sport and the latter as GSP).

successful, recording a deficit in three years only – 1926, 1931, 1940 – while the BWSA foundered under the weight of its debts.

#### AIMS AND FOUNDATION

Both bodies derived some of their inspiration from international organizations. Workers' leisure travel was a new adventure and was discussed by Cecil Rogerson, Harry Gosling of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), and others at an International Labour Office (ILO) meeting at Geneva. They drafted some objectives, and early discussions included Albert Thomas, ILO secretary.<sup>4</sup> Rogerson was rather a maverick figure, once on the staff of the League of Nations' Union, and described by his sister as a social worker. The beginning of the WTA was a matter of controversy, but it is generally agreed that Rogerson was the driving force.

For workers' sporting activities there were plenty of antecedents. As Stephen Jones wrote, a socialist sporting tradition had existed from Victorian times; examples ranged from the Clarion Cycling Club, the Scottish Labour Sporting Federation, and labour football clubs, including that of the Guildford Cooperative Ladies, and the Southampton Transport Workers' Social and Athletic Club.<sup>5</sup> Socialist sport was more fully developed in Europe than in Britain; the German Sports and Gymnastic League, for instance, had been created in 1893. The Workers' Sports International was set up in Ghent in 1913. Unlike the pioneering WTA, a British sporting organization would have to fit in with these pre-existing bodies. British delegates attended the first postwar meeting of the Sports International in 1919; the latter body was formally reconstituted in 1920 at Lucerne and was henceforth more usually known as the Lucerne International. The Czech Workers' Gymnast Association hosted an international athletics meeting in 1921, followed by the Leipzig Workers' Gymnast Club in 1922. The Lucerne International not only aimed to "act as the guard of defence of the working population against fascism", but ultimately to create "a new humanity" through "spiritual and ethical development".<sup>6</sup> The sporting counterpart to WTA's Cecil Rogerson was Tom Groom, chair of the Clarion Cycling Club. Groom attended the third

4. RWTA, handwritten memorandum of origins, n.d., extract from "Up and Down Stream" by Harry Gosling, Cecil Rogerson to Gosling, 22 November 1922, Miss E.D. Rogerson to Francis Williams, 27 February n.d., U2543 C1. Rogerson died in 1926 in a climbing accident in Switzerland; WTA provided his headstone.

5. Stephen Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class* (Manchester, 1988), p. 74.

6. Sozialistische Arbeiter-Internationale papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; Devlieger to SAI secretary (Adler), 15 May 1925, SAI 2955; David Steinberg, "The Workers' Sports International, 1920–1928", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13 (1978).

Lucerne International meeting in Switzerland in 1923 and determined that Britain should be represented by its own federation on future occasions.

The prime aim of both groups at their foundation echoed the current ambition of the Second International and International Federation of Trades Unions, to promote world peace. Both groups emphasized the importance of direct workers' involvement in order to achieve international understanding, peace, and goodwill.<sup>7</sup> Arthur Creech Jones (TGWU) wrote in its staff journal in 1929 that WTA had "a real measure of idealism".<sup>8</sup> Looking back to its foundation, the WTA 1947 report commented: "The main purpose of its founders was to provide an organisation which, while technically competent in every respect as a travel organisation, should have as its main object the promotion of peace through personal contact."<sup>9</sup>

The flyleaves of all WTA Annual Reports expressed the aim of achieving peace through: "mutual understanding between the workers of all countries [...] actual contact, by interchange of visits, by the study of languages, and by some knowledge of the history, literature, art and social movements of other countries". Similarly, Groom wrote that: "the future pacification of the world will be won, and held, on the democratic sporting fields of the Workers' Olympiad [...] international peace [...] is not possible except by a strenuous anti-militarist campaign".<sup>10</sup>

In addition, both groups, as their titles indicated, explicitly aimed to serve working people. WTA chair, J.W. Bowen of the Post Workers' Union, wrote of Rogerson that he explicitly rejected the option of providing "holidays for the middle classes", preferring to serve parties from "the works, the forge, the mine, the garage [...] the idea was that of a robust, self-governing, cooperative movement of the workers themselves".<sup>11</sup> Finally, for both groups, the provision of leisure activities with an educative or social purpose was important, an inherent part of international activities. As Bowen wrote, there was a need for the labour movement to think about "the wise use of leisure", which was newly available to many workers. The WTA, wrote Bowen, wanted: "to play our part in the task of fitting a constantly expanding leisure into a continuing civilisation", in order to create an educated, as well as a leisured society. It

7. Gerd Callesen's unpublished paper insists that internationalism be based on workers' direct experience and that the institutionalization of internationalism in the Second International and IFTU weakened the spontaneity of previous informal links. See also Kevin Callahan's interesting assertion in "Performing Internationalism" in Stuttgart in 1907: French and German Socialist Nationalism and the Political Culture of an International Socialist Congress", *International Review of Social History*, (45) 2000, pp. 51–87, that socialist international congresses were occasions for ritual, political symbolism, and public display.

8. WTAR, Arthur Creech Jones, *The Echo*, no. 2, December 1929, WTA staff journal.

9. 26th Annual Report of the WTA.

10. Tom Groom, "Labour and Sport", *Labour Magazine*, 2 (1923).

11. WTAR, Address by J.W. Bowen, JP, (Chairman) to the National Council, 31 May 1931.

was important, therefore, that WTA tours were “not for the sake of mere sightseeing”, but should be focused on areas where social and political problems were being tackled.<sup>12</sup>

The foundation years were not easy for either group. Groom’s campaign led to the Independent Labour Party calling a meeting in April 1923 to establish a British socialist or workers’ sports federation, and the British Workers’ Sports Federation was created in May of that year, with Labour Party, Trades Union Congress, and Clarion Cycling Club backing, although little practical help was given. For the WTA, Rogerson was offered a room and office by J.J. Mallon, Warden of Toynbee Hall, and embarked on a chaotic first year. There were regrettable incidents such as the exploits of a group of “Scotchmen from Glasgow” in Berlin. Neglected by their group leader: “They naturally got disgruntled and found fault with everything, got drunk and profited badly” (the fluctuations in the value of the mark made this possible) and the accounts were poorly kept.<sup>13</sup>

#### LABOUR MOVEMENT LINKS

Confirming its labour-movement orientation possibly contributed to the difficulties of WTA’s first year. While, according to Bowen’s comments above, Rogerson had originally favoured a self-governing WTA, and Mallon, for his part, had envisaged a nonpolitical organization, for groups such as the WTA and the Sports Federation, with high ambitions, preferring a clientele of working people, without capitalist backing, there was one obvious source of prospective assistance. Thus both groups looked to the Labour Party, trades unions, and cooperative societies for financial support, office space, advertisement, and participants. Moreover, as shown above, the Sports Federation had been envisaged as the British representative of a socialist international, and Harry Gosling had assisted at the birth of WTA, whereas to those at the ILO meeting, it had been obvious that trades union contacts were necessary.

