

Consequently, Zimmer touches on the Mexican Revolution and the Russian Revolutions of 1917, as well as the World Wars and the Spanish Civil War. Of the three works, his is the most consistent in adopting a transnational perspective.

Zimmer's archival research is impressive, as is his use of a wide range of sources in multiple languages. This, too, started as a dissertation, but reads extremely well. He presents his arguments forthrightly and explanations of any ideological differences, conflicts, and similarities are sparkingly clear. Throughout the work he pays attention to questions of race and gender (not just discussing the "woman question" but also masculinity). Moving away from the dominance of the east coast in most studies, Zimmer presents a fascinating examination of the interplay of individuals of various ethnicities and involved with anarchism and its sympathizers in San Francisco. His account of activism by migrants from Asia makes San Francisco sound vastly more diverse in its activism. But he does not ignore the racism that blighted some movements and journals.

The authors under review make important interventions in the history of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism and in various national histories. Baer opens up the importance of anarchist migrants going back and forth between Spain and Argentina. Tomchuk has advanced our knowledge of anarchism in Canada and the role of Italian-speaking anarchists in North America. With Zimmer's clear prose and attention to multiple identities and locations, Paul Avrich has a worthy successor.

*Andrew H. Lee*

Bobst Library, New York University  
70 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012, USA  
E-mail: [andrew.lee@nyu.edu](mailto:andrew.lee@nyu.edu)

HOFFFROGGE, RALF. *Working-Class Politics in the German Revolution. Richard Müller, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Origins of the Council Movement.* Transl. by Joseph B. Keady. Ed. by Radhika Desai. [Historical Materialism Book Series, Vol. 77.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2014. xiv, 253 pp. € 190.00; \$141.00. doi: 10.1017/S0020859016000195

Richard Müller (1880–1943) is by no means the first name that springs to mind when thinking about the historical actors of the 1918 November Revolution in Germany. For most scholars and activists, the martyred communist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht or the social-democratic statesmen Phillip Scheidemann and Friedrich Ebert are more likely candidates. Ralf Hoffrogge, a historian at the University of Potsdam, challenges this state of affairs by outlining how a revolutionary lathe operator from poor rural origins became pivotal to the unfolding of German history through his intimate contacts with the organized working-class movement. Hoffrogge further makes the case that Müller's legacy has been crushed between "the millstones of social democracy and Marxism-Leninism" (p. 197), with the result that our collective understanding of the collapse of the German *Kaiserreich* and the emergence of the Weimar Republic has been distorted by the particular shibboleths and foundation myths subsequently created by historians on both sides of the Cold War frontier. By foregrounding the life and work of

Müller and shifting the terms of the debate, Hoffrogge is successful in calling into question this historical consensus.

After all, it is rather odd that Müller has been so marginalized in German labour history given that he was central to pretty much everything that the workers' movement achieved after 1914. In particular, he was a leader of the *Revolutionäre Obleute* (Revolutionary Shop Stewards' movement) – a militant, semi-secretive union network which opposed the *Burgfrieden* (fortress peace) between the official workers' movement and the Kaiser state during the First World War and organized a number of impressive anti-war strikes that laid the foundations for the upheaval of November 1918. So influential was this network of militants that leading revolutionaries such as Liebknecht came to the conclusion that it was futile to call actions or demonstrations without the group's official backing. As proof of how central this network was to the success of the November uprising, Müller was elected Chairman of the Executive Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in 1918. He later edited the council-communist publication *Der Arbeiterrat* (*Workers' Council*), working alongside thinkers such as Karl Korsch, and was integral to the trade-union activity of both the Independent Social Democracy (USPD) and the German Communist Party (KPD).

The book, a translation and expanded edition of his 2008 work published in German under the catchier – if perhaps slightly misleading – title of *Richard Müller: Der Mann hinter der Novemberrevolution* (*Richard Müller: The Man behind the November Revolution*) can certainly be seen as the most authoritative biography of a man who, until now, has remained largely in the shadows. In particular, the study makes four valuable contributions to labour history.

First, it draws on a variety of rare sources in order to gather together the fragments of Müller's youth and his later years, providing an in-depth account of how he became a union activist and how, towards the end of his life, he turned his back on working-class politics to become a millionaire Berlin landlord, earning the scorn of both the SPD and National Socialist Press for his rather dubious business practices and his exploitation of working-class tenants.

Second, it weaves the individual experiences and outlooks of Müller and his close comrades into a broader account of German radical history from World War I through to the mid-1920s. In so doing, events such as the January 1919 uprising, the aborted Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch of March 1920, and the failed insurrection that has come to be known as the "March Action" of 1921 are all portrayed in a fresh light through a focus on Müller's particular interpretations of, and contributions to, these events. We learn about Müller's – often strained – relations with German Communists such as Liebknecht (who the ever-grounded Müller charged with "revolutionary gymnastics" and with being distant from the workers to which he was appealing) and also how the shop stewards cooperated with other organizations and trends in Germany and beyond – from the rank-and-file union members of the SPD through to the left-wing syndicalists and the Russian Bolsheviks. Particular highlights include descriptions of a secretive meeting in a Neukölln pub to plan the November insurrection; Müller's letters written to the Comintern to protest the sidelining of leading KPD militants; and an account of how Gustav Noske, the self-proclaimed SPD "bloodhound" of the German Revolution, physically destroyed records of the meetings of the Executive Council of the German Councils. (Fortunately, Müller kept his private copy so that today it is possible to read the proceedings.)

Third, Hoffrogge sheds new light on the role played by women in the shop stewards' network. Two in particular – Cläre Casper and Lucie Heimburger-Gottschar – are mentioned for their brave work in the dangerous field of arms procurement for the network (apparently, single women were least likely to be suspected of stashing weapons).

