

The elegant prose, the women's voices, and excavated stories beckon readers of all backgrounds. This book combines and awakens two aspects of U.S. history which have fallen prey to general amnesia: The Italian Americans' past as a racially undesirable people, and an American (female) anarchist tradition.

Christa Santina Wirth is a Ph.D. candidate in the history department of the University of Zurich. The title of her dissertation project is: "Familial Memories and Identity Constructions: Three Generations of Descendants of Southern Italian Immigrants to the United States, 1913–2010." The dissertation is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (Schweizerischer Nationalfonds). From 2006 to 2008 Christa Wirth was an academic assistant in the history department of the University of Zurich. From 2008 to 2011 she was a Visiting Fellow in the history department at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA. She is currently completing her dissertation. She published: "Der American Dream in den Erzählungen der Nachkommen eines italienischen Migrantenpaares: Ein Werkstattbericht" in *Migration und Erinnerung. Migration et mémoire: Methoden und Konzepte der Forschung. Méthodes et concepts de recherche* (Lit-Verlag 2010). Address correspondence to Christa Wirth, 79 Bradford Road, Watertown, MA, 02472. E-mail: wirthchrista@hotmail.com

Notes

1. Jennifer Guglielmo, "Italian Women's Proletarian Feminism in the New York City Garment Trades, 1890s–1940s," in *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World. (Studies in Gender and History)*, ed. D. Gabaccia and F. Iacovetta (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2002), pp. 247–99.
2. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno eds. *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*. Afterword by David R. Roediger. (New York, London, 2003).

Hoffrogge, Ralf. *Richard Müller: Der Mann hinter der Novemberrevolution. [Richard Müller: The Man behind the November Revolution]*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 2008. 233 pp. €19,90 (hardcover).

Richard Müller: The Man behind the November Revolution is the title of the seventh volume of the hardcover book series History of Communism and Leftist Socialism, edited by Berlin-based Dietz publishers. But who was Richard Müller? Never heard of him? Today widely unknown, Müller was the leader of the so-called Revolutionary Shop Stewards in the early twentieth century in Germany. "From 1916 to 1921, Müller was without any doubt among the politically most influential personalities in the German labor movement" (216).

The Revolutionary Stewards were the primary organizers behind the mass-strike movement between 1916 and 1918 in Germany and the only antiwar organization deeply rooted among workers in the factories. And they were the backbone of the German so-called November revolution in 1918. Their clandestine cell structure was the main support for the revolution. With their

mixture of avant-garde and grassroots organization the Revolutionary Stewards represented thousands of workers from the factories in Berlin.

But in official history—whether that of mainstream bourgeois, social democratic, or established Communist Party—the role of the shop stewards role has been generally ignored, minimized, or even deliberately omitted. Social democracy considered ship stewards too communist, and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the unions in post-World War II West Germany wanted to underline the role of the social democrats, while blaming communists for all and everything bad that befell the country. Conversely, the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands [KPD]) and later also the official German Democratic Republic history defamed the Stewards as reformists and social democrats.

The KPD attributed the key role in the November Revolution to the Spartacist League led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, which in reality was rather marginal. The Stewards, who belonged to the council communist movement, expressed a strong and early critique of the authoritarian development in the Soviet Union. Consequently, they were pulverized politically by the disdain of social democracy and party communism. Council Communists—who opposed both state capitalism and socialist/bureaucratic statism had few advocates in the East or West.

Hoffrogge uses the life of Richard Müller as entre into writing this fascinating history of the 1914–1920 democratic workers movement. Hoffrogge concentrates on the politically substantial elements of this history and is not distracted in long-winded biographic details of his personal life. Through transcending the often senseless tendency to focus on the minutia of Müller's personality, Hoffrogge facilitates the understanding of the significance of the council communists and Shop Steward Movement. He only briefly touches on Müller's youth and life before becoming a committed communist revolutionary, as well as his widely unknown and apparently rather inglorious later life as construction entrepreneur, owner of several houses and landlord.