However, while the WTA and the Sports Federation needed the labour movement, it did not necessarily follow that the Labour Party and trades union leadership would welcome their adherence. Dick Geary, comparing European labour movements of the period, wrote that specific political factors in each country determined its labour politics;<sup>14</sup> in Britain, the Labour Party had developed as an agency for political representation, and electoral success remained its prime goal. What assisted this object was welcome, what threatened it was to be avoided. Thus Harry Gosling feared

12. WTAR, Address by J.W. Bowen, JP, (Chairman of Management Committee) to National Council, 31 May 1933 (typescript).

13. RWTA, Rogerson to Gosling, 22 November 1922; Edward Knight to Dear Comrade, 24 July 1922, U2543 C1.

14. Dick Geary, *European Labour Politics from 1900 to the Depression* (London, 1991), p. 6.

that WTA's difficult first year was "doing harm to the Labour movement".<sup>15</sup> Such caution was bred by Labour's vulnerability; while it was able to form two minority governments (1924, 1929–1931) the Labour Party was still struggling to build its electoral base, and its parliamentary presence was seriously weakened by the debacle of the fall of the Labour government in the 1931 economic crisis. For the trades unions, these were also years of grave problems, as restrictive legislation followed the collapse of the 1926 General Strike. By contrast, in Germany, the early formation of a sports federation was an indication of the different development of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), already sizeable before 1914. The SPD was envisaged as affording a complete way of life, providing leisure and entertainment in addition to political and industrial activity.<sup>16</sup>

Bowen's aim of an educated, leisured society was an indication of similar ambitions. The success of both WTA and the Sports Federation depended upon a vigorous labour-movement culture such as that of the SPD. Stefan Berger, comparing Britain and Germany, has shown that while the British Labour Party, founded later than the SPD, faced more competition from an established mass leisure culture, a labour-movement leisure culture did exist in Britain and "might be understood as a smaller version of that wider SPD community of solidarity".<sup>17</sup> Its leaders' caution notwithstanding, in the 1920s and 1930s, the wider labour-movement world was rich in activities such as clubs, choral societies, workers' education, in addition to many groups with international associations, ranging from Esperantists to temperance societies, and those for the protection of animals.<sup>18</sup> For the

15. RWTA, Rogerson to Gosling, 22 November 1922.

16. Geary, *European Labour Politics*, p. 9.

17. Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, 1900–1931* (Oxford, 1994), p. 133, ch. 4; *idem*, "The British and German Labour Movements: the *Sonderweg* Revisited", *Twentieth Century British History*, 3 (1992), also argues that the British labour interest was less repressed and better integrated; and thus had less need of a self-contained culture. See also the discussion of labour-movement culture situated between popular religion, which it partly replaced, and popular culture, in Berthold Unfried and Christine Schindler, *Riten, Mythen und symbole: Die Arbeiterbewegung zwischen "Zivilreligion" und Volkskultur*, 33 Linzer Konferenz, Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1999. The Paris December 2002 colloquium, "Fréquentations et sociabilités militantes", also studied the interaction of social and political networks.

18. Chris Williams has written of the labour-movement culture in these years, in "Britain", in Stefan Berger and David Broughton (eds), *The Force of Labour: the Western European Labour Movement and the Working Class in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1995). See also Alun Howkins's account of communist oppositional culture in London during the "class against class" phase, "Class against Class: the Political Culture of the CPGB, 1930–1935", in Frank Gloversmith (ed.), *Class, Culture and Social Change* (Brighton, 1980). See my *The International Faith*, chs 4 and 5 for international affiliations of these groups, and my "Bridging the Gap between Reform and Revolution: the Activities of the Teachers' Labour League and Education Workers' International in the 1920s and 1930s", Transactions of the 115th American Historical Association Conference, "Practices of Historical Narrative" (microfilm, 2001).

most part, this labour-movement world was locally based, thriving on the constituency organization formed in 1918, and generally stronger in areas of heavy industry. In addition, Herbert Morrison, a leading Labour Party figure, when leader of the London County Council between the wars was responsible for developing a vigorous London labour culture.

WTA and the Sports Federation aimed from the start to be national organizations, so their task in forging links to this labour-movement world was harder than that of a club content with local recognition. The WTA, after a disappointing start, had an easier road than the Sports Federation. Invitations to the first WTA Toynbee Hall meeting were sent to fifty trades unions, cooperative societies, the Labour Party Secretary, and Labour Members of Parliament, in addition to other settlements. Rogerson was disappointed when only a few trades' union leaders attended and doctored the minutes to make the audience appear greater.<sup>19</sup> The Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress, and the Cooperative Party recognized WTA in 1923. Rogerson was finally replaced by E.W. Wimble who, with hardly any capital at his disposal,<sup>20</sup> built an efficient, profitable organization. WTA became part of the broad labour-movement family, operating partly through bureaux in trades' union and cooperative offices. A WTA holiday was often offered as the prize for a local Labour Party or trades council raffle.<sup>21</sup> WTA had free advertising from trades' union journals, although it paid for *Daily Herald* advertisements. Its press cuttings file illustrates that it received coverage almost solely from the labour-movement press.<sup>22</sup> In 1931, WTA headquarters moved to Labour Party headquarters in Transport House. By 1933, Bowen recorded that WTA "had won its position in the working-class movement" and that there were no fears for the future "as long as we try to meet the needs of our members and fortify our working-class connections and adapt ourselves for service to the Workers' Movement".<sup>23</sup> Ramsay MacDonald, when Labour Prime Minister, had accepted nomination as the WTA's first President, but following his entry into the National Government in 1931 and expulsion from the Labour Party, Ernest Bevin (TGWU leader) was elected President; he was succeeded in 1951 by Herbert Morrison. James Middleton, Labour Party Secretary, sat on the WTA National Council from 1930. One of WTA's domestic functions was to provide a venue for leading Labour figures to meet; for instance, in 1937 Party leader Attlee,

19. RWTA, Draft Convention of Objects [...] offered to ILO conference, n.d. (1921); Minutes of meeting 25 November 1921; Rogerson to Creech Jones 1921, U2543 C1.

