

Roth, *L'altro movimento operaio: Storia della repressione capitalistica in Germania dal 1880 a oggi*

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Volume 4, 1979

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11t4rv09>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Ramirez, B. (1979). Roth, *L'altro movimento operaio: Storia della repressione capitalistica in Germania dal 1880 a oggi*. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4, 278–280.

trade union confederation in France, as the most important element.

The core of this essay deals in some detail with the complex political development surrounding these concepts and strategies, and the relations between the main actors: the state, the United Left Alliance, the Communist Party, and the two major trade union confederations, the CGT and the CFDT. The essay represents a good example of political analysis with a reliance on formal party and union statements. One does not always get a clear picture of the extent to which these declarations are related to practice. Paradoxically, the extent of worker/union power in Italy resembles most closely that of the Swedish workers' movement. But here the similarity ends. Martin Slater reviews the history and contemporary developments of worker councils and their forerunners, the internal commissions, against the background of inter-union and political rivalry and the very extensive changes which have taken place in collective bargaining. The workers' councils made their appearance on the shop floor in 1968. Their spontaneous development in large factories in northern Italy introduced direct worker power on the shop floor level. Initially distinct from the union structure, the unions were eventually successful in adjusting to the presence of workers' councils. It is through the workers' councils that workers exercise their power vis-à-vis management at the factory level. While Swedish workers have made significant gains in reducing managerial prerogatives, in the final analysis through legislation, the workers' councils in Italy have made similar gains essentially based on the power of massive rank and file support. The Councils accept no limitations on which issues could be brought up in bargaining. They have challenged employers on issues ranging from job classification to the employers' investment policies. In 1970 for example, the workers' councils, in their negotiations with Fiat, agreed to spread a reduction in working hours over a longer period in

return for a commitment by management to build a new plant in southern Italy.

The system transforming potential of the workers' council movement is obvious in that the frequent contestations with employers are usually fought on open anti-capitalist demands. What is less certain, and this essay does not give adequate weight to this issue, is the impact of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) on union policies and strategies. The present policy of the PCI to reach the "historic compromise" with the Christian Democratic Party clearly creates a basic contradiction with the declared aim of creating the conditions for a transition to socialism.

David Garson in his concluding comments remarks that while workers' control has the potential "to grow into decentralized socialism, so too it has the potential to revert back to human relations management." While admittedly one can develop a more optimistic scenario, particularly in respect of Sweden and Italy, I am reminded of the historical parallel described so well by C.B. Macpherson in referring to the emergence of the democratic franchise in England after the liberal state was firmly established. There is on the whole little evidence that worker participation innovations have posed a serious threat to the maintenance of capitalist power.

This is a first rate collection of essays.

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Karl Heinz Roth, *L'altro movimento operaio: Storia della repressione capitalistica in Germania dal 1880 a oggi* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1976).

[Original title: *Die "andere" Arbeiterbewegung und die Entwicklung der kapitalistischen Repression von 1880 bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Trikont Verlag, 1974).]

L'altro movimento operaio is a work that does not lend itself easily to categorizations; and this may be one of the reasons

why its publication sparked a very lively historiographical and political debate in Germany, which later spread to Italy where three editions of the Italian translation have already appeared in three years.

Any work which in less than 300 pages attempts to analyse a century of working-class history cannot be but a work of synthesis. Yet this label cannot be entirely attached to this work, both on account of the originality of the thesis set forth by the authors,* and also because this thesis rests on very vast archival material.

The central claim made by the authors is one few people could argue against, namely, that it is impossible to acquire a correct knowledge of the history of workers' movements without taking into account the mostly unwritten history of a whole sector of the working population which official labour historiographies have tended to consider marginal. In this case, they are those millions of workers, mostly unskilled or semi-skilled, often immigrants or prisoners of war, who from the Bismarckian period, through two world wars, and on to the economic boom of the 1960s, have occupied a central place in the development of capitalism in that country.

The authors, however, are not primarily interested in writing a social history of that sector of the working population — their objective is not, for instance, that of depicting the degradation to which those people were subjected, nor do they attempt to study the subculture(s) which may have informed the workers' collective experiences. Rather, the authors' concern is entirely political as they aim at showing to what extent the "other workers' movement" has constantly been the target of capitalist policies designed to repress its militancy so as to insure economic growth and political control over the entire German working class.

This is why the authors devote so much

attention to another central theme of their book, namely, the history of capitalist repression. That this theme has unfolded in close interaction with the history of working-class organizations is indeed a point that the authors are able to present forcefully and convincingly and perhaps the only line of analysis which provides the book with a certain continuity. The authors go to a great length to show the emergence and the operation of the various industrial police corps — from the "*Zechenwheren*" of the Bismarckian period, to the "*Freikorps*" of the post-World War One period, to the "*Werkschutz*" of the World War I and World War II periods — and the extent to which these corps, designed at first to exert surveillance over workers' activities in the factories and to repress any sign of militance, were gradually integrated into the state apparatus, whether in the case of the Weimar state, the Nazi state, or the social-democratic state of the post-wwii era.

The reconstruction of this theme allows the authors to throw some interesting and thought-provoking light on some of the key turning points of twentieth-century German political history, as the roots of the state repression which has characterised many German regimes is traced back to the relations of power between rival social classes at the point of production. Thus, for instance, the much debated "social-democratic betrayal" of the World War I period is explained not so much in terms of political opportunism and ideological deviationism, but rather as being part of a business strategy designed to disaggregate a certain working-class composition which had begun posing crucial problems to capitalist accumulation.

This and other similar examples discussed by the authors show to what extent the originality of this work rests on the particular methodology employed. Briefly stated, it is a methodology which constantly seeks to elucidate the relationship between a given working-class composition and the particular workers' organiza-

* The plural is being used because one of the five chapters which make up the book is authored by Elisabeth Behrens.

tions emerging out of it. The result is a tendency to de-emphasize the role of ideologies as major forces of workers' movements, and a great concern to distinguish the material conditions of work and reproduction among the various sectors of the working population.

Hence, the juxtaposition occurring throughout the book between the skilled sectors of the German working class and the unskilled sectors, most of which making up what the authors call "the other workers' movement." However, it is only in the discussion of the Weimar Republic period that this analysis appears fruitful and convincing. Here Roth succeeds in contrasting one phase of workers' struggles led by skilled workers desirous to impose an alternative based on the workers' councils practice, and another phase which he calls "the insurrectionary one" and which was initiated and led by those working-class sectors which composed "the other movement."

Except for this case and for the analysis of the contemporary period, the juxtaposi-

tion of the two movements tends to remain more theoretical than historical, with the consequence that the authors seem to elevate to principle a sort of incipient radicalism of unskilled workers on the one hand, and an incipient cooptability of skilled trade unions, on the other hand.

Moreover, unless the thesis of another workers' movement, paralleling and often conflicting against the official movement, is corroborated by more thorough historical reconstruction (though the authors do make an effort in this direction) one wonders to what extent all those sectors of the German proletariat (unskilled, immigrants, women, forced labourers, etc.) may be historically defined and treated as a "movement."

Finally, it is hoped that this book may become available in English or French as it would be a very important contribution to the methodological debate going on among Canadian labour historians.

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