
Making Anti-Fascism

Transnational: The Origins of

Communist and Socialist

Articulations of Resistance in

Europe, 1923–1924

K A S P E R B R A S K É N

Conventionally, the starting point of socialist and communist resistance to fascism in Europe and the creation of a European ‘culture of anti-fascism’ is dated to the 1930s in the context of the establishment of the Third Reich in 1933 and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The hypothesis of the article is that the initiatives and debates of 1923 played a pivotal role in the creation of the transnational anti-fascist movement that transferred cultures of anti-fascism across borders in Europe and the world. The aim of the article is to analyse the first, but hitherto forgotten, efforts to make anti-fascism a transnational phenomenon in the early 1920s. Further, the article will discuss whether there are clear continuities or discontinuities in the anti-fascist articulations of 1923 and the ones created after 1933.

For some years now fascism is no longer a party matter, but a general cultural and rights issue concerning all levels of society. . . . The fascist menace threatens today the entire world, and especially Germany. . . . The undersigned Initiative Committee sends today an urgent appeal to all workers, labourers, liberally and progressively thinking people, to launch anti-fascist organisations in all countries. The first mission of such organisations must be to carry out a systematic and broad

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educational work on the nature and culturally destructive consequences of the fascist reign, and to unite all organisations and groups to a vigorous united fight against fascism.¹

The above appeal was signed by the initiative committee for the foundation of an *International Antifascist League* and was supported by an international line-up of artists, intellectuals, socialist and communist politicians, including such prominent figures as Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, Anatole France, Georg Grosz, Ernst Toller, Willi Münzenberg, Edo Fimmen, Upton Sinclair and Prof. Dr. Carl Grünberg.² Contrary to what one might assume, the appeal was not published as a response to Hitler's ascendance to power in Germany in January 1933 but is dated 7 November 1923 – two days prior to the failed Beer Hall Putsch staged by Hitler in Munich.

The starting point for the socialists' and communists' resistance to fascism in Europe and the creation of a European 'culture of antifascism' is conventionally dated to between the establishment of the Third Reich in 1933 and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. This article argues, however, that the earlier initiatives and debates of 1923 played a pivotal role in the creation of a transnational anti-fascist movement that transferred cultures of anti-fascism across borders in Europe and the world. It analyses the initial but hitherto forgotten efforts to make anti-fascism a transnational phenomenon in the early 1920s and discusses whether there are clear continuities or discontinuities in the anti-fascist articulations of 1923 and the ones created after 1933. Notably, many of the individuals involved in the 1923 campaign also became central figures in the post-1933 anti-fascist campaigns, such as the German communist Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940), who was one of the leaders of the Berlin anti-fascist committee in 1923 and who then during the 1930s organised several major anti-fascist campaigns in exile in Paris, including the publication of the *Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror* in 1933. The global *Brown Book* campaign was so successful that it became, according to the historian Anson Rabinbach, a prism through which most of the world saw Nazi Germany as a system of bestiality and oppression for more than a generation.³ Likewise, both the French author Henri Barbusse (1873–1935), who joined the French Communist Party (PCF) in 1923, and Edo Fimmen, the Secretary of the International Transport Workers' Federation, became vital actors in the post-1933 transnational anti-fascist campaigns.⁴ However, there is also a different story of transfer and entanglement to be told as cultures and practices of resistance were not contained within the left but rather travelled

¹ 'Gegen den Faschismus! Gegen reaktionäre Schreckensherrschaft und weißen Terror! Aufruf zur Gründung einer Internationalen Antifaschistischen Liga', *Chronik des Faschismus*, 8 (7 Nov. 1923).

² 'Gegen den Faschismus!'.

³ Hans Mommsen, 'Der Reichstagsbrand und seine politischen Folgen', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 12, 4 (1964); Claus-Dieter Krohn, 'Propaganda als Widerstand? Die Braunbuch-Kampagne zum Reichstagsbrand 1933', *Exilforschung. Ein internationales Jahrbuch*, 15 (Exil und Widerstand) (1997), 10–32; Anson Rabinbach, 'Staging Antifascism. The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror', *New German Critique*, 35, 1 (2008), 97–126.

⁴ On the role of Barbusse for the international united front after 1933, see Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism: Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 37–9. On Fimmen see, Bob Reinalda, ed. *The International Transportworkers Federation 1914–1945: The Edo Fimmen era* (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1997).

across the political spectrum to the far right. Propaganda methods and knowledge of ‘the enemy’ were transferred to the other side. For example, one of the signers of the 1923 Initiative Committee, Eugène Ollausen (1887–1962), who joined the Norwegian Communist Party in 1923, made the leap later in the 1920s to the far right and collaborated with the Nazi occupiers of Norway during the Second World War.⁵

The article also aims to challenge the conception of anti-fascism as a distinct Stalinist invention, as argued by scholars such as François Furet, placing it instead in the context of classic working-class internationalism and transnational solidarity, as anti-fascism was mainly articulated as part of the counter-cultural practices of interwar communism and socialism.⁶ Contrary to claims by, for example, Rabinbach that ‘anti-fascism’ was not a widely used term in the Communist International (Comintern) before 1933, or before Stalin’s endorsement of the ‘social fascism’ thesis in 1928 that labelled social democracy as a form of fascism (and was not revoked until the Comintern’s turn to popular fronts in 1935), this article will demonstrate that the terms fascism and anti-fascism were in extensive use within the international communist movement during 1923–1924.⁷ Just as Dan Stone has explored how Nazism was understood and perceived before the Holocaust and the atrocities of the Second World War,⁸ so, too, this article will ask what constituted anti-fascism before the installation of Stalin’s ‘personal dictatorship’. It discusses, moreover, the very first endeavours to create an anti-fascist united front between communists and socialists, which are of crucial significance for the analysis of later post-1933 united front and popular front initiatives taken against the rising threat and fear of fascism and war.