20. WTAR, Announcement Regarding Loan Stock and Capital, 1929; 26th Annual Report of the WTA, year ending October 31, 1947.

21. GSP, WTA to Alderman Jenkins, South Wales Miners, 8 November 1929, JSM/WTA/2.

22. RWTA, Management Committee report for year ending 31 December 1923, U2543 B4/4; Press cuttings file, U2543 Z1/3.

23. WTAR, Address by J.W. Bowen, 1933.

Citrine (TUC Secretary), and Middleton were invited by Bowen and Bevin to celebrate the New Year at the WTA's Isle of Wight centre; Citrine led a session on foreign policy, and Attlee led talks on how the armed forces might operate.<sup>24</sup>

The British Workers' Sports Federation won official TUC recognition in 1927.<sup>25</sup> However, a chain of problems ensued when, at the first Federation national congress in 1928, communists George Sinfield and Walter Tapsell were elected to the Executive Committee, Sinfield taking over from Tom Groom as General Secretary. The TUC promptly withdrew its recognition, and the Clarion Cycling Club left the Federation. The Labour Party viewed the Federation as a lost cause. Although it had not given much help to the Federation before, the desire to close an avenue of potential communist recruitment now impelled the Labour Party to take sport seriously; at a 1930 Conference at Transport House, the National (later British) Workers' Sports Association was formed as a counterbalance to the Federation and its headquarters incorporated into the Transport House family mansion.<sup>26</sup>

Internationally also, the WTA had the easier course. There was a loose federation of workers' travel organizations in various European social democratic countries; William Gillies, the Labour Party International Secretary, a WTA shareholder and member of the WTA Management Committee, used contacts at the Labour and Socialist International to communicate with European groups, and an international conference of travel groups was called in 1927. However, WTA at this stage resisted European pressure to join a formal Travel International, preferring to keep its operational independence.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of sport, international contacts had appeared promising; the British toured Germany in 1924; the first Workers' Olympiad was held in Frankfurt in 1925, followed by the 1926 Vienna Sports Festival. WTA arranged a British Workers' Sports Federation football tour of Austria in 1927, which was accompanied by Tom Groom; 10,000 people came to a welcome reception in Vienna. National Union of Railwaymen footballers contributed to British success: "'Ted' Buttery was a lion-hearted back, 'Les' Streets a constructive centre-half and 'Bert' Champion a goal-scoring inside-left".<sup>28</sup> A British football team toured the Soviet Union in 1927, and Clarion Cyclists attended the second Prague athletics meeting the same year. The Lucerne International went from strength to strength; Jules Devlieger of Belgium was Secretary, succeeded by Rudolf Siaba; Julius

24. GSP, invitation n.d., programme January 1937, JSM/WTA/7-11.

25. ILP meeting, *New Leader*, 30 March 1923; Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, pp. 75ff.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

