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**LENIN IN COPENHAGEN, AUTUMN 1910:
ÉMIGRÉ POLITICS, INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM
AND NETWORK OF REVOLUTIONARY EXILES**

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The brief stay of Lenin in Copenhagen during the late summer and autumn of 1910 has generally occupied only a marginal place in studies of the Russian history movement. Overshadowed by the historical events of 1917 and by Lenin's longer periods of exile in Switzerland, France and Britain, the Copenhagen visit has nevertheless attracted increasing scholarly attention as an illuminating episode in the history of transnational socialism. During his stay, Lenin attended the Eighth Congress of the Second International, participated in meetings among Russian social democratic delegates, established contacts with socialist activists from across Europe, and pursued extensive research on Danish agriculture and cooperative institutions in the Royal Danish Library. This article argues that the significance of Lenin's Copenhagen lies less in his formal role during the congress than in the wider political and intellectual environment in which it occurred. Copenhagen functioned as a hub within an international network of revolutionary exiles, allowing socialist activists to exchange ideas, debate strategy and maintain political organizations across national borders. Examining Lenin's activities through Soviet, Western, Danish and recent historiography demonstrates how interpretations of the visit have evolved alongside changing understandings of the Russian history in 1917 and international socialism.

Keywords: Vladimir Lenin, Copenhagen, Second International, Bolshevism, 1917, exile, transnational history, socialism, historiography, Denmark, Russia, German Social Democratic Party, First World War, 1910, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Carl Thomsen.

**ЛЕНИН В КОПЕНГАГЕНЕ ОСЕНЬЮ 1910 Г.:
ПОЛИТИКА В ИЗГНАНИИ, МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОЦИАЛИЗМ
И СЕТЬ ЭМИГРАНТОВ-РЕВОЛЮЦИОНЕРОВ**

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Краткое пребывание Ленина в Копенгагене в конце лета и осенью 1910 г., как правило, занимало лишь второстепенное место в исследованиях русского исторического движения. Омраченный историческими событиями 1917 года и более длительным пребыванием Ленина в изгнании в Швейцарии, Франции и Великобритании, визит в Копенгаген, тем не менее, привлекает все большее внимание ученых как важный эпизод в истории международного социализма. Во время своего пребывания в Дании Ленин посетил Восьмой конгресс Второго интернационала, участвовал во встречах делегатов от российских социал-демократов, установил контакты с социалистическими активистами со всей Европы, провел обширные исследования датского сельского хозяйства и кооперативных институтов в Королевской Датской библиотеке. В данной статье утверждается, что значение визита Ленина в Копенгаген заключается не столько в его официальной роли на конгрессе, сколько в более широкой политической и интеллектуальной среде, в которой это происходило. Копенгаген функционировал как центр международной сети эмигрантов-революционеров, позволяя социалистическим активистам обмениваться идеями, обсуждать стратегию и поддерживать политические организации за пределами национальных границ. Изучение деятельности Ленина с точки зрения советской, западной, датской и новейшей историографии показывает, как эволюционировали интерпретации этого визита наряду с изменением понимания истории России в 1917 г. и международного социализма.

Ключевые слова: Владимир Ленин, Копенгаген, Второй интернационал, большевизм, 1917 год, изгнание, транснациональная история, социализм, историография, Дания, Россия, Социал-демократическая партия Германии, Первая мировая война, 1910 год, Надежда Крупская, Карл Томсен.

Introduction

Rather than presenting Copenhagen merely as a minor episode in Lenin's biography, this article situates the visit within broader European political developments before the First World War. It shows that the congress reflected both the strengths and the growing ideological fractures of the Second International and provides insight into the political culture of revolutionary exile that helped shape twentieth-century revolutionary movements. For nearly two decades before returning to Russia in April 1917, Lenin lived largely in political exile. Forced abroad by Tsarist repression after repeated arrests and surveillance, he resided in or travelled through numerous European cities, including Munich, London, Geneva, Paris, Zurich, Cracow, Stockholm and Copenhagen. These cities formed an interconnected geography of revolutionary politics in which socialist leaders met, debated, published newspapers, organized congresses, and maintained clandestine communication with activists inside the Russian Empire. Exile was therefore not simply a period of political isolation but constituted an essential component of revolutionary organization itself [8, p. 250].

Among these locations, Copenhagen occupies a distinctive position. Although Lenin's stay in the Danish capital lasted only several weeks during 1910, it coincided with the Eighth Congress of the Second International, one of the largest international gatherings of socialist parties before the First World War. Nearly nine hundred delegates representing more than thirty countries assembled in Copenhagen to discuss questions ranging from labour legislation and unemployment to militarism, colonialism, parliamentary tactics and international solidarity. Lenin attended as a representative of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and simultaneously used the opportunity to strengthen contacts among revolutionary Marxists. Despite the Congress' impressive scale, Lenin occupied only a relatively modest position within its formal proceedings. The Bolsheviks remained a minority faction inside the fragmented Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, while the dominant voices at the congress belonged largely to established Western European socialist parties, particularly the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Nevertheless, Lenin's

presence in Copenhagen provides historians with a valuable lens through which to examine the ideological conflicts that increasingly divided the international socialist movement during the years preceding the First World War [2, p. 200].

The Copenhagen congress also illustrates an important characteristic of European socialism before 1914: its fundamentally transnational nature. Socialist leaders crossed borders with remarkable frequency despite political repression, language barriers, and limited financial resources. Newspapers circulated internationally, theoretical works were translated into multiple languages, and congresses created opportunities for personal interaction that often proved as significant as official resolutions. Revolutionary politics depended not only upon ideas but also upon extensive personal networks connecting activists across Europe. Recent scholarships increasingly emphasize these transnational dimensions of revolutionary history. Rather than treating national revolutionary movements as isolated developments, historians now examine the circulation of ideas, political practices and individuals across international borders. Lenin's movements through Europe exemplify this broader phenomenon. His Copenhagen visit demonstrates how political exile generated opportunities for intellectual exchange while simultaneously exposing the tensions that ultimately fractured socialist internationalism during the First World War [2, p. 210].