In this article I will focus on the anti-fascist strategies of international communist and socialist organisations and analyse their transnational anti-fascist networks, articulations of anti-fascism and cultural representations of the fascist threat. This approach will enable the contextual study of the various strands of the fascist and proto-fascist ideologies and movements while they were in a continuous transformation process. The methodology is inspired by cultural and conceptual history and raises a series of questions. What were the first conceptualisations of the resistance against fascism on a transnational level? How were varieties of anti-fascism spread transnationally through these international organisations and networks and how should they be analysed in the context of the more general outline of interwar anti-fascism and international fascism and National Socialism? The article will highlight how from the very beginning the transnational anti-fascist movement

⁵ Knut Kjeldstadli, ‘Eugène Ollausen. Journalist Politiker’, *Norsk biografisk leksikon*, https://nbl.snl.no/Eug%C3%A8ne_Ollausen (last visited 1 June 2016).

⁶ François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 266–82.

⁷ For example in Rabinbach, ‘Staging Antifascism’, 104.

⁸ Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933–1939: Before War and Holocaust* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 [2003]), 3.

conceived of fascism as an international phenomenon based on a transnational network of fascist groups and parties.⁹

Transnational Anti-Fascism and Fascism

Just as the Italians can be given credit for forming and inspiring a completely new European movement that came to define the twentieth century, so can the socialist and especially the communist movement be given credit for forming anti-fascism into a transnational phenomenon, in which anti-fascist networks, transfers and entanglements criss-crossed the European continent.¹⁰ Activists travelled across Europe to participate in conferences, meetings and rallies where they, on the one hand, presented general methods to fight fascism, but, on the other hand, exchanged their experiences of confronting fascist movements in various national contexts. Likewise, publications discussing the nature of fascism and the forms of anti-fascist action were easily transferrable across Europe through newspapers, pamphlets and campaigns coordinated by international organisations such as the Comintern. In this way, so-called national histories of anti-fascism can be shown to be highly connected and a part of one European history. In a way, the emphasis on transnational history also opens up the possibilities to rewrite the history of European resistance to Nazi occupation that in most cases has remained a part of national narratives and histories of resistance. From the perspective of methodological nationalism, in which society and history are mainly analysed within isolated national boxes, there was no ‘European resistance’, but if one is willing to include the long transnational history of European anti-fascism, these national histories of resistance must be regarded as much more interconnected.¹¹

Although the creation of the Italian fascist movement in March 1919 inspired a theoretical debate within the international communist movement, it was only after Mussolini’s march on Rome on 28 October 1922 that the debates within the Comintern intensified. It must be remembered that just as Italian fascism was undergoing constant transformation throughout the interwar period, so, too, anti-

⁹ The only general outline of European anti-fascism is the classic work by Jacques Droz, *Histoire de l’antifascisme en Europe 1923–1939* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001 [1985]). For the 1930s, the best transnational and comparative study of anti-fascist alliances in united and popular fronts is the seminal work by Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*. For anarchist antifascism, see David Berry, ‘“Fascism or Revolution!” Anarchism and Antifascism in France, 1933–39’, *Contemporary European History*, 8, 1 (1999), 51–71.

¹⁰ For a further discussion, see Arnd Bauerkämper, ‘Transnationalism in Historiographical Practice. Historical Comparison and the Investigation of Entanglements in European History’, in Jaroslav Suchoples and Katy Turton, eds., *Forgotten by History. New Research on Twentieth Century Europe and America* (Berlin: LIT, 2009), 12–20.

¹¹ For collections of resistance in country-specific studies see Kurt Zentner, *Illustrierte Geschichte des Widerstandes in Deutschland und Europa, 1933–1945* (München: Südwest Verlag, 1966); M. R. D. Foot, *Resistance: An Analysis of European Resistance to Nazism 1940–1945* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976); Bob Moore, ed., *Resistance in Western Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000) and Gerd R. Ueberschär and Peter Steinkamp, eds., *Handbuch zum Widerstand gegen Nationalsozialismus und Faschismus in Europa 1933/39 bis 1945* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

fascism was continually being redefined. Anti-fascism was by necessity articulated differently during the period until 1922, when Italian fascism was only a movement with extra-parliamentary power, to how it was during the transformation period that lasted until 1929. It was articulated differently again during the fully-fledged fascist dictatorship that collapsed in 1943.¹² Likewise, anti-fascism was affected by the dynamics of international fascism. Until the early 1930s Mussolini's Italy served as the model for most fascist groups and parties around Europe, whereas the National Socialists (the Nazis) took over as the leading inspiration of fascist parties and movements in the