The Reluctant Internationalists
Autumn Term Newsletter 2016

This term has been another very busy one for the Reluctant Internationalists project. With less than a year to go we are organising more workshops and conferences, and are eager to complete a number of projects. The coming term will see our final two academic events – a workshop on ‘Socialist Internationalism’ on 3 February, and a conference on ‘Languages of Internationalism’ on 24-26 May. You can find more details about how to sign up and come along on our website.

We have also begun work on our new Wellcome Trust Public Engagement grant and are revelling in the opportunities it offers us for interacting with new audiences, particularly with school teachers and their pupils. Teachers will occupy a central place in our activities this year. We are about to launch, in collaboration with the Historical Association, a new teacher training programme on ‘The Cold War in the Classroom’. We have also inaugurated a new network of school teachers who are studying at Birkbeck College, and are developing a new online collection of teaching resources. You can find out more details below.

At the same time, the project team has become ever-more dispersed, which brings with it both opportunities and challenges: Ana Antic and Dora Vargha left Birkbeck this term to take up new lectureships at the University of Exeter, and Johanna Conterio will leave soon to take up a new post in Modern European and International History at Flinders University, Adelaide. After a tough grilling from his examiners (Professors Kiran Pater and Xosé M. Nuñez Seixas), David Brydan passed his PhD viva with no corrections and has joined the project as a postdoctoral researcher. Two new colleagues have joined the group to help us with our public engagement work: Siobhan Morris is our new Public Engagement and Events Coordinator; Dongwon Esther Kim is our first Public Engagement Visiting Fellow.

Awards and Publications

Dora Vargha has been awarded a Wellcome Seed Award for her research project titled ‘Socialist Medicine: an Alternative Global Health History’. Many congratulations, Dora!
Ana Antic’s Fraenkel Prize-winning *Therapeutic Fascism: Experiencing the Violence of the Nazi New Order* has now been published by Oxford University Press. Ana’s book launch will take place next term; more details will be posted on our blog very soon.

**Other Publications**

David Brydan, ‘Hard Right, Soft Power: Fascist regimes and the battle for hearts and minds’, *The Conversation* (September 2016)

Johanna Conterio, ‘Heating the Groves: Imported Technology, Transnational Scientific Networks and the Acclimatization of Citrus in the USSR, 1928-1941,’ in *Objects in Motion: Globalizing Technology*, edited by Bryan Dewalt and Nina Möllers (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2016), 22-34

For previous newsletters, see [here](#).

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**Our Events This Term**

**Writing "Outsiders" into the History of International Public Health** (28-29 October 2016)

Earlier this term, the Reluctant Internationalists held a two-day symposium on the history of international public health in collaboration with Professor Susan Gross Solomon. The workshop brought together over twenty scholars from the Europe and the US, and set out to test what impact factoring in ‘outsiders’ can have on the way we write the history of international public health. Histories of the development of international public health in the 20th century tend to be celebrations of achievements – whether the enrolling of an ever-widening number of nations in programs to improve health and prevent disease, the adoption of shared standards and measurements to track health status, or the circulation of health researchers and statesmen across national frontiers. Justified though it often was, the repeated sounding of trumpets relegated to the background ‘outsiders’ in the international health arena. What can close study of ‘outsiders’ tell us about the international system of public health – its rules (written and unwritten), its reach, and its commitment to inclusiveness?

The first panel focused on ‘giving and taking’, with discussion ranging from the political geography of UNRRA’s donating and receiving countries, Greek and Eastern European international health in the interwar period, and an introduction to a new database of Rockefeller Fellows and Fellowship Programmes in Public Health. The second panel zoomed in on Soviet Russia during the inter-war years. Papers discussed Soviet public health

Jessica Reinsch, gave a talk on ‘The “haves” and “have nots”: the political geography of UNRRA’s donating and receiving countries’ at *Writing “Outsiders” into the History of International Public Health*, London, 27 October 2016

David Brydan, gave a paper on ‘Franco’s Spain and the Early WHO: Outsiders, Universality and the Cold War’, at *Writing “Outsiders” into the History of International Public Health*, 27 October 2016

Dora Varga, talked about ‘Insiders and Outsiders in the WHO’ as part of *Writing “Outsiders” into the History of International Public Health*, 28 October 2016