27. RWTA, press cuttings, U2543 Z1/3; Williams, *Journey into Adventure*, pp. 71ff.

28. RWTA, *Daily Herald* press cutting 24 June 1927, U2543 Z1/3.

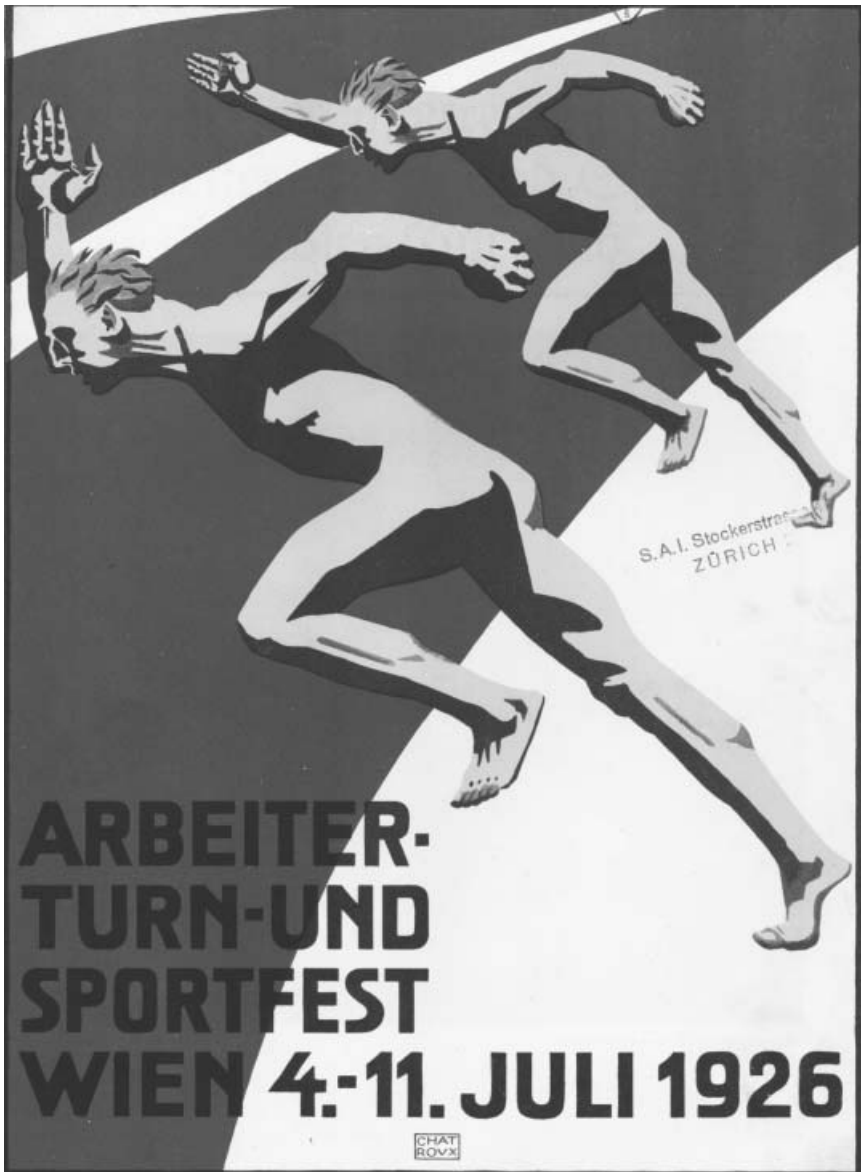


Figure 1. Poster of the Vienna Workers' Gymnastics and Sports Festival, June 1926.  
*Collection IISH, SAI archive*

Deutsch was President. By 1925, eighteen national federations had affiliated, and by 1927 the Lucerne International claimed over 1.5 million members. Germany accounted for over 900,000 members and Austria and Czechoslovakia had around 150,000 members; affiliates were from east



and west Europe, America, and Palestine. Activities included bicycling, skiing, mountaineering, aviation, chess, and radio.

Difficulties arose from the division of the international labour movement into reformist and revolutionary wings. Initially, following the policy of its German affiliate, the Lucerne International had maintained a neutral position, affiliating to neither the Labour and Socialist, nor the Communist Internationals. Despite fears of communist conspiracies, contact was maintained with the Moscow-based Red Sports International formed in 1921 and the Red Sports clubs of the Young Communist League; the communists, for their part, insisted on their right to participate in activities arranged by the Lucerne International. Such neutrality was no longer possible from 1927 when the period of greatest hostility between the Labour and Socialist and Communist Internationals began, the communists moving towards their “class against class” position, when social democrats were condemned as reactionary apologists. The Lucerne International affiliated to the Labour and Socialist International, to which it had always been more attuned.

The German Federation’s attitude of neutrality had been a sensible policy, given the size of the German communist membership. However, in Britain, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), although active, was small, and viewed with antagonism by Labour leaders who wanted to keep it so. The CPGB was refused affiliation to the Labour Party. As I have written, the Labour Party’s International Secretary, William Gillies, was fiercely anticommunist. He feared not only that communists would try to infiltrate the Labour Party at home, both to subvert its policies and to rob it of members, but that communists had the same agenda internationally. In his view, communists were culpable of undermining social democracy and thus assisted in the rise of fascism; he coined the term “communazis”.<sup>29</sup> The 1930s were years of increasing proscriptions of groups and people suspected of communist sympathies; the Independent Labour Party, having begun consideration of work with communists in a socialist/communist united front against fascism, decided against affiliation to the Labour Party in 1932.<sup>30</sup> The election of Sinfield and Tapsell to the Sports’ Federation executive and the creation of the noncommunist BWSA were early examples of a response to fears of communist infiltration. For Gillies, this was a matter not merely of domestic, but of international concern, as a sports group with communist connections would add to the “communist solar system” of which Gillies wrote,<sup>31</sup> seemingly innocuous organizations that were part of a subversive world politics. Forming BWSA was a pre-emptive strike, creating a social

29. Collette, *The International Faith*, p. 78.

30. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

31. William Gillies, *The Communist Solar System* (London, 1933).

democrat line of affiliation, BWSA to the Lucerne International, Lucerne to the Labour and Socialist International.

#### ACTIVITIES

The exact extent of the international activities of BWSA and WTA is difficult to determine; participants attended events, took tours, and were largely anonymous. BWSA membership at its height in the 1930s was around 12,000, the greater part coming from the National Clarion Cycling Club and the London Labour Sports Association.<sup>32</sup> BWSA organized sport for the Labour League of Youth, which provided it with its most obvious pool of potential members.<sup>33</sup> However, the number in membership may well underestimate the number of participants. While a very small percentage of members/participants would have undertaken international tours, BWSA continued to operate as an affiliate of an international body. There is more evidence in the case of WTA of the relationship of international to domestic activity, and of what kinds of people took part. The WTA Annual Reports show that overseas bookings were numerous and were not matched by domestic bookings until 1928. Overseas bookings were divided into the Continental Programme, and special parties or independent travel, the special parties being about one-tenth of the total. From 1921 to 1931 total overseas bookings rose from 1,000 to 13,706 and annual turnover rose from £40,000 to £200,000. In 1931, the Continental Programme accounted for 10,869 holidays, which fell to 6,730 in 1932, then rose to nearly 34,000 in the peak year of 1937, falling back to 30,000 in 1939, while annual turnover rose to £650,000 in 1937. However, domestic and international WTA activities overlapped. Domestically, there were programmes of lectures on foreign affairs, language classes, and further education on international events by means of film shows, discussion groups, and summer schools. An example was the lecture given by Camille Huysmans, Secretary of the pre-war Second International, on "Walloons, Flemish, and Dutch", in a series of sketches of national characteristics.<sup>34</sup> Locally, lectures were arranged by WTA Fellowships, of which there were sixteen by 1939.<sup>35</sup>

The aim had been that WTA travellers should be working people, and Bowen questioned, in 1931, whether the WTA had "reached the workers".

32. Stephen Bird, "The British Workers' Sports Association", *Society for the Study of Labour History Bulletin*, 50 (1985), p. 9.

33. Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, pp. 78–81; see also Stephen Jones, "The European Workers' Sports Movement", *European History Quarterly*, 18 (1988); *Sozialistische Jugend Internationale* papers, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Labour Party League of Youth to Secretary, 1 February 1932, SJI 742/11.

34. *The Echo*, no.2, December 1929

35. 18th Annual Report of the WTA.

