Summary of *The “virus of involvement”. The International Institute of Social History in the field of forces of social history, social movements, and collections, 1935-1989*

The central question in this thesis is how did the International Institute of Social History professionalize in the period 1935-1989? In the introduction I explain this that this process was influenced by three global forces: ‘society,’ ‘economic and social history,’ and ‘the infrastructure of research and collecting.’ Together they provide the analytical framework for this book.

Chapter 1 describes how social history emerged as a discipline in the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Great Britain. The field followed a different course of development in each of these countries, although there were overlaps in some cases. Generally, the three coherent processes in the discipline were as follows: becoming scholarly history, professionalizing, and institutionalizing. The transition to a scholarly discipline made history, as well as social history, an independent field of research. The critical-philological method was fundamental to the scholarly historical perspective. Labour history figured prominently within social history. Those active in social history often had a role, or had previously been involved in the movement. The discipline also played a role in the development of the labour movement. After the Second World War methods and techniques in social sciences strongly influenced the emergence of social history scholarship.

As history transitioned to a scholarly discipline, amateurs and professionals gradually drifted apart. Professionals were increasingly historians with university appointments. Until the early 1950s, they were mainly professors. The discipline became part of the academic discourse, and those concerned worked in academic circles. Still, social history also continued to be practiced outside academia.

Chapter 2 covers the history that preceded the IISH. Gradually, a varied landscape emerged of institutions that formed the infrastructure of the historical discipline. In addition to the professors, universities appointed academic staff and teaching assistants. More and more journals were published, national and international associations established, congresses organized and institutions publishing sources founded. Historians and
social historians could make use of facilities such as archives, libraries, and specialized research institutions. The chapter then covers the start of the academic and professional career of N.W. Posthumus, the founder of the IISH and also its first director. He was one of a small group of historians in the Netherlands that established economic history as a discipline. In 1913 he became first professor of economic history at the newly founded Nederlandsche Handels-Hoogeschool (now Erasmus University) in Rotterdam. In 1914 he founded the Nederlands Economisch-Historisch Archief (NEHA).

Chapter 3 describes the spectacular history of the IISH from 1935 to 1940. The NEHA was among the founders of the IISH. During the pre-war years, the Institute was dedicated almost entirely to rescuing the papers of opponents of Nazism. Founding librarian A. Scheltema was pivotal in this effort. The international networks involved remained relevant for the IISH for many decades after the war. The most important networks were those of Dutch, German, and Russian social democrats. The position of Russian Menshevik Nicolaevsky was crucial, as was his role in obtaining the historical archive of the SPD comprising the papers of Marx and Engels. Acquiring this archive immediately established the worldwide reputation of the Institute. Organizationally, the IISH followed the example of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow: the Institute was divided into four geographic ‘cabinets,’ i.e. sections responsible for scholarship and collecting alike. Financing came from Dutch social-democratic circles. In this period, the Centrale Arbeiders-Verzekeringen- en Depositobank spent large sums (over fl. 750,000) setting up the IISH. The chapter also relates the mounting tensions between the main operators in this period: Posthumus and De Lieme, the director of the Centrale. The ever-rising threat of war led the Institute to take measures to secure the collections, such as arranging a branch in Oxford and finding hiding places in France. In this stage of the history of the IISH, strong social forces pressuring the Institute were very powerful. Only part of the academic program drafted in 1935 could be implemented. Launching the International Review for Social History was especially important. The Institute could operate fairly independently, with minimal influence from a sponsoring infrastructure.

The Second World War is covered in Chapter 4. The German forces of occupation took control of the Institute, based largely on political, police-related repressive, and ideological considerations. For the IISH the Second World War was a major turning point. The underlying idea survived only among a small group of those remaining in the Netherlands, including Scheltema, the founding librarian of the Institute. In Oxford, Lehning managed to keep the evacuated collections intact throughout the war. The collections that
the Germans seized in Paris, Amboise, and Amsterdam were destined for a Nazi institution for higher education. Because the National Socialists were interested in the content of this material, many collections ultimately escaped destruction and were preserved.

The first twenty years after 1945 are covered in Chapter 5. The most significant problem was the quest for other sources of financing, since De Centrale wanted to cut back on its contribution. Ultimately, the City of Amsterdam and the Dutch government allocated funding to the IISH as well. The stipulation was that the collections of De Centrale needed to remain in the public domain via the IISH. To this end, the Stichting IISG and De Centrale reached a new standing loan agreement in 1947. The pillaged Institute was rebuilt on a tight budget. A substantial share of the collections looted was traced and returned. Between 1945 and 1953, Posthumus, Scheltema, and Lehning left the Institute. The new administration, headed by Rüter from 1953, worked hard to anchor the Institute in university circles by making it an Inter University Institute (IUI). Anticipating this transition, the Institute was made part of the Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA) in 1963. Rüter managed to raise funding externally. In 1959, the Ford Foundation provided a large grant that finally enabled the Institute to catalogue the most important collections adequately. ZWO regularly financed scholarly publications as well.