This article argues that Lenin's stay in Copenhagen should be understood not merely as an isolated biographical episode but as part of the wider political geography of European socialism before 1914. The visit reveals three interconnected historical processes. First, it illustrates the operation of international revolutionary networks that sustained socialist activism across Europe. Second, it demonstrates the deepening ideological divisions within the Second International between reformist and revolutionary currents. Third, it highlights the importance of intellectual work, including Lenin's research on Danish agriculture and cooperative institutions in shaping revolutionary political thought beyond immediate party struggles [7, p. 85-86].

The discussion proceeds in several stages. It first places Lenin's Copenhagen visit within the broader context of his revolutionary career before 1910. It then examines the political significance of the Eighth Congress of the Second International and reconstructs Lenin's activities during his stay in Denmark. Attention is devoted to the historiography surrounding the visit, comparing Soviet interpretations, Cold War scholarship, Danish labour history and recent transnational approaches. Finally, the article considers how public memory has transformed the historical significance of Lenin's brief residence in Copenhagen over the past century. Rather than seeking to exaggerate the importance of a short visit, this study proposes that seemingly minor episodes can illuminate much larger historical developments. Copenhagen did not determine the course of the Russian Revolution, but it offers an exceptional vantage point from which historians can observe the international political culture that made revolutionary movements possible in the early twentieth century [7, p. 75].

Lenin before 1910: exile and the formation of Bolshevism

To understand the significance of Lenin's stay in Copenhagen in 1910, it is necessary to examine the political and intellectual trajectory that brought him there. By the time he arrived in Denmark, Lenin was already a veteran revolutionary who had spent nearly two decades engaged in underground political activity, imprisonment, exile, factional disputes and ideological struggle. Although he had not yet become the internationally recognized leader associated with the Russian Revolution of 1917, many of the central elements of his political thought had already emerged. The years preceding 1910 were formative not only for Lenin personally but also for the broader Russian revolutionary movement. They witnessed the emergence of Marxism as a significant political force within the Russian Empire, the fragmentation of the socialist movement into competing factions, and the growing importance of transnational political networks. Lenin's experiences during this period profoundly shaped his understanding of organization, revolutionary strategy and the relationship between political theory and practical action [1, p. 222].

Lenin

Born in Simbirsk in 1870, Vladimir Lenin belonged to a generation of Russian intellectuals whose political consciousness was shaped by the contradictions of late imperial Russia. The Russian Empire remained an autocratic state under Tsarist rule, characterized by limited political participation, extensive censorship and an increasingly dissatisfied population. Rapid industrialization during the late nineteenth century transformed social relations into major urban centres, producing a growing industrial working class that became an important audience for socialist ideas. Lenin's political radicalization was accelerated by personal tragedy. In 1887 his elder brother Alexander Ulyanov was executed for participating in a conspiracy to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. Although Lenin later rejected the methods of individual terrorism employed by earlier revolutionary groups, the execution left a lasting impression and reinforced his opposition to the autocratic regime. During his university years Lenin became increasingly attracted to Marxism. The works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels appeared to provide a systematic explanation of social development and offered a theoretical framework for understanding Russia's political and economic transformation [3, p. 100].

Unlike the populist movements that had dominated earlier generations of Russian radicalism, Marxists emphasized the central role of industrial workers and class struggle in historical change. By the mid-1890s Lenin had become an active organizer within the Russian Marxist movement. In 1895 he helped establish the Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class in St. Petersburg, an organization that sought to combine socialist theory with practical agitation among workers. The Tsarist authorities responded swiftly. Lenin was arrested, imprisoned and eventually sentenced to internal exile in Siberia. Although exile was intended to suppress political dissent, it often produced the opposite effect. Like many revolutionaries of his generation, Lenin used the period to deepen his theoretical studies, establish political contacts, and prepare for future activity. The experience also strengthened his conviction that revolutionary movements required disciplined organization capable of surviving state repression [1, p. 198].

The Second International before the Copenhagen Congress

By 1910, therefore, Lenin arrived in Copenhagen as a revolutionary leader whose political outlook had been shaped by years of ideological conflict, organizational experimentation and practical experience. His commitment to disciplined party organization, revolutionary socialism, and international political engagement had already become defining features of his political identity. Lenin's presence in Copenhagen cannot be understood apart from the institution that brought hundreds of socialist activists to the Danish capital – the Second International. Founded in Paris in 1889 the Second International emerged as the principal organization linking socialist parties and labour movements across national borders. It sought to coordinate political activity among workers' organizations while promoting international solidarity in an era marked by rapid industrialization, imperial expansion, and growing social conflict [6, p. 75].

Unlike later communist internationals, the Second International possessed relatively limited centralized authority. It functioned primarily as a forum for discussion and coordination rather than as a hierarchical organization capable of directing national parties. Nevertheless, its congresses became major political events that attracted leading socialist thinkers, trade unionists, parliamentarians, journalists and activists from around the world. By the beginning of the twentieth century, socialism had become a powerful force in European politics. The German Social Democratic Party had become one of the largest political parties in Europe, while socialist movements gained influence in France, Austria, Belgium, Scandinavia, Italy and elsewhere. Trade unions expanded rapidly and socialist representatives increasingly entered national parliaments. This success, however, generated new tensions [3, p. 151].