Checking the records showed that most holidays were taken at the cheapest centres, that the cheapest tours were the most popular and that the average tour was of just over a week: "It is not unreasonable, therefore, to assume that the bulk of these holidays were taken by working people".<sup>36</sup> However, the drop in bookings in 1932 suggests that workers with some excess income were WTA's usual clients, and that they had been affected by the economic depression. WTA recorded the gender and marital status of its clients; women travellers outnumbered men five to four; married couples booked 60 per cent of the holidays, and single women were the greater proportion of the remainder. Married couples' bookings fell to 21 per cent of the total in 1932 and those of single men rose, again possibly an effect of the depression. Karen Hunt and June Hannam have shown that women were under-represented in international socialist conferences (unless these were held in their own country) and suggest that the reasons are the usual ones of women's double disadvantage of domestic commitment and low pay.<sup>37</sup> However, women's overall preponderance as WTA clients argues either greater disposable income, and/or a greater commitment to foreign travel. As women had not achieved equal pay, women WTA clients may have been employed in higher salaried sections of the labour force than male clients. Alternately, women bereaved in the First World War may have felt the need to visit war graves, or women may have found foreign travel a release from prescribed gender roles, more restrictive on home territory.<sup>38</sup>

At first, student hostels in Vienna and Berlin were used for WTA tours, the Austrian and German Social Democratic Parties providing guides; Germany, with its more developed labour leisure culture was an obvious choice, as was "Red Vienna", with its socialist city council.<sup>39</sup> In addition, Rogerson wanted tourists to "try to understand the awful difficulties of the devastated areas of Central Europe". Some idea of the poverty may be gained by the WTA recompense to the hostels; in addition to a money grant, material was provided for sheeting.<sup>40</sup> The Belgian labour-movement holiday home was also used, and five French cooperative-movement holiday homes. Surviving records do not make it clear whether Continental-Programme tours were arranged independently from Britain, or if

36. WTAR, Address by J.W. Bowen, 1931.

37. June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London, 2000), pp. 169–170.

38. There is a wealth of feminist literature on the interaction of gender and national identity and the resultant domestic constraints on women; see, for example, Jan Jindy Pettman, *Worlding Women* (London, 1996).

39. Jill Lewis, "Red Vienna: Socialism in One City, 1918–22", *European Studies Review*, 13 (1983).

40. RWTA, Rogerson to Gosling, 22 November 1922; WTA leaflet, n.d. (1922); memorandum of Special Meeting of Management Committee, n.d. U2543 C1.

use was made of partner organizations in the countries visited, although the inclusion of visits to sanatoria, hospitals, and social welfare centres implies some degree of partnership.<sup>41</sup> The Belgian programme included Ostend, Bruges, the Ypres battlefield, Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp, and Waterloo and, with the French Programme, proved the most popular; the German, Austrian, and Swiss tours followed in popularity. There were Rhine cruises, mountain climbing, and walking holidays. Negotiations were opened with the Russian consul in London in 1924 preparatory to WTA visits to the Soviet Union.<sup>42</sup> Spain became a popular venue. Excursions which were not financially viable were maintained for their educative element, for instance to the International Study School at Geneva, and the International Summer Schools held by the Belgian and Danish labour movements. Bursaries were provided for travel to the latter.

Examples of special parties were the 1926 and 1927 tours for local councillors. The 1926 tour to Belgium, to study local government, was led by Alderman E.G. Culpin of the London County Council. In 1927, Herbert Morrison led a more extensive tour of German local authorities: "to visit municipal undertakings [...] eg. gas works, infant welfare centres", and to study municipal finance, education, and town planning.<sup>43</sup> In 1931, a Rhine cruise party of 250 people was accompanied by Ernest Bevin, John Wilmot (MP from 1933), and Bowen. Two special parties were organized to visit the Soviet Union in 1932, Herbert Morrison leading one that studied political institutions, and Ernest Green of the Workers' Education Association the other, to study education. The same year the Women's Cooperative Guild booked a special party to Bruges, Brussels, and Ghent, where they were welcomed by Belgian women's groups.<sup>44</sup>

As Bowen wrote, foreign leisure travel for workers was a new phenomenon: "Foreign travel for working people before the war was something strange and unnatural, an experience which was expensive, complicated and difficult."<sup>45</sup> To create demand, the WTA had to simplify the experience, and its advertisements laid emphasis on the ease of WTA travel: "You get all the advantages of the friendly spirit, the comradeship and the good-tempered fun of WTA parties, which arrange things so that there is no hitch. Passports, foreign money, languages – all these little troubles vanish when you decide to 'go WTA'."<sup>46</sup> This was good

41. WTAR, Address by J.W. Bowen, 1931; 15th Annual Report of the WTA year ended October 31 1938.

42. RWTA, General Secretary's report to Executive committee, 22 November 1924, U2543 C1.

43. RWTA, press cuttings U2543 Z1/3.

44. 10th Annual Report of the WTA year ended October 31 1931, 12th Annual Report of the WTA year ended October 31 1933, and 13th Annual Report of the WTA year ended October 31 1934.

45. Address by J.W. Bowen, 1931.

46. *Stepney Citizen*, September 1936.

advertising, but major difficulties remained. Post-1918 poverty in Europe caused food riots and the evacuation of foreigners from Vienna during a WTA visit. In 1923, the French occupation of the Ruhr disrupted plans and “the mark was in a chaotic state”.<sup>47</sup> The WTA appeared remarkably impervious, to the extent of foolhardiness, to the growth of reactionary and fascist politics in Europe. In 1931 Bowen had been confident that: “nationalism in its crude form cannot survive”. In 1933 he lamented that: “the intense nationalist spirit which has manifested itself in Europe tends to make contacts with working-class organisations throughout Europe increasingly difficult”. His remarks again imply that partnerships had been forged; presumably organization became increasingly independent as European labour movements came under attack. There is no doubt that the British labour movement was aware of the extent and violence of the repression.<sup>48</sup> However, Bowen resisted the temptation to cut the Continental Programme because “any other policy would have done violence to the main purpose of our work”.<sup>49</sup> As many as 15,570 people booked onto the Continental Programme in 1936 and there were 22 special parties, comprising 570 people. The party in Spain had to be rescued from the effects of the Spanish Civil War: John Wilmott took one party, stranded at Port Bou, on a two-mile hike through the Hendaye tunnel to safety. A second party at San Sebastian had to evade gunfire, dodging from doorway to doorway to the British consulate.<sup>50</sup> By 1937, the once-popular German and Austrian tours, which had accounted for 40 per cent of the Continental Programme, were reduced to 25 per cent. In 1938, the crisis in Czechoslovakia curtailed the tours, and new centres were opened in France, Norway, and Switzerland.<sup>51</sup> Under cover of its travel operations, WTA arranged the evacuation of socialist refugees from Czechoslovakia, hiring trains from Prague; at the Polish port of Gdynia a steamer was waiting, and negotiations with KLM produced 20 charter flights. William Gillies was in Prague arranging visas until the arrival of the German troops. These refugees were housed in WTA permanent centres in Britain until accommodation was found for them.<sup>52</sup>