Johanna Conterio’s paper was entitled ‘Socialist Architects on Health: Debates about Health and Welfare at the International Union of Architects Congress in Moscow, 1958,’ at *Writing “Outsiders” into the History of International Public Health*, 28 October 2016

Johanna Conterio, presented on ‘The Prophylactic Park: Health and Healing in the Soviet City, 1928-1953,’ at *The Environment and Health in History*, University of Oulu, Finland, 3 November 2016

Dora Varga, gave a talk on ‘Eastern Europe and Communism in Global Polio Eradication’, at the *Annual Meeting of the History of Science Society (HSS)*, Atlanta, GA, 3-6 November 2016

Dora Varga, gave a paper on ‘Polio eradication as a socialist project’ at *Health, Wellbeing and Subsistence in the History of Socioeconomic Rights, Duties and Obligations*, Wissenschaftszentrum füer Sozialforschung, Berlin, 10-11 November 2016

Johanna Conterio, gave a paper on ‘The Sovietization of the Black Sea Coast under
schemes, socialist design around Black Sea resorts, and the role of Czechoslovakia in the early Cold War period. The third panel examined the history of public health in the so-called ‘outsider’ states of Franco’s Spain, Nazi Germany, and Greece. The fourth panel addressed the dynamics of ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’ in international health networks; papers shed light on colonial politics of global public health, insiders and outsiders in the World Health Organisation, and communist medicine and psychiatry in the developing world. The workshop concluded with a lively roundtable discussion. A podcast is available here. The full conference report can be read here.

International London Walking Tours (25 November 2016)
As part of the Being Human 2016 festival, the Reluctant Internationalists led a series of three walking tours around London to explore the city’s history of internationalism. The walks highlighted London’s history as a magnet for, and laboratory of, international ideas and collaborations. The three tours centred on Wartime, Epidemic, and Communist London, with each taking participants through the streets of central London to illuminate the stories, lives and organisations often hidden amid the modern day bustle of the city. More details can be found on our blog.

First History Teacher Network Meeting (22 November 2016)
This term we inaugurated the Birkbeck History Teacher’s Network to provide an informal forum for secondary school teachers who are currently studying at Birkbeck or alumni of the college, as well as their colleagues. The first meeting took place in November with a small group of teachers and teaching assistants joining members of the project team to discuss experiences, resources and the current curriculum, over a glass of wine. We learnt a lot about how we can support teachers and their students, and are now planning a number of follow-up events. A further meeting of the Network will take place towards the end of next term – look out on our blog, Facebook or Twitter for more information. If you are interested in joining the Network or would like further information, please get in touch with us via reluctant.internationslists@gmail.com

Crossing Borders: The Spanish Civil War and Transnational Mobilisation (30 June-1 July 2016)
In the summer, Birkbeck hosted a two-day conference on the international history of the Spanish Civil War. Bringing together over thirty scholars from Europe, the US and further afield, the conference set out to explore the origins and experiences of Khrushchev and the Problem of Overdevelopment,’ at the Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Washington, DC, 17 November 2016

Johanna Conterio, was also a panel chair for ‘Ecology and Russian Culture IV: Nonhuman Environments,’ at the National Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Washington, DC, 18 November 2016

Jessica Reinish, gave a seminar on ‘UNRRA and the Mid-Century World of Refugees’, at the Modern European History Seminar Series at the University of Oxford, 1 December 2016

Jessica Reinish, took part in the Writing New Histories of Humanitarianism workshop, UCL with a paper titled ‘What makes an expert? The view from UNRRA, 1943-1947”, 8 December 2016


Where you’ll see us next

Johanna Conterio, is due to present on ‘Factories of Health: The Sanatorium Architecture of the Soviet Avant-Garde, 1926-1936,’ at the Centre for Research in European Architecture, University of Kent, Canterbury, February 2017
transnational mobilisation during the conflict and the immediate post-war period. A full conference report is now available [here](#). A podcast of the conference’s keynote lecture by Helen Graham is [here](#). Abstracts of all papers can be accessed via the conference website.

### Upcoming Events

**Teaching Fellowship Programme: The Cold War in the Classroom**

We are delighted to be working with the Historical Association on a new teacher training programme to give a group of secondary school teachers the opportunity to draw on the expertise of academic historians, to exchange ideas about teaching practice, and to work towards the creation of original learning resources. The Cold War programme will be launched in early January 2017.