Many socialist leaders concluded that participation in parliamentary politics offered a practical route toward social reform. Electoral campaigns, legislative initiatives and cooperation with existing political institutions appeared capable of improving workers' conditions while gradually expanding democratic participation. Other socialists remained sceptical of such strategies. They feared that integration

into parliamentary systems would weaken revolutionary commitment and encourage accommodation with capitalist institutions. These concerns became particularly significant for revolutionaries from countries such as Russia, where democratic institutions remained weak or non-existent. The resulting debates dominated discussions throughout the international socialist movement. Questions concerning reform versus revolution, parliamentary participation, trade union strategy, colonialism, militarism, and national identity generated increasingly intense disagreements.

Leading theorists attempted to preserve unity despite these divisions. Karl Kautsky, often regarded as the foremost Marxist theorist of the era, sought to reconcile revolutionary objectives with practical political activity. Rosa Luxemburg criticized what she regarded as excessive moderation within many socialist parties while simultaneously challenging aspects of Lenin's organizational approach. Jean Jaurès promoted democratic socialism and international cooperation. Across Europe, socialist leaders struggled to balance ideological commitments with political realities. These debates formed the intellectual and political backdrop to the International Socialist Congress convened in Copenhagen in August 1910. Delegates arrived not only to discuss specific policy questions but also to confront fundamental issues concerning the future direction of the socialist movement itself. For Lenin the Congress represented both an opportunity and a challenge. It offered access to an unparalleled network of socialist activists and provided a forum in which revolutionary perspectives could be articulated. At the same time, it exposed him to a movement increasingly dominated by parties whose political strategies differed sharply from his own [2, p. 230-231].

The tensions visible in Copenhagen would continue to intensify during the following years. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 would ultimately reveal the fragility of socialist internationalism and contribute to the collapse of the Second International as a unified political force. Yet in 1910 those outcomes remained uncertain. The Congress assembled in Copenhagen amid both optimism, regarding the growth of socialism and growing concern regarding its ideological future. It was

within this complex political environment that Lenin entered the Danish capital and participated in one of the most important gatherings of the international socialist movement before the First World War.

Copenhagen 1910: the International Socialist Congress and the geography of politics

When delegates of the Second International assembled in Copenhagen between 28 August and 3 September 1910, Europe appeared outwardly stable. Industrial production was expanding, parliamentary democracy was gradually extending its reach in several countries and international trade connected the major economies more closely than ever before. Beneath this apparent stability, however, lay profound political tensions. Intensifying imperial rivalries, accelerating military expenditure, widespread labour unrest, and unresolved national conflicts increasingly challenged the optimistic assumptions that had characterized much of the previous decade. The Copenhagen Congress became one of the last great international gatherings of European socialism before these tensions culminated in the First World War [3, p. 278].

The Danish capital was well suited to host such a congress. Denmark possessed one of the most stable constitutional systems in Northern Europe and had developed a vigorous labour movement that maintained close relations with socialist organizations throughout the continent. Copenhagen's geographical position between Central Europe and Scandinavia, together with its relatively liberal political climate, made the city particularly attractive for exiled revolutionaries and international political organizations. Unlike activists travelling to the Russian Empire, delegates arriving in Denmark faced comparatively few restrictions, enabling the congress to assemble representatives from an unusually broad spectrum of political traditions. Contemporary reports estimated that approximately nine hundred delegates from thirty-three countries participated in the congress, making it one of the largest international socialist gatherings ever organized before 1914. Delegations represented not only the major European socialist parties but also labour organizations from

North America, Latin America, Australia and parts of Asia, demonstrating the increasingly global character of socialist politics [9, s. 11].

The agenda reflected the remarkable breadth of socialist concerns. Delegates debated unemployment, labour legislation, trade union organization, cooperative movements, women's political participation, colonial policy, international arbitration, and the growing danger of militarism. Although these subjects appeared diverse, they all raised a common question: could socialism achieve its objectives through gradual democratic reform, or would the contradictions of capitalist society ultimately require revolutionary transformation? To Lenin these debates were of immediate political importance. Since the failure of the 1905 Revolution, Russian Marxists had been engaged in intense disputes concerning organizational strategy, relations with liberal political parties, and the future direction of the revolutionary movement. Participation in the Copenhagen Congress therefore provided an opportunity not merely to exchange ideas with foreign colleagues but also to strengthen the position of the Bolshevik faction within the broader international socialist community [4, p. 305-306].

Lenin's arrival in Copenhagen

Lenin arrived in Copenhagen during the latter part of August 1910 together with his wife and political collaborator Nadezhda Krupskaya. They rented modest accommodation at Vesterbrogade, 112, situated in Copenhagen's rapidly developing Vesterbro district. The neighbourhood, characterized by working-class housing, small businesses, railway workers, artisans, and industrial labourers, contrasted sharply with the more affluent quarters surrounding the royal palace and government ministries. Today the building remains one of the few surviving physical reminders of Lenin's Danish visit. A commemorative plaque installed on its façade identifies the apartment where Lenin lived during his stay, illustrating how even relatively brief episodes can become incorporated into the historical landscape of European cities. Unlike later revolutionary mythology, there is little evidence that Lenin's daily routine in Copenhagen differed significantly from his habits elsewhere in exile. Contemporary accounts consistently portray him as leading a remarkably disciplined

existence. He rose early spent much of the day reading or writing, attended congress meetings when necessary, and devoted considerable attention to discussions with fellow revolutionaries. Visitors frequently commented upon his capacity for sustained intellectual concentration and his preference for detailed political analysis over ceremonial public appearances [5, p. 455; 11, s. 20].