Despite its continued success in attracting bookings, and having acquired enough capital to begin building new headquarters near Victoria,

47. RWTA, secretary's statement n.d. (1922), report of Management Committee year ended 31 December 1923, U2543 C1.

48. William Gillies's correspondence, Labour Party archives, National Museum of Labour History, Manchester, Germany file.

49. Address by J.W. Bowen.

50. 15th Annual Report of the WTA year ended 31 October 1936; Williams, *Journey into Adventure*, pp. 122–123.

51. 17th Annual Report of the WTA year ended October 31 1938.

52. RWTA, Management Committee 23 November 1938, 24 March 1939, U2543 B4/4; Williams, *Journey into Adventure*, pp. 124–126; Doreen Warriner, “A Winter in Prague”, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 62 (1984).

WTA had to cease its international activities; it faced passport and currency regulations, the destruction of labour movements in Europe, border controls. There were attempts to overcome this; Tom Groom led a world tour.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the 1939 Annual Report stated “WTA is checked in its full stride by another war”. Altogether, 3,500 travellers were rescued from Europe that year and 4,000 bookings were cancelled.<sup>54</sup> As hopes of peace receded, WTA goals became the creation of international understanding and goodwill, as a counter to the growing nationalist spirit in Europe. The 1939 Annual Report looked back on “the direct and immediate experience which has come close to many thousands of us, who have seen the world with the WTA”, and the attempt “to strengthen among its many supporters an understanding of the deeper social issues”.<sup>55</sup>

BWSA could not match the extent of WTA activities but it maintained a succession of international events. British footballers toured Germany and the Netherlands; a tennis team visited the Netherlands; Belgian, Austrian, Czech, Polish, and Swiss sports teams attended the British Tolpuddle Martyrs’ celebrations. The Guildford ladies notwithstanding, unlike travel, sport remained a predominately masculine activity. The Federation had had women’s sections, and women had formed about one-fifth of the membership. BWSA was less successful at attracting women; one only served on its executive.

The Lucerne International, meanwhile, profited by its association with the Labour and Socialist International, which had a news service to serve its widely ranging membership. The second official Workers’ Olympiad was held in Vienna in 1931 and a Wintersports Olympiad was organized; 1,000 athletes attended from 26 countries, compared to 1,408 from 37 countries at the 1932 Olympic Games. After 1933, the same problems were evident as had affected WTA. It was possible for the Czech Association to hold its third international meeting in 1934, but the Spanish Civil War caused the cancellation of the 1936 Workers’ Olympiad in Barcelona, which had been planned as a protest at the choice of Berlin as venue for the Olympic Games. British athlete, Tom Binet, wrote that despite the bolted hotel doors, barricade, gunfire, and escort of armed cars, “with our Scottish pipers at our head, we, with the teams of all the other nations represented, marched in procession”.<sup>56</sup> Walter Tapsell was among those from the British labour movement who died fighting in the Spanish Civil War, as were Tom Darban and Ray Cox, of the Clarion Cycling Club.<sup>57</sup> When the “class against class” phase of greatest hostility gave way to international attempts to form united (communist and socialist) and

53. RWTA, Management Committee minutes 22 December 1938, U2543 B4/4

54. 18th Annual Report of the WTA, 1939; 26th Annual Report of the WTA, 1947.

55. 18th Annual Report of the WTA, 1939.

56. Tom Binet, *Stepney Citizen*, September 1936.

57. Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, p. 186.

popular (general antifascist) fronts, the Lucerne International invited Soviet organizations to the third Antwerp Workers' Olympiad. Held in 1938, this was the last great workers' international sports meeting before the Second World War. The Lucerne overture did not succeed, the communists refusing the Lucerne request to limit numbers, but "neutral" countries, France, Norway, Spain, and Sweden, attended as guests, in addition to representatives of all Lucerne affiliates.<sup>58</sup>

#### FINAL YEARS

The labour-movement world and its constituency communities which supported WTA and BWSA in their earlier years were disrupted and dissipated by war. Foreign leisure travel was obviously no longer an option, while the young sportsmen were of the group most likely to have been conscripted for military service. WTA, however, was able to survive the war, despite a bomb which totally destroyed its offices and its staff being called up for ARP and other duties.<sup>59</sup> A lucrative deal was made with the Ministry of Supply to provide and run workers' hostels.<sup>60</sup> Postwar, WTA continued to be used for travel at home and abroad by labour-movement organizations. As late as 1960, Herbert Morrison, then President, wrote that: "Amongst the principle objects is the promotion of travel between the peoples of all countries with a view to the maintenance of international goodwill and international friendship", and WTA affiliated to the International Federation of Workers' Travel Associations (in America known as the International Association of People's Travel Associations).<sup>61</sup> However, foreign travel became more widespread, and the number of tourist agencies grew, so that WTA faced new competition. Recognizing this situation, WTA became a founder member of the Association of British Travel Associations. Wimble had retired in 1947, Creech Jones died in 1964, Morrison and Bowen in 1965. In July 1966, a Special General Meeting of shareholders agreed the name change to Galleon Travel; the inclusion of "workers" in the title was now perceived, even by labour-movement travellers, to signify something second-rate.<sup>62</sup> WTA had lost its mission before the modern demands for sun and sand.