**Children’s Book Project: Francesca Sanna**

We’re delighted to welcome the celebrated children’s author Francesca Sanna as our visiting fellow in 2017. Francesca’s book *The Journey* was awarded with the Gold Medal from the Society of Illustrators in New York and has featured in the ‘Best Books of 2016’ lists in the *New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Guardian*. Francesca will join the Reluctant Internationalist group in spring and summer term 2017, while working on her new book project. Her new book asks: ‘What happens after “The Journey”? Look out for events with Francesca on our blog!**

**Socialist Internationalism Workshop (3 February 2017)**

Research on the global history of socialism has been growing, but the majority of narratives and frameworks for approaching the history of the so-called ‘socialist world’ are still focused on the relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union. The aim of this day of discussion is to take stock of recent historical contributions that shift focus away from the superpowers and from Washington and Moscow, and instead consider the circulation of ideas, goods, people, and practices within and beyond the socialist and communist worlds on their own terms. You can read more about the workshop on our events page.

**Jessica Reinsch**, will give a keynote lecture on ‘The Twentieth Century in Maps’ at the Historical Association’s one-day CPD course for school teachers on [Tracing the Twentieth Century through Maps](#), 4 February 2017. This accompanies the British Library’s current exhibition, *Maps and the 20th Century: Drawing the Line*.

**Dora Vargha**, will give a paper on ‘A Rocky Beginning: the early WHO and the roots of socialist international health’ at the UCD Centre for the History of Medicine, Dublin, 23 February 2017

**Ana Antic**, will introduce her book, *Therapeutic Fascism: Experiencing the violence of the Nazi New Order*, at *SSSEES-UCL*, 14 March 2017

**Jessica Reinsch**, will be commentator at the symposium *Citizens of the World? The Place of the International in British Politics since 1918* at Queen Mary, University of London, 16-17 March 2017

**Johanna Conterio**, will present on ‘All Quiet on the Home Front: Sochi after the Evacuation and the Limits of Mobilization, 1941-1945’ at *The International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences*, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, March 2017

**Johanna Conterio**, will give a paper on ‘The Lungs of the City: Green Space as Sanitary Infrastructure in Stalinist Urban Planning’ at the *Annual Conference of the American Society for Environmental History*, Chicago, March 29-2 April 2017

**Ana Antic**, will present on ‘Imagining Africa in Eastern Europe: Transcultural psychiatry and global anthropological research in early Cold War Yugoslavia’ at the *European Congress of Global History*, Budapest, 31 August-3 September 2017
In collaboration with Brigid O’Keefe (Brooklyn College, CUNY) we will host our final conference in May 2017 on ‘Languages of Internationalism’. The conference will bring together, among others, historians, anthropologists, literary scholars and linguists. The goal of the conference is to shed light on the centrality of language to people’s past pursuit and experiences of internationalism. Historians must better understand the linguistic realities that their subjects confronted in their various global networks and endeavors. For any agents of internationalism, language presented a wide variety of challenges and opportunities. It imposed obstacles and provided avenues to mutual understanding and collaboration among diverse peoples. The relative successes and failures of past internationalist projects in large measure owed to participants’ ability to effectively communicate across not just linguistic, but also political, cultural, economic, and professional boundaries. This fundamental and literal question of (mis)communication has dramatically shaped the lives of peoples variously confronting the global realities or pretensions of their milieus. More details are available on our blog. The conference programme will be announced early in 2017.

From our Visiting Fellows

Holly Case: The Age of Questions

For a month last summer (mid-May to mid-June, 2016), I had the privilege of joining the Reluctant Internationalists project group for research and interaction on themes of common interest. Among the project leader (Jessica Reinisch) and other members and guests (among them Heidi Tworek and Elidor Mehilili), the intellectual energy was remarkable. At several conferences, talks and workshops organised over the course of the short time I was there (on the Armenian genocide, the history of medicine, expertise, etc.) a broad range of interests was paired with impressive regional and temporal depth of knowledge. It is not surprising to me that so many of the project members have found jobs and received honours in the meantime.
Beyond the scholarly merit of the project, I was above all taken with the comradery within the group. The tenor of discussions was always productive and the atmosphere intense intellectually, but relaxed socially. It was truly a joy to think and work among such young scholars and enhances my faith in the future of historical inquiry that they are the faces of the next generation.