The Congress at the Odd Fellow Palace

The formal sessions of the congress were held in Copenhagen's impressive Odd Fellow Palace, an eighteenth-century building that provided an appropriately prestigious setting for one of the largest international political gatherings of the period. Delegates filled meeting halls where simultaneous discussions occurred on numerous resolutions and committee reports. The atmosphere combined parliamentary procedure with the passionate ideological engagement characteristic of the international socialist movement. Although Lenin attended these sessions regularly, his role within the official proceedings remained relatively modest. The leading public speakers were generally representatives of the large Western European socialist parties, particularly the German Social Democratic Party, whose parliamentary achievements commanded considerable respect throughout the International. Several factors limited Lenin's visibility. His command of Western European languages, although adequate for political discussion, did not match the rhetorical fluency of many German, French or Belgian delegates. More importantly, the Bolsheviks themselves represented only one faction within the divided Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and therefore lacked the institutional influence enjoyed by established socialist parties elsewhere in Europe [5, p. 460].

Yet it would be misleading to measure Lenin's importance solely by the number of speeches he delivered. Much of the real political work at international congresses occurred outside the formal plenary sessions. Committee meetings, informal conversations, private dinners, and small gatherings among like-minded delegates frequently proved more influential than official debates recorded in congress proceedings. Lenin understood this reality exceptionally well. He devoted considerable effort to cultivating relationships among revolutionary Marxists from

different countries, seeking to strengthen informal networks that might eventually challenge the reformist majority within the International. These conversations, although largely absent from official documentation, contributed to the gradual emergence of political alliances that became increasingly significant during the crisis of European socialism after 1914 [9, s. 12].

The Folkets Hus and the Socialist Women's Conference

Another important venue associated with the congress was Folkets Hus on Jagtvej, long recognised as one of Copenhagen's principal centres of labour politics. Before the official congress commenced, the Second International Socialist Women's Conference convened there under the leadership of Clara Zetkin. The conference marked a milestone in the history of international socialism. Zetkin successfully proposed establishing an annual International Women's Day dedicated to advancing women's political rights, universal suffrage, labour protection and social equality. Although the first observances varied between countries, the Copenhagen conference laid the institutional foundation for what later became one of the world's most widely recognised international commemorative days.

Lenin did not play a central role in the Women's Conference itself, yet he attended meetings at Folkets Hus and maintained close contact with several participants, including Zetkin, whose revolutionary convictions he greatly admired. Their political cooperation continued during subsequent years of exile and later within the Communist International after 1919. The Women's Conference also illustrated the extraordinary diversity of socialist activism before the First World War. While later historical narratives often focus primarily upon questions of revolution and state power, socialist organizations simultaneously campaigned for women's suffrage, educational reform, labour protection, public health and democratic participation. Copenhagen therefore represented not only a meeting place for revolutionary conspirators but also a forum for ambitious programs of social reform [5, p. 466].

Research at the Royal Danish Library

One of the most revealing aspects of Lenin's Copenhagen stay occurred away from congress halls altogether. Contemporary evidence indicates that he spent many mornings working in the Royal Danish Library, examining agricultural statistics, economic reports and studies concerning Danish cooperative farming. This research reflected a longstanding feature of Lenin's political method. Unlike many revolutionary leaders remembered primarily for speeches or organizational activity, Lenin devoted enormous energy to empirical investigation. Throughout his exile he systematically analysed statistical publications, government reports, agricultural surveys, industrial production figures and demographic studies. His major theoretical work consistently combined ideological argument with extensive quantitative evidence. Denmark attracted his attention because its agricultural economy appeared to demonstrate how small-scale farming could coexist with highly developed cooperative institutions. Danish dairies, agricultural associations, credit cooperatives and marketing organizations had achieved remarkable economic success without abandoning private ownership entirely. For Lenin these developments posed important theoretical questions regarding the relationship between capitalism, peasant agriculture, and collective organization. Although it would be misleading to suggest that Danish agriculture directly shaped later Soviet policy, the research undertaken in Copenhagen contributed to Lenin's broader understanding of rural economic structures. His continued interest in cooperatives reappeared repeatedly after 1917, particularly during debates surrounding agricultural reconstruction and the New Economic Policy. The Copenhagen studies therefore illustrate that Lenin's exile was characterized not solely by political agitation but equally by sustained intellectual inquiry. In retrospect, Lenin's daily routine in Copenhagen reveals an important characteristic of revolutionary exile. Political leadership consisted not merely of speeches and conspiratorial meetings but also of painstaking research, extensive correspondence, continuous reading and participation in international intellectual communities. The Congress itself lasted only a few days; the intellectual work

undertaken before, during and after the formal proceedings formed part of a much longer process through which revolutionary theory evolved [5, p. 455-457].

Reform or revolution? Ideological conflict at the Copenhagen Congress

Although the Eighth Congress of the Second International concluded with resolutions reaffirming international socialist solidarity, contemporaries were already aware that profound disagreements threatened the unity of the movement. The Congress revealed a widening gap between revolutionary Marxists, who regarded capitalism as fundamentally incompatible with socialism, and reformist social democrats, who increasingly believed that democratic institutions offered a viable path toward social transformation. Lenin's experience in Copenhagen unfolded against this backdrop of ideological confrontation. The principal fault line concerned the relationship between parliamentary politics and revolutionary action. Since the foundation of the Second International in 1889 socialist parties had achieved remarkable electoral successes in several European states. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), for example, had become the largest socialist party in the world, while labour parties in Scandinavia, Belgium, Austria-Hungary and France gained increasing representation in national legislatures. For many socialist leaders, these developments appeared to demonstrate that democratic institutions could gradually be transformed from within [4, p. 290].