58. William Gillies's correspondence, Gillies's memorandum on Antwerp games, WG/SPO/4, publicity leaflet, WG/SPO/5.

59. RWTA, bomb damage claims U2543 C2, Management Committee minutes 14 September 1939, U2543 B4/4; WTA was finally repaid £4,747.17s in war damages in 1949.

60. RWTA, Annual General Meeting 24 February 1941, U2543 B4/4, Ministry of Supply file U2543 C3.

61. WTAR, *What is the WTA?* (London, 1960), p. 1.

62. RWTA, Travel Logs, U2543 Z9/1.

Abroad, there were attempts to try to revive the Lucerne International; the BWSA chair (H.H. Elvin), secretary (A.E. Richards) and treasurer (George H. Elvin) attended a conference held at Paris in October 1945, with delegates from Belgium, Finland, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Switzerland. Observers came from the USA and Yugoslavia. A recall conference was planned for 1948.<sup>63</sup> The Sports International was finally re-established and christened the Comité Sportif International du Travail. BWSA, however, was forced by lack of money to decline a number of invitations to European events and did not immediately reaffiliate to the International. Efforts were made to establish an organization with a sound financial footing. Arthur Deakin (TGWU) was BWSA president, and the TGWU, the Union of Post Office Workers, and the Confederation of Health Service Employees were amongst the affiliates. Edith Summerskill MP represented the Labour Party on BWSA's National Council. A special appeal was issued in order to create an international fund. F.W. Butler, formerly of the Metropolitan Police, was appointed full-time secretary/organizer in 1946 and remained in post until 1952, but BWSA was largely inactive internationally.<sup>64</sup> Butler was replaced by Ray Deacon as acting Secretary for a year, and Dave Curtis was appointed General Secretary in 1954.

With Curtis's appointment, there was an attempt to reinvigorate BWSA. Curtis had the same commitment to direct international activity as Tom Groom or Cecil Rogerson. The case that he made was similar to theirs, that international goodwill would result from both individual and group friendships. Moreover, Curtis believed that sport and the creative arts were "vital means of self-expression and mental and physical relaxation" that would meet democratic socialism's aim of "Man's full physical and intellectual development, ensuring a richer, healthier and happier life for all people". Like Bowen, he thought that workers should use leisure wisely and that recreation should "not be the privilege of any class or race".<sup>65</sup> Under Curtis's secretaryship, BWSA did reaffiliate to the Sports' International in 1955.<sup>66</sup> Curtis noted that it campaigned for the right of physical and cultural expression. Perhaps remembering past controversies with communists, the Sports' International entered the caveat that cultural exchanges should "not be abused as propaganda for any particular form of government".<sup>67</sup> Curtis was instrumental in achieving the release of the Lucerne International funds, £800 deposited in the London Cooperative

63. Sport, BWSA 16th Annual Report year ending 31 December 1945.

64. Sport, BWSA executive committee minutes, 19 October 1946; BWSA Secretary's report, 1955.

65. *Ibid.*; BWSA statement, January 1957.

66. GSP, BWSA 26 Annual Report, GS/BWSA/68.

67. Sport, BWSA statement, January 1957.



Wholesale Society Bank in 1938.<sup>68</sup> BWSA helped the Labour Party International Department with a project that involved Yugoslavian youth clubs and assisted with the entertainment of a group of UNESCO students. Contact with the International Union of Socialist Youth was established.<sup>69</sup>

However, while arranging BWSA's involvement in a number of costly ventures, Curtis, in some ways reminiscent of Cecil Rogerson, failed to establish good relations with Morgan Phillips, Labour Party Secretary. An attempt to run a coach from the Margate 1955 Labour Party conference to watch an Albert Hall boxing tournament including Russian boxers was not well received.<sup>70</sup> The first misfortune was BWSA's visit to the International Sports Festival in the Netherlands, which left a deficit of £300.<sup>71</sup> The second was to invite a team of Czech trades unions' sports organizations to the BWSA Athletics and Cycling Championships, on which occasion it rained, adding a further £300 to the deficit.<sup>72</sup> The third was a disastrous "Salute to May Day" held at the Adelphi Theatre, London in order to raise money for international activities, specifically a trip to Israel in May 1956 to attend the Israeli Labour Party third sports festival. Tom Driberg MP, who acted as compere, was left with an impression of inefficiency ("I vowed never to get mixed up personally again with anything they were running") and more money was lost.<sup>73</sup> Undeterred, Curtis joined the National Stevedores and Dockers' Union in the battle to achieve the entry of Soviet crews to Henley Royal Regatta.<sup>74</sup>

Its past history of suspected communist connections and infiltration may go some way to explain lack of Labour Party support for BWSA after the war. No financial support was given and BWSA lost its place in Transport House, operating from London offices for ten years from 1946; the London Cooperative Society provided offices in Robert Owen House from 1956. Curtis complained that BWSA was the poorest affiliate in the International.<sup>75</sup> He wanted to run a monthly lottery amongst local Labour parties and to devote 10 per cent of the profit to "international

68. Sport, Curtis to Morgan Phillips, 13 May 1957. There was a similar difficulty in securing the release of the Labour and Socialist International funds. See Collette, *The International Faith*, p. 190.

69. Sport, BWSA Annual Report, 31 December 1955.

70. GSP, Curtis to Miss Barker, secretary of conference arrangements committee 16 August 1955, Miss Barker to Curtis, 7 September 1955, GS/BWSA/53. The problem was that delegates might miss the afternoon session.

