

'International solidarity' – a paradox? On the unresolved dilemma of nation vs. internationalism in the Second International as the reason for its failure

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The beginning of World War I also marks the breakdown of the Second International. Despite its antimilitarist manifestos and commitments, published most recently at the 1912 Basel Peace Congress, most of the workers' parties in the warring countries voted for the war loans and hence for the nation. The paper examines, as a reason for its failure, the contradiction between the Second International's internationalist intent and the separation of the individual workers' parties along national lines. It begins by presenting the viewpoints of individual representatives of the International on the relation between 'nation' and 'internationalism', drawing on published works, newspaper articles, speeches and letters. The paper then explores the history of the Second International for early signs of its ultimate failure. Did the responses of the workers' parties to various skirmishes prior to World War I already intimate a possible failure in the event of a war? I look at the answer to this question in connection with potential alternative responses by the International. Finally, I comment on the significance of the International's failure as a result of the above dilemma for social and pacifist movements today.