Lenin regarded this interpretation with increasing scepticism. His political experience in the Russian Empire differed fundamentally from that of socialists operating within constitutional monarchies or parliamentary republics. The Tsarist regime offered few legal opportunities for political participation, trade union activity remained heavily restricted and censorship limited public debate. Consequently, Lenin concluded that revolutionary organisation rather than parliamentary reform remained the decisive instrument of political change. These contrasting political experiences produced two competing visions of socialism. Reformists argued that expanding suffrage, labour legislation, social insurance and trade union organisation represented tangible advances toward a socialist society. Revolutionaries, by contrast, viewed such reforms as potentially valuable but ultimately insufficient, arguing that

the capitalist state would defend existing property relations whenever fundamental challenges emerged. The debates in Copenhagen therefore extended far beyond questions of immediate policy. They addressed one of the central problems of twentieth-century political history: could socialism emerge through democratic evolution, or did it require revolutionary rupture? [4, p. 300; 12, p. 125].

Lenin and the Danish Labour Movement

Lenin's stay in Denmark also exposed him to one of the most successful labour movements in Northern Europe. Danish Social Democracy had developed into a disciplined parliamentary organisation closely connected with expanding trade unions and cooperative enterprises. Unlike the fragmented Russian socialist movement, Danish labour politics operated within a constitutional framework that allowed relatively open political competition. This contrast fascinated Lenin while simultaneously reinforcing his political reservations. Contemporary accounts suggest that he expressed little enthusiasm for the moderate course pursued by leading Danish Social Democrats, particularly Thorvald Stauning, who would later become Denmark's longest-serving prime minister. Stauning believed that socialism should be achieved through parliamentary majorities, negotiated reforms and cooperation with other democratic forces. Lenin considered such an approach inadequate for societies characterized by deep structural inequalities and entrenched class power. It would, however, be misleading to portray these disagreements as purely personal. They reflected fundamentally different historical circumstances. Danish socialists operated within a constitutional monarchy where elections, trade unions and public debate gradually expanded political opportunities. Russian revolutionaries confronted an autocratic empire sustained by censorship, political policing, and recurrent repression. Their contrasting political strategies emerged from markedly different institutional environments rather than simply divergent ideological preferences. Modern historians increasingly emphasize this contextual dimension. Earlier Cold War scholarships often interpreted the conflict between reformism and revolution as an abstract ideological dispute. More recent research instead examines how national political structures shaped socialist strategy. From this perspective, neither Stauning's

parliamentary gradualism nor Lenin's revolutionary organizational model can be understood independently of the political systems within which they evolved [2, p. 111].

Militarism and the crisis of international socialism

Perhaps the most consequential debates in Copenhagen concerned militarism and the growing danger of European war. During the decade preceding 1914 military expenditure increased dramatically among the major powers. Germany expanded its naval programme, Britain responded with accelerated shipbuilding, France strengthened conscription and Russia embarked upon extensive military reforms following its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Socialist parties formally opposed militarism, arguing that wars primarily served imperial and capitalist interests while imposing immense suffering upon the working classes. Congress delegates therefore reaffirmed earlier resolutions calling upon socialist organizations to resist militarization and to promote international peace.

Yet beneath the apparent unanimity lay significant ambiguity. Although delegates agreed that workers should oppose imperialist conflict, they disagreed profoundly about the practical measures to be adopted should war break out. Some advocated parliamentary resistance, others favoured mass strikes, while revolutionary minorities contemplated the possibility that war itself might generate revolutionary crises. Lenin belonged firmly to the latter group. Even before 1914 he argued that interstate conflict exposed the contradictions of capitalist society and might create opportunities for revolutionary transformation. Although he could not foresee the precise circumstances of the First World War, his interventions increasingly reflected the conviction that socialist parties should prepare not merely to protest war but also to exploit the political crises that war would inevitably produce.

Retrospectively, the Copenhagen Congress acquired exceptional significance because many of its resolutions proved impossible to implement only four years later. When the First World War erupted in August 1914, most socialist parties supported their respective national governments. German Social Democrats voted in favour of war credits in the Reichstag; French socialists entered the Sacred Union; Austrian,

Belgian, and British socialist organizations likewise rallied behind national war efforts. For Lenin these developments constituted not simply a political disappointment but an intellectual vindication. He concluded that reformist socialism had become inseparable from the national states within which it operated. The collapse of socialist internationalism confirmed his long-standing suspicion that parliamentary success had weakened rather than strengthened revolutionary commitment.

Informal networks and revolutionary collaboration

While formal resolutions occupied public attention, another dimension of the Copenhagen Congress proved equally significant: the creation and maintenance of informal political networks. International congresses offered opportunities for conversations that transcended official agendas. Delegates exchanged publications, discussed organizational tactics, arranged future meetings and established personal relationships that often endured for decades. Lenin proved particularly adept at cultivating these informal connections. Rather than measuring success solely through congress resolutions, he sought to strengthen cooperation among revolutionary Marxists dispersed across Europe. These contacts assumed increasing importance after 1914, when the disintegration of the Second International compelled revolutionary socialists to construct alternative international organisations. Recent scholarship on transnational political history has highlighted the importance of these personal networks. Historians now recognise that revolutionary movements depended not only upon ideological agreement but also upon durable relationships built through repeated encounters in cities such as London, Paris, Zurich, Brussels, Stockholm and Copenhagen. Exile created communities of political activists whose influence extended far beyond the individual congresses they attended. From this perspective, Copenhagen appears not merely as the location of a single conference but as one node within a broader European geography of revolutionary politics. Ideas circulated alongside newspapers, correspondence, translations, financial assistance, and personal friendships. The movement of people across borders facilitated the

movement of political concepts, organizational practices, and strategic innovations. [6, p. 84].