71. Sport, *Sportopics* (BWSA magazine), 1955.

72. Sport, General Secretary's report, 1955.

73. Sport, BWSA Annual Report, 31 December 1955; GSP, Driberg to Morgan Phillips, 14 December 1956, GS/BWSA/68.

74. GSP, BWSA Annual Report, 1955, GS/BWSA/68.

75. Sport, General Secretary's report, 1955.

understanding through sport”.<sup>76</sup> It was not possible to pay Curtis’s salary in December 1956. The TUC refused to make a loan to BWSA and, moreover, viewed BWSA’s debts as “a bad advertisement for the TUC”.<sup>77</sup> Curtis stated that he would have to resign if the lottery were not approved but he was pre-empted by withdrawal of TUC and Labour Party patronage, and the BWSA’s reluctant acceptance of their advice to wind up its affairs.<sup>78</sup> Curtis continued to try to persuade the Labour Party to acknowledge the value of international sport, and sought payment of his expenses to the Sports International Congress.<sup>79</sup> Refused assistance, Curtis appealed directly to Aneurin Bevan, Labour Party Treasurer. His grounds recalled the interwar period division between social democrats and communists, that a British supported, and therefore stronger International, would counterbalance “the propaganda value of the World Federation of Democratic Youth and other communist controlled sports and youth organisations”. He also proposed to support the resolution calling for the exclusion of the Sports International’s two communist affiliates.<sup>80</sup> His plea was unsuccessful.

No further proposals for a labour sports club were made until the Harold Wilson government, when Denis Howell was appointed Minister of Sport. The choice of Britain to host the 1966 football World Cup impelled W.R. Williams, former BWSA football section head, to suggest some sort of revival. He had maintained vestiges of a labour football organization and contemplated a European tour in 1965.<sup>81</sup> The proposal was forwarded to A.L. Williams, Labour Party Secretary, for comment. Williams argued against any revival, on the grounds that BSWA had not been well run – indeed, Williams wrote that the TUC and Labour Party had been relieved when it was wound up. Moreover, Williams had little faith that the wider labour movement could flourish in the postwar world, writing:

[...] the real failure is the British attitude to sport and recreation [...] on the Continent sport and recreation are associated with political and religious organisations [...]. Personally, I prefer the British attitude, and believe that any attempt to resurrect a movement similar to the BWSA is doomed [...].<sup>82</sup>

76. Sport, Curtis to Morgan Phillips, 27 November 1956.

77. Sport, Tewson to Curtis, 5 December 1956, Curtis to Tewson n.d.

78. GSP, Schedule of matters concerning the winding up of the BWSA, 28 May 1957, GS/BWSA/109.

79. Sport, Curtis to Morgan Phillips, 13 May 1957, forwarding Sports International Congress Agenda; Tewson to Curtis, 14 May 1957.

80. Sport, Tewson to Curtis, 14 May 1957; Curtis to Bevan, 22 May 1957.

81. GSP, W.R. Williams, United Workers’ Football Club to Harold Wilson, 21 July, 29 November 1964, GS/BWSA/132.

82. Sport, A.L. Williams, Labour Party Secretary, to Howell, 14 December 1964.

## CONCLUSION

Williams's comment illustrates the main problem faced by both BWSA and WTA after the Second World War, that labour "communities of solidarity" no longer existed as they had in the interwar years. On the one hand, the rise of a youth culture, the growth of the mass-market leisure industry, including the travel industry and not least, the professionalization of sport, provided well-financed competition which neither group could match. The Labour Party and TUC thus expressed the view when BWSA was wound up, that: "the functions which it was originally thought BWSA could perform had really been developed by other sports and athletic organisations, and that young workers preferred to associate themselves with such organisations and to avail themselves of the facilities which they afforded".<sup>83</sup> On the other, the Labour Party was hugely successful at the polls in 1945, drawing new people into membership, while state ownership of the commanding heights of industry gave the trades unions new grounds for recruitment. Electoral success had always been the priority; the wider labour-movement world had been appreciated, but it is doubtful how far such contacts had been actively sought by the leadership. Wimble wrote in 1940: "Although the workers' movement has enormous wealth, it has never yet considered adequately the movements within itself into which it should put its money."<sup>84</sup> Both WTA and the Sports Federation had proposed themselves as part of this world, and had been viewed with suspicion when they appeared not to be of benefit, WTA when it performed badly in its first year and the Sports Federation when communists were elected to its executive. The formation of BWSA was a calculated attempt to ensure that communists did not infiltrate the Labour Party by the door of sporting activity. Uncongenial figures such as Rogerson or Curtis were viewed with disfavour.

More profoundly, Williams's comments indicate distaste for a wider labour culture as an alien phenomenon. If his views were typical amongst labour leaders, this may indicate not so much a change of heart towards "communities of solidarity" as an inevitable outcome of the development of the labour movement in Britain. Its nineteenth-century forebears had been rich in associate communities; the 1900 formation of the Labour Representation Committee was a conscious step away from this labour oppositional culture towards building an electoral machine. The 1918 constituency organization was a return to local strongholds that worked well between the wars but was broken up from 1939 to 1945 when the workplace, rather than the constituency, became the basis of organization.

83. GSP, Tewson to Curtis 20 December 1956, GS/BWSA/69.

84. RWTA, General Secretary's report to Annual General Meeting, 25 May 1940, U2543 B4/4. Stefan Berger refers to officials' "rather ambiguous attitude towards [...] ancillary organisations"; Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats*, p. 170.

The repeated proscriptions of the 1930s and the decision of the ILP to cease affiliation further weakened the wider labour world. Moreover, international affiliations and activities were next to impossible during the war and in the years that immediately followed.

Once accepted into the labour world, the gains could be considerable. The WTA, after a shaky first year, went from strength to strength, its finances sound, located in Labour Party local and head offices, its Presidents Labour Party leaders. The unfortunate BWSA was less secure; it failed to attract “big-name” support; requests for financial support were viewed with disfavour and its attempts to provide entertainment on a shoestring budget were inevitably lacking in success and regarded, like the conference boxing trip, as a frivolous activity. The more-favoured WTA went a considerable way towards meeting its own goals. So far as its anonymous travellers can be detected, they did seem to be working people, men and women. Given the political situation in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, it was admirable that so many bookings were made for the overseas tours and that these were persistently undertaken. How far these travellers were motivated by pleasure and how far by a desire to make contacts with socialists abroad is, perhaps, impossible to unravel. BWSA was also remarkably persistent and just as willing to operate in areas of some danger. Neither body could guarantee peace, but the post-1945 revival of the Lucerne International is some indication that international contacts could survive war and provide some hope for the future.