In this period the Institute explored new opportunities and had to adapt to the new social constellation. The Cold War defined the political climate. Social democracy became a partner in the welfare state during the reconstruction in the Netherlands. This changed the perspective of the IISH on collecting. Decolonization had the same effect on non-European topics.

Output from scholarship had a slow start. Highlights included the relaunch in 1956 of the *International Review of Social History*, one of the few scholarly journals on social history at the time. Like before the war, scholarly output was strongly focused on publishing sources.

Chapter 6 covers the period 1965-1979. When Rüter died unexpectedly in 1965 the Institute was still in the midst of the IUI process. New director De Jong Edz. carried on this policy. The IISH experienced major growth. Social and labour history became significantly more important. This was attributable to the rise of the student movement and more generally the movement of the sixties. Organizationally, the growth caused the number of ‘cabinets’ to increase. Combined with other differentiation processes in the organization, such as setting up a separate archive department in addition to the existing library, this led to an unwieldy and fragmented organization. From the end of the 1960s, the director devoted a great deal of attention to
the problems with democratizing the University of Amsterdam, where he was a professor. The internal democratization that reached the Institute via the WUB caused major difficulties. Relations between various committees of staff representatives and the administration deteriorated so much that De Jong Edz. resigned in 1977. Around the same time the objective changed from joining the university to joining the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

Output from scholarship increased but continued to revolve around publishing sources. Collection development gently embraced the world of 1960s activism. This and other factors led to enormous collection growth, and cataloging delays became commonplace, as did problems with the accommodations. Part of the Herengracht building was about to collapse, necessitating an emergency move to the Kabelweg.

The most recent period covered in this PhD thesis is 1979-1989 in Chapter 7. The first topic addressed is the accession to the KNAW. In the early years futile efforts were made to solve the major organizational problems of the Institute. At first, the Board expected the Institute to come up with a solution. But both the Board and the KNAW found the policy ideas suggested by the Institute to be unsatisfactory. In 1983 the Board and the KNAW decided that a reorganization was necessary and had this carried out under the aegis of Fischer from 1984. The ‘cabinets’ were discontinued, and the Institute was restructured to comprise a Research Department and a Collections Department. This resulted in a greatly simplified organization and improved performance in many respects. Collection development was extended to non-European topics. Automation considerably reduced the cataloging problems. Moving to the Cruquiusweg premises finally provided the Institute with adequate accommodations. Research was transformed to accommodate a modern praxis driven by scholarly questions.

This chapter also addresses two important cases that illustrate how the Institute professionalized. The first concerned the approach to the archive of the CNT/FAI. Rescued in 1939, this archive ended up in the care of the IISH but with inadequate provisions. After the death of Franco in 1975 control of this heritage was disputed between different factions of the anarcho-syndicalist movement re-established in Spain. The Institute was occupied on two occasions by a group within this movement and seemed to be getting dragged into the struggle between the factions. From 1984 the IISH explicitly brought the management of this archive under the standards generally accepted in the Netherlands. Only afterwards did the solution to this conflict became available.
The second case was the conflict between the IISH and Lehning about publishing the *Archives Bakounine*. This source publication lagged behind schedule, and in 1980 some staff members became entangled in an internal conflict with Lehning. The entire conflict revolved around control of an important academic project. Launching and pursuing the complicated project (in 1958!) had required a man of Lehning’s stature. Conversely, the prestige of the project also enhanced that of the editor and the Institute. During the conflict the administration and board of the IISH tried to deal with this department and its staff as with any ‘ordinary’ department. Lehning, however, regarded it as his project. These problems, in addition to other developments in the discipline, led the desirability of source publications to be reconsidered. Once again, automation surfaced as an attractive alternative.

Over time, the Institute revised its relationship with ‘society,’ ‘social history,’ and ‘infrastructure.’ The influence of ‘society’ on professionalization gradually diminished. Especially in the 1970s and 80s, the Institute was in the throes of new views on social history as a discipline and wanted to contribute to that debate as well. As for the ‘infrastructure,’ the KNAW finally proved a firm anchor.

The conclusion revisits the main question about the course of professionalizing the IISH. The IISH, staffed during its early years by a combination of engaged scholars and erudite amateurs, was for many years dominated entirely by practical problems arising from the rescue of archives and libraries that began in 1935. Less professional features long came into play. Throughout the period, inequalities between men and women at the workplace and in the profession persisted. At the upper echelons in management and on the board, male dominance prevailed. Into the 1960s, the IISH was an independent institution able to set its own standards for management and staff alike. This aspect changed gradually, the two most significant events being accession to the UvA in 1963 and to the KNAW in 1979. Transition to the KNAW was decisive for accelerating professionalization within all ranks in the organization. This was offset by some loss of independence. While by the end of the period covered, the IISH had been established as a professional institution for collection development and research, identification with the broad ideals of the international labour movement drove the central motivation. The ‘virus of involvement’ remained effective throughout the entire period.