Copenhagen as a historical turning point

Whether the Copenhagen Congress itself constituted a decisive, turning point remains a matter of historiographical debate. It did not produce dramatic resolutions, create new political institutions or immediately alter the balance of power within the international socialist movement. Nevertheless, historians increasingly regard the congress as symbolically important because it represented the final phase of apparent unity before the catastrophic divisions of 1914. For Lenin personally, Copenhagen reinforced conclusions already emerging from the experience of the failed Revolution of 1905. His scepticism toward reformism deepened his commitment to independent revolutionary organisation strengthened, and his international contacts expanded. These developments did not determine the course of later events, but they formed part of the cumulative political experience that shaped Bolshevik strategy during the years immediately preceding the Russian Revolution. Consequently, the historical significance of Copenhagen lays less in spectacular political achievements than in the gradual consolidation of ideas, relationships, and organisational practices. It exemplifies how revolutionary movements evolved through continuous interaction across national borders rather than through isolated moments of dramatic upheaval. By examining these quieter processes of political exchange, historians gain a more nuanced understanding of how international socialism functioned before the First World War and how its internal tensions ultimately reshaped twentieth-century history [6, p. 88].

Historiography: interpreting Lenin's stay in Copenhagen

The historical significance of Lenin's stay in Copenhagen has long been a matter of interpretation rather than factual disagreement. The basic chronology of the visit is well established: Lenin attended the Eighth Congress of the Second International, lived with Nadezhda Krupskaya at Vesterbrogade, 112, participated in meetings with Russian and international socialists and conducted research at the Royal Danish Library. What historians continue to debate is the broader meaning of

these activities. Was Copenhagen an important milestone in Lenin's political development, merely one stop among many during his years of exile or an illuminating example of the transnational character of European revolutionary politics? Answers to these questions have varied considerably over the past century. Interpretations have been shaped not only by newly available archival material but also by changing political climates, methodological innovations, and evolving perspectives on the Russian Revolution itself. Broadly speaking, the historiography may be divided into four overlapping traditions: Soviet interpretations, Western Cold War scholarship, Danish labour history, and recent transnational approaches.

Soviet historiography: the heroic narrative

The earliest systematic interpretations emerged within Soviet historical writing during the 1920s and 1930s. Historians writing under Soviet institutions naturally viewed Lenin's entire political career through the lens of the successful October Revolution. Events preceding 1917 were therefore frequently interpreted as progressive stages in an inevitable revolutionary process. Within this framework, the Copenhagen Congress assumed significance because it illustrated Lenin's determination to preserve the revolutionary essence of Marxism against what Soviet historians described as the growing opportunism of reformist social democracy. Official biographies portrayed Lenin as the principal defender of revolutionary orthodoxy within the Second International, emphasising his meetings with radical delegates and his efforts to strengthen cooperation among revolutionary socialists. This interpretation rested partly upon Lenin's own retrospective writings. In later notes prepared for lectures on the international socialist movement, Lenin emphasised the importance of international cooperation among revolutionary workers and criticised reformist tendencies that had become increasingly influential before 1914. Soviet historians frequently used these later reflections to interpret Lenin's activities in Copenhagen as an early stage in the political development that ultimately culminated in the establishment of the Communist International after 1919. Such interpretations undoubtedly highlighted genuine elements of Lenin's political thought. He consistently regarded international cooperation among revolutionary

socialists as essential and increasingly criticised parliamentary reformism after 1905. Nevertheless, Soviet historiography often attributed greater influence to Lenin during the Copenhagen Congress than contemporary evidence supports. Congress proceedings indicate that Lenin participated actively in committee work and informal discussions, but he did not dominate the formal debates. The Bolsheviks remained only one faction within the divided Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, while the congress itself was dominated numerically and politically by delegates representing the large Western European socialist parties. Consequently, modern historians generally regard Soviet accounts as valuable for understanding official interpretations of Lenin but less reliable as objective reconstructions of the congress itself.

Western scholarship during the Cold War

Following the Second World War, Western historians approached Lenin from markedly different perspectives. The ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies encouraged scholars to reassess revolutionary leaders with greater critical distance. Rather than accepting Soviet narratives of historical inevitability, historians increasingly situated Lenin within broader European intellectual and political developments. Influential writers such as Edmund Wilson explored Lenin's ideas as part of the wider tradition of nineteenth century revolutionary thought rather than treating them as uniquely decisive. Western scholars generally interpreted the Copenhagen Congress as one episode within the prolonged experience of political exile rather than a decisive turning point in Lenin's career. This historiographical tradition also paid greater attention to the diversity of socialist politics before 1914. Rather than portraying reformists simply as ideological opponents of Lenin, historians analysed the practical political circumstances confronting socialist parties in different national contexts. The parliamentary achievements of German, Scandinavian and French social democracy appeared less as evidence of political betrayal than as rational responses to constitutional political systems that differed fundamentally from the autocratic conditions of the Russian Empire. Cold War scholarship therefore challenged several assumptions that had

characterised Soviet historical writing. First, it rejected teleological interpretations that viewed all earlier events primarily as preparation for 1917. Second, it emphasized the limited political influence exercised by Lenin within Second International before the First World War. Finally, Bolshevism situated within the wider diversity of European socialist traditions rather than treating it as the inevitable culmination of Marxist theory. While these interpretations offered important correctives to Soviet orthodoxy, they occasionally introduced their own limitations. Some Cold War accounts tended to underestimate Lenin's intellectual originality or dismissed revolutionary ideology primarily through the lens of later Soviet authoritarianism. More recent scholarships have sought to move beyond these ideological polarities.

