

EDITOR'S REMARKS

Internationals and Workers between the World Wars

“Proletarian revolutions,” wrote Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, “criticise themselves constantly . . . [and] come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh . . .” Workers’ struggles during the last two decades from Poland to Portland have breached the rigid lines of ideology and organization inherited from the Cold War and have precipitated a discussion within workers’ parties and unions over strategies and objectives, which refuses to be confined by those organizations’ own ossified and self-serving myths. Historians have played an important role in this quest. To the extent that they have followed George Haupt’s appeal to abandon the “doctrinaire optic” in favor of an unfettered reopening of sources and the development of analytical categories appropriate to the lives and activities of the workers themselves (ILWCH no. 14/15), they have initiated a profound reassessment of “the apparently accomplished.”

This issue of ILWCH is devoted to new studies of the Second and Third Internationals and of the Catholic workers’ movement in the period between the two world wars. Its theme is set (in a departure from ILWCH’s customary self-limitation to news and reviews) by a bold and provocative essay which Alexandre Adler of the University of Paris originally wrote for *Rinascita*, the literary and cultural journal of the Italian Communists, as one of a splendid group of articles dealing with Stalin and Stalinism. Few readers will agree with all of Adler’s blunt and iconoclastic formulations, but even fewer will fail to be impressed by his panoramic view of the transformation of both the Communist International and its world setting between 1930 and 1934. That transformation, he argues, had inescapable consequences for the subsequent relations among the various geographical and ideological components of the workers’ movement.

Adler’s analysis focuses on the Soviet Union, Germany, China, and the United States. Other essays and reviews in this issue follow his directions to the last three of these countries. Larry Peterson analyzes an imposing array of new books dealing with the country where the Communist-Socialist split was fought out in its most decisive form: Germany. The voices of the embattled German workers themselves are beginning to be heard over the intellectual jamming of party legends. Paul Buhle and Ronald Schatz address the American scene: Buhle by insisting that the aspirations and actions of the Communist Party’s *members* hold the key to understanding the epoch’s radicalism, and Schatz by showing what is known and unknown about Catholic trade unionists, whose movement has been largely ignored by historians but was certainly familiar to every labor activist. China is taken up by Lynda Schaffer. Good studies of its workers remain few, she argues, but some do exist, and she shows what can be found in them. Whatever Chinese workers did, Schaffer makes it clear that they were not putty in the hands of Comintern agents.

Because of the length of these essays and the large amount of news to report in this issue, many excellent book reviews which have been set in type were postponed to the next issue, so that those for which space could be allowed might relate directly to the theme of this number. As for a review essay on the social history of Soviet workers since 1917, we hereby invite some reader of ILWCH to provide it for a future issue.

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