As for my own research, Britain was just where I needed to be this summer. Much of my time outside of Birkbeck was spent between the National Archives in Kew and the British Library. In both places I found a wealth of documents and pamphlets relating to the book project I am currently completing on “The Age of Questions,” tentatively subtitled “First Attempt at a History (in Aggregate) of the Eastern, Social, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions from Roughly 1800 to 1945, and Beyond.” The Reluctant Internationalists did me the honour of asking me to deliver the opening address for their new Centre for the Study of Internationalism, for which I spoke on my book project.

What was “The Age of Questions”? From a spattering of references to the American and Catholic questions in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, there followed an interrogative deluge in the nineteenth. Before long, publicists, scholars, statesmen, novelists, religious authorities, millers, doctors, and others competed to derive the best solutions to the Eastern, Belgian, woman, labour [worker], agrarian, and Jewish questions. These were folded into larger ones, like the European, nationality, and social questions, even as they competed for attention with countless smaller ones, like the Kansas, Macedonian, Schleswig-Holstein, and cotton questions. The most prominent figures put their pens to them: Alexis de Tocqueville, Victor Hugo, Karl Marx, Frederick Douglass, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Adolf Hitler, to name just a few. That questions were construed as problems is evident from another familiar formulation: the “definitive” or “final solution.” My book wonders: Was there a family resemblance between questions, or certain patterns that recurred or migrated across them? Have they disappeared, or are they still with us?

Being among the Reluctant Internationalists at Birkbeck helped me bring this project to completion. My archival and other findings at Kew and the BL filled the last of the holes in the analysis relating to the origin of the age, in which British politicians and publicists played the leading role. I left London just days before the Brexit vote. As such, I will always remember that month as an especially wonderful time before the general unravelling that has since ensued, and that shows all the more the unquestionable relevance of the Reluctant Internationalists project.

**Heidi Tworek: What Makes Health Special?**

I had the good fortune and great privilege of spending a month as a visiting fellow at the Reluctant Internationalists project earlier this year. As someone who has only recently started to work on the history of health, I found our discussions tremendously helpful for understanding how to think about health as an international phenomenon. One of the main recurring questions throughout our discussions revolved around the place of health in international
interactions. What, if anything, made health different from other international concerns like labour, communications, war or trade?

Health stood for me as an area that bureaucrats often designated as “technical” to enable broader participation in health-related organisations. The designation of “technical” allowed experts to claim that health concerns existed beyond politics and could thus include non-members of international organisations.

In the interwar period, countries like Germany or the Soviet Union were critical players in the League of Nations Health Organisation. Germany continued to send out epidemiological bulletins over wireless after Hitler rescinded the country’s membership of the League in October 1933. The Rockefeller Foundation provided the majority of funding for the Health Organisation, even though the United States never joined the League. Similarly, David Brydan’s recent PhD thesis has shown how Spanish health officials remained deeply involved in the World Health Organisation although Spain was not allowed to join the United Nations until 1955. Disease crossed borders and did not discriminate between members and non-members of an international body. Despite political differences, nation-states often recognised that and cooperated accordingly.

Our discussions about how labels like “technical” enabled broader participation in health matters reminded me of my earlier work on the history of communications, where the label had performed a similar function. Calling communications standards “technical” enabled officials from the nineteenth centuries onwards to reach agreements about cross-border connections. A special issue that I co-edited for Journal of Policy History found that communications standards have succeeded historically when they regulated technical issues like frequencies, but not when they tried to regulate content.

If I apply that distinction back to the history of health, it implies that standardisation in health was likelier to occur when officials could designate something as “technical” (like causes of death) than when it required agreement on broader social issues. Social issues took health out of the purportedly technical into the very definitely political.

What made health different than communications was the very obvious stakes of life or death. In this sense, health was more like war. Health and war have long been linked metaphorically. We talk about “battling” disease or the “war on AIDS.” Conversely, health metaphors are tremendously virulent. We talk about the “health” of the economy or memes going “viral” online. These metaphors had real consequences. Robert Peckham’s work has shown, for example, how the metaphor of contagion in financial crises affected assessments of risk and responses to stock market crashes. Within the world of the military, some countries stopped supplying health data to the League of Nations around 1940 because they feared that the information could be misused by enemy nations for war planning.

Health, then, could be both as “technical” as communications
standards and as “political” as war. By comparing health with other areas of internationalism, we gain a far more nuanced picture of how, when, and why cross-border interactions made reluctant experts into enthusiastic participants or vice versa.