Danish labour history and local perspectives

A distinct historiographical tradition emerged within Denmark itself, where historians and labour scholars approached Lenin's visit from perspectives quite different from those prevailing in either Soviet or Anglo-American scholarship. The pioneering work of Carl Thomsen remains particularly significant. Drawing extensively upon Danish archives, newspapers, correspondence, municipal records, and eyewitness testimony, Thomsen reconstructed Lenin's daily activities in Copenhagen with greater precision than earlier historians. Rather than concentrating exclusively upon ideological debates, Thomsen examined where Lenin lived, whom he met, how he travelled through the city and the institutions he visited. This local perspective demonstrated that Lenin's Copenhagen experience extended well beyond the congress sessions themselves. His research at the Royal Danish Library, his observations of Danish agricultural cooperatives, and his interactions with Danish socialist organisations all contributed to a richer understanding of his stay. Danish historians consequently emphasised Copenhagen as a place of intellectual exchange rather than merely a venue for political speeches. Labour historians also viewed the congress itself as evidence of Denmark's importance within the international socialist movement. Hosting nearly nine hundred delegates from thirty-three countries illustrated Copenhagen's position as one of Europe's principal meeting places for

organised labour before the First World War. In this interpretation, Lenin's presence becomes significant not because Denmark fundamentally altered his political ideas but because the congress demonstrates the extent to which socialist politics functioned through international cooperation. Equally important, Danish scholarship generally avoids the ideological polarisation that characterised much Cold War writing. Instead of evaluating Lenin primarily as either revolutionary hero or authoritarian precursor, historians have tended to investigate the visit as an episode in Denmark's own international political history [10, p. 10-11].

Transnational history and global networks

Since the 1990s historical scholarships have increasingly adopted transnational perspectives that challenge traditional nationally cantered narratives. Rather than analysing revolutionary movements exclusively within national political histories, historians now investigate the circulation of people, ideas, publications and political practices across borders. This methodological shift has substantially altered interpretations of Lenin's Copenhagen visit. From a transnational perspective, the significance of Copenhagen lies not primarily in the congress resolutions or Lenin's formal participation but in the city's function within broader European networks of political exile. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, revolutionary activists moved continuously among cities including Geneva, Zurich, Paris, Brussels, London, Stockholm, Cracow and Copenhagen. These urban centres formed interconnected spaces where political organizations could maintain communication despite repression in their home countries. Historians working within this framework emphasize mobility itself as a historical phenomenon. Exile was not merely a temporary interruption in revolutionary activity but an essential condition through which socialist politics became internationalized. Newspapers, pamphlets, financial resources, translators, publishing houses and personal relationships circulated alongside the activists themselves. Lenin's stay in Copenhagen therefore illustrates how revolutionary ideas developed through sustained international interaction rather than isolated national experiences. His participation in congress discussions, private meetings, library research, and conversations with socialists from

numerous countries exemplifies the interconnected political culture that characterized European socialism before 1914. Recent scholarship also demonstrates that the Copenhagen Congress reflected the genuinely global ambitions of the socialist movement. Delegates arrived not only from Europe but also from North America, Latin America, Australia, and Asia, illustrating that socialist internationalism extended far beyond the continent traditionally associated with Marxist politics [8, p. 158].

Debates concerning Lenin's influence

Despite broad agreement regarding the factual circumstances of Lenin's stay, historians continue to disagree about its political significance. One interpretation argues that Copenhagen contributed meaningfully to Lenin's development by strengthening contacts among revolutionary Marxists and reinforcing his growing criticism of reformist social democracy. Although no dramatic political breakthrough occurred during the congress, the cumulative effect of repeated international meetings gradually prepared the foundations for later revolutionary cooperation. A second interpretation adopts a considerably more cautious assessment. Scholars supporting this view emphasize that Lenin exercised relatively little influence within the official proceedings. Most delegates remained committed to parliamentary socialism, while Bolshevism occupied only a marginal position within the broader international movement. From this perspective, Copenhagen illustrates the weakness rather than the strength of Lenin's position before 1914. A third approach shifts attention away from formal politics altogether. Rather than asking whether Lenin influenced congress resolutions, historians investigate his intellectual activities during the visit. His systematic examination of Danish agricultural statistics and cooperative institutions reflects his continuing interest in questions of economic organization, peasant society and rural development subjects that later assumed considerable importance in Soviet debates concerning agricultural policy. These interpretations need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, the complexity of Lenin's Copenhagen experience arises precisely because political networking, ideological debate, and intellectual inquiry occurred simultaneously [10, p. 8].

Memory, public history and historical interpretation

The historiography of Lenin's Copenhagen visit also intersects with broader questions concerning historical memory. Public commemorations rarely remain politically neutral, and Lenin's legacy has repeatedly been reinterpreted in response to changing political circumstances. The commemorative plaque at Vesterbrogade, 112 acknowledges the historical fact of Lenin's residence without necessarily endorsing his later political achievements or the subsequent history of the Soviet Union. It exemplifies a broader trend within European public history that seeks to preserve historically significant sites while recognising the complexity of the individuals associated with them. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 scholarly interest in Lenin has increasingly moved beyond ideological confrontation. Historians today are generally less concerned with defending or condemning Lenin than with understanding the historical conditions under which revolutionary movements emerged. Copenhagen provides an especially valuable case study because it allows historians to examine Lenin before he became head of state, during a period when he remained one revolutionary activist among many within an extraordinarily diverse international socialist movement. This historiographical evolution illustrates a broader transformation within historical scholarship. Rather than treating historical figures as either heroes or villains, contemporary historians increasingly analyse them within the political, social, and intellectual contexts that shaped their actions. Lenin's stay in Copenhagen thus serves not only as a subject of historical investigation but also as an example of how historical interpretation itself changes over time.