As leader of the Revolutionary Stewards, Müller followed a “mixture of revolutionary impetus and politically pragmatic tactics” (151). He knew how to “differentiate between his own ideas and the real consciousness of the working class” (65). For the Spartakists and the early KPD, which responded still to strongly putschist ideas of revolution and thought to seize power by in some kind of storm on the Winter Palace, this was reason enough to criticize and mistrust Müller and the Stewards who sustained “the Russian tactic is not valid for Germany” (64–65). Müller also held on to his beliefs when he was apparently alone defending them. That was the case in the evening of January 6, 1919, when he dismissed the armed uprising in Berlin decided by the revolutionary left with great euphoria, as hopeless. And also when he denied support for the adventurous armed actions in March 1921, considering them condemned to failure (219).

Müller was a member of the Independent Social Democratic Party, the USPD (which united the formerly scattered opposition, including the Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and their Spartacist League) since 1917. He and the

Stewards, who had also joined the party, were part of its left wing. But they still defended “organizational independent councils and unions” (145). The Stewards introduced the political mass strike as instrument of revolutionary struggle. When after a wave of mass strikes and rebellions of workers and soldiers, the preparations for a general uprising were discovered by the government authorities, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards joined a congregation of soldiers’ councils at the Reichstag on the afternoon of November 9, 1918, directed the meeting and managed to convince workers and soldiers to call for the election of a revolutionary government through workers’ and soldiers’ councils in Berlin on the next day.

After the election, due to the political ability of the SPD, the Stewards were forced to accept parity between the USPD and the SPD in the revolutionary government. Two governmental bodies were elected. Richard Müller became one of two chairmen of the Berlin Executive Council, which was considered the highest organ of the revolutionary government.

But power shifted more and more to the second body, the Council of the Peoples’ Deputies, which was composed of a reformist majority. The situation in the Executive Council was also quite difficult for Müller and the revolutionaries, since most workers and also the newly politicized soldiers traditionally trusted the SPD. Soldiers and SPD voted against building a Red Guard to defend the revolution. At the end of 1918, the USPD left the governmental bodies following an attack of government troops against revolutionary soldiers in Berlin. The SPD took definitive control of the political opening. But the revolution was already defeated anyway. In mid-December, the national convention of workers’ councils had already voted against the consolidation of the council system and agreed to general elections for a national parliament.

The revolutionary left failed to convince the majority of workers and soldiers of their ideas, and a wave of strikes in the spring of 1919 were brutally crushed. The Revolutionary Stewards split. And after the defeats of the strikes and struggles in 1919, the workers’ council movement was transformed into a movement of shop councils (*Betriebsräte*). At their first national congress in October 1920, Müller and other communists could not convince the delegates of the need of autonomous councils, and they were subordinated to the unions. The council movement in Germany came to an end.

In December 1920, the left of the USPD, and with it also Müller and many of the former Revolutionary Shop Stewards, finally merged with the KPD, and together they built the United Communist Party of Germany (VKPD). The KPD benefited immensely from the merger. Newspapers, organized workers structures, and more than 300,000 militants became part of the quiet small KPD, which turned into a mass party.

Notwithstanding his political party activities, Müller’s main interest and commitment was, during the entire time, directed to the revolutionary factory work. He devoted himself to the reorganization of revolutionary trade union work on behalf of the (V) KPD. The revolutionaries had not been able to prevail in the general trade unions, but the KPD urged its members to continue with

their work inside the unions. But in 1921, the VKPD was again divided into the old fractions.

The former KPD representatives were increasingly following orders from Moscow and reassumed their former putschist perspective, which led to the defeat of the so-called March events, when the VKPD called for armed workers resistance against police repression and remained largely isolated. Müller and others were now in opposition to the party leadership, which defended the offensive orientation. Given the increasing centralization efforts in the KPD, some of the Stewards tried, in 1921, to rebuild the Stewards as an independent force, which was not well received by the party, but it is unclear if Müller was part of these efforts. Müller also strongly opposed the authoritarian and centralistic course of the KPD from inside the party.