Heimburger-Gottschar recalls how “quite a lot of young girls” leafleted for the Revolutionary Shop Stewards in 1918 and how these young women were also “entrusted with taking away weapons or picking them up beforehand” (p. 64). Hopefully, this little-known aspect of the November Revolution can become the subject of future research.

Fourth, Hoffrogge usefully expands on the thorny relationship between making history and writing about it. Müller did both. In the 1920s, he compiled a three-volume history of the revolution which, according to Hoffrogge, has exerted a significant, but largely unnoticed, influence on subsequent historiography in East and West. For instance, Sebastian Haffner’s hugely popular *Die verratene Revolution* (1969) drew heavily on Müller’s argument that the stormy years after 1918 amounted to a civil war. Chapters 10 (“Richard Müller as Historian of the German Revolution 1923–1925”) and 11 (“Footnotes and Suppression – Richard Müller’s Impact on Historiography”) exemplify Hoffrogge’s knowledge of the historiography of the German labour movement and make fascinating reading for any historian of the period.

Müller’s life was characterized by repeated and failed attempts to establish and sustain independent working-class organizations. All of these attempts were ultimately in vain: they were undermined either by the manoeuvres of the trade-union apparatus in the German Metal Workers’ Union or the Confederation of German Trade Unions; by the force of Gustav Noske’s wave of violence against the council movement; or by an increasingly aggressive Weimar state apparatus that clamped down on the left but often turned a blind eye to the putschism of the far right. On account of Müller’s continual failures, Hoffrogge refers to him as the “Sisyphus of the revolution”. Indeed, one cannot avoid the impression that Müller’s efforts, while doubtlessly heroic and inspirational, were, in many ways, doomed to fail from the outset. As several of his contemporaries in the revolutionary movement highlighted at the time, Müller’s conception of a “pure council system” of workplace organization as *the* basis of the transition from capitalism to socialism was rather aloof to the struggle for state power above and beyond the point of production. This was, indeed, the terrain on which political parties were able to intervene and shape the revolutionary process in a way that the councils simply could not – something that is evident both in the behaviour of the SPD in November 1918–1919 and that of the Bolsheviks in 1917. As Hoffrogge explains, Müller’s reading of the Russian Revolution, which so greatly inspired him, was not so much based on an appreciation of the hegemony of Russian Bolshevism and the fruits of decades of party-political organization, but rather as embodying the ascendance of the council idea. For Müller, the workers’ councils were clearly the form which workers’ power had to assume. One gets the impression, however, that the price of such a focus on the council system prevented Müller and his comrades from articulating a radical alternative to the SPD – a party that was able to draw on its mass support across the nation as a whole in order to undermine the revolutionary process and ultimately reduce the council movement to a solely economic concern.

Hoffrogge is clearly sympathetic to Müller’s strategic conception of a grassroots socialism (which Hoffrogge, often unhelpfully, counterposes to party-political organization), but is not uncritical of his strategic thought. When it comes to Müller’s understanding of a council republic, for example, Hoffrogge notes that the focus on the workplace actually means that housewives and the unemployed would be excluded from the decision-making process: an obvious shortcoming of Müller’s workerist philosophy. While Müller’s understanding of Marxism certainly left a place for working-class party political organization (he was a member of both the USPD and the KPD), Hoffrogge correctly notes that “his political home had always been the DMV [the German Metalworkers’ Union] and the council movement” (p. 147).

Hoffrogge's research is a genuine service to both scholars and activists alike. It provides a meticulously detailed yet eminently readable account of a rich life of struggle that mirrored the fate of the German workers' movement itself: from its promising beginnings of huge trade-union organization and the mighty SPD through to the defeats and disorientation of the 1920s and that movement's ultimate destruction in 1933. It seems that Müller lived and breathed these setbacks with such intensity that he ultimately came to shun the movement to which he had devoted his life.

Ben Lewis

University of Sheffield  
Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN, United Kingdom  
E-mail: ben.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk

STUDER, BRIGITTE. *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*. Transl. by Dafydd Rees Roberts. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke [etc.] 2015. ix, 227 pp. £41.73. doi: 10.1017/S0020859016000201

This book presents a concentrated and engaging collection of historian Brigitte Studer's research on international communism and its pivotal centre between the wars, the Communist International (Comintern; 1919–1943). Studer is one of the leading international experts on the Comintern as a global phenomenon in the history of the twentieth century. Her research over the past twenty years has greatly contributed to dismantling the historiographical myths that had been in circulation about this international organization after its dissolution and during the Cold War. As late as 1986, the historians Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch feared that the Kremlin's concealment of and the lack of access to archives in Moscow would silence the history of the Comintern.<sup>1</sup> However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the opening of Russian archives, and the pioneering efforts of Studer and many others in the 1990s, it was possible to take great strides in reassessing the Comintern's history, not only adding new insights based on primary sources but also introducing new theoretical and methodological perspectives. The present book contributes to this body of literature by offering a spirited and stimulating study on interwar communism as a space of "experience" and "practice". In this volume, Studer draws up a balance sheet on some of her substantial research on the Comintern. Comparable to historian Alexander Vatlin's survey *Die Komintern*,<sup>2</sup> Studer's book builds both on formerly published essays and on revised versions of contributions to other publications either in French or German. Given that this book is in English (skilfully translated by Dafydd Rees Roberts) it will surely help to bring her research to a wider circle of readers.

What does the title of the book imply? The detailed introductory chapter outlines Studer's firm belief in placing the experiences of individuals at the centre of her historical

1. Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford, 1986), pp. viii–ix.

2. Alexander Vatlin, *Die Komintern. Gründung, Programmatik, Akteure* (Berlin, 2009).