Copenhagen in the European geography of revolution

Although Lenin's residence in Copenhagen lasted only a few weeks, it exemplifies an important feature of early twentieth-century revolutionary politics: the existence of a transnational political geography that connected activists across Europe. Revolutionary movements were not confined within national borders. Instead, they developed through a dense network of congresses, publishing houses, exile communities, trade unions and socialist organizations that enabled ideas and people to circulate with remarkable intensity.

The years before the First World War witnessed an unprecedented internationalization of socialist politics. Railways, telegraph networks, expanding newspaper circulation, and relatively open European borders facilitated communication among activists from different countries. Copenhagen occupied a strategic position within these networks. Its geographical location between Central Europe and Scandinavia, combined with Denmark's comparatively liberal political climate, made it an attractive meeting place for organizations that could not easily assemble elsewhere.

For Lenin exile represented more than physical displacement. It became an essential political condition. Most of his theoretical writings before 1917 were produced outside Russia. His political influence depended upon continuous movement between European cities, regular participation in congresses, extensive correspondence and cooperation with socialist publishers. Rather than interrupting revolutionary activity, exile provided opportunities for reflection, research and international collaboration that would have been impossible under Tsarist censorship.

Recent scholarship has increasingly demonstrated that these international connections shaped the development of revolutionary ideology. Political concepts did not emerge in isolation but through repeated encounters among activists confronting similar social and political problems in different national contexts. Copenhagen therefore belongs to a wider constellation of European cities including Geneva, Zurich, London, Paris, Brussels, Stockholm, Cracow and Vienna that functioned as laboratories of political innovation.

The congress of 1910 also illustrates the paradoxical character of Second International. On the one hand, it represented perhaps the greatest achievement of organized socialist internationalism before the First World War. Hundreds of delegates from dozens of countries debated common political objectives and sought coordinated responses to unemployment, militarism, labour legislation, and democratic reform. On the other hand, the congress exposed ideological disagreements that increasingly challenged the movement's unity.

These tensions became dramatically visible after August 1914. When European governments mobilized for war, socialist parties confronted the dilemma anticipated but never resolved during earlier congresses. Most organizations supported national war efforts despite previous commitments to international solidarity. For Lenin this collapse confirmed his long-standing conviction that reformist socialism had become integrated into existing state structures. The disintegration of the Second International subsequently encouraged him to advocate a new revolutionary international organization based upon stricter ideological principles.

Seen from this longer historical perspective, Copenhagen acquires significance not because decisive political decisions were made there but because the Congress reveals the intellectual environment from which later revolutionary developments emerged. The debates held in Copenhagen anticipated many of the questions that would dominate socialist politics throughout the twentieth century: the relationship between democracy and revolution, nationalism and internationalism, reform and systemic transformation, political organization and mass participation.

Conclusion

Lenin's visit to Copenhagen in 1910 occupies only a brief episode within the broader chronology of his revolutionary career. Nevertheless, its historical significance extends beyond the limited duration of the stay itself. Examined within the wider context of European socialist politics, the visit offers valuable insights into the operation of revolutionary exile, the international dimensions of Marxist politics, and the ideological conflicts that shaped the twentieth century. This study has argued that Copenhagen should not be interpreted simply as another location in Lenin's travel across Europe. Rather, the city functioned as an important node within the international networks through which socialist activists exchanged ideas, organized political activity and maintained communication across national boundaries. The Eighth Congress of the Second International demonstrated both the remarkable organizational achievements of international socialism and the increasingly visible tensions that would ultimately fracture the movement during the First World War.

Lenin's own role at the congress remained relatively modest. Contemporary evidence does not support later claims that he dominated proceedings or exercised decisive influence over congress resolutions. His importance lay elsewhere: in his participation in informal discussions, his cultivation of revolutionary contacts and his continued intellectual work. His research into Danish agricultural statistics and cooperative institutions further illustrates that revolutionary politics consisted not solely of agitation and organizational activity but also of sustained scholarly inquiry into economic and social development. The historiography surrounding Lenin's Copenhagen stay reflects broader transformations within historical scholarship. Soviet historians interpreted the congress as a milestone on the road to revolutionary victory; Cold War scholars emphasised Lenin's limited influence and the diversity of European socialism; Danish historians reconstructed the local dimensions of the visit through archival research; and recent transnational approaches have situated Copenhagen within wider international networks of political mobility and intellectual exchange.

These changing interpretations demonstrate that historical significance is neither fixed nor inherent. Rather, it evolves as historians pose new questions, gain access to new sources, and adopt new methodological perspectives. Lenin's stay in Copenhagen has therefore become valuable not because it transformed the course of history directly but because it illuminates the international political culture within which revolutionary movements developed before 1917. More broadly, the Copenhagen Congress reminds historians that the Russian Revolution cannot be understood exclusively through events that occurred inside the Russian Empire. The intellectual foundations of Bolshevism were shaped through decades of interaction with European socialism. Exile, congresses, correspondence, libraries, publishing houses, and personal relationships all contributed to the political education of revolutionary leaders.

In this sense, Copenhagen forms part of a wider European history of revolution. It represents a place where international cooperation, ideological disagreement, and intellectual inquiry intersected during one of the final moments of

apparent unity before the catastrophe of the First World War. Although the congress did not determine the future, it exposed many of the political tensions that would dominate European history during the decades that followed.

Ultimately, Lenin's Copenhagen experience demonstrates the value of studying seemingly marginal historical episodes. Short visits, temporary residences, and international conferences often reveal broader processes that remain invisible within purely national narratives. By situating Copenhagen within the transnational history of revolutionary politics, historians gain a richer understanding not only of Lenin himself but also of the international socialist movement whose ambitions, achievements, and failures profoundly shaped the modern world.

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