In January 1922, Müller, together with many other comrades who demanded the resignation of the party leadership responsible for the March events, were expelled from the KPD. Their expulsion was supported by Moscow and Lenin himself who only six months earlier had supported Müller's critique. The Berlin Stewards, however, had already left the party in November when the KPD asked them for unconditional subordination.

After being expelled from the KPD, Müller became active in a small leftwing union, the German Industry Association (DIV), and along with Karl Korsch, was considered a leading figure in the council communist movement, and dedicated his life to analyzing and writing the history he witnessed and also shaped.

He published three books between 1924 and 1925: *From the Kaiser's Empire to the Republic*, volumes one and two, and *The Civil War in Germany*. In spite of his experiences with the KPD, he referred positively to Lenin. His books, even if not popularized, for the abovementioned reasons, are among the most interesting on the revolutionary movement in Germany between 1916 and 1924, and on analyzing revolutionary socialism for all readers. Müller, who is a man of praxis, combining his analytic and organizing talents, developed an accurate and deep Marxist analysis and argumentation in his writings of the history of the German revolution, and, later, developments that were not focused on individual leaders or representatives.

Hoffrogge notes that Müller adopted a totally dark and pessimistic view in the third volume that tells the story of the suppression of the January uprising, the murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, and the destruction of the Bavarian Council Republic; Müller even provided an outlook on the authoritarian development to follow. The revolution in Germany had been defeated, and that was emblematic of Müller's personal experience. Müller was also the first to analyze those years as an undeclared civil war, a thesis that became well known forty-four years later through the work of Sebastian Haffner (*Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918–1919*, English translation 1973).

Müller retired from politics after inconsistencies showed up in his engagement in constructing houses for the DIV members. He then entered the housing construction industry. This development showed some inconsistencies in his character. He set up a successful construction business and then gained

notoriety for hostile practices as a landlord against tenants. What finally caused this change cannot be explained by Hoffrogge, but it is also of minimal interest, as noted above. The personality of Müller is not of real historical interest, as is the case for most historical figures, but his legacy as revolutionary. Under National Socialism, Müller—in contrast to most of his fellow comrades—was not persecuted. He died on May 11, 1943 of unknown cause.

The merit of Hoffrogge's contribution is a capacity to translate his extensive research into a wide-ranging historical analysis and narrative of the role of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and Richard Müller. Hoffrogge shows that the political route, in large measure short-circuited by Moscow, was by no means the only one possible means to revolutionary struggle, no less the only option. In addition to the great historical importance of Hoffrogge's work, the study of the subject will also play an important role for contemporary debates about the road to socialism.

Dario Azzellini is a professor of Political Science at the University of Linz (Austria). Azzellini is also a writer and documentary film director. He has authored and edited many works, including, most recently: "Ours to Manage and Own: Worker Control from the Commune to the Present" (Haymarket, 2012). He is currently writing several books on new forms of work organization. Azzellini was Associate Editor for Latin America of *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present* (2009) Wiley-Blackwell. His other published work include several books, essays, and documentaries on social movements, privatization of military services, migration and racism in Italy, Mexico, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Venezuela. Address correspondence to Dr. Dario Azzellini, c/o metrogap, Lausitzer Str. 10, 10999 Berlin, Germany. E-mail: dario@azzellini.net

Taylor, Clarence. *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. \$55.00 (hardcover).

Clarence Taylor deserves our appreciation for reclaiming the memory of the New York Teachers Union, the old American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 5. Founded by a group of Socialists in 1916, Local 5 was one of the first teachers unions in the U.S.

What makes the history of Local 5 significant is not its early founding, but rather its intense period of social activism after a mixed group of rank-and-file teachers ousted the old leadership and took charge in 1935. The displaced and disgruntled old guard quickly branded the Teachers Union, often referred to as the TU, as "Communist controlled," an accusation quickly taken up by a variety of professional anti-Communists, churchmen, budget cutters, and opponents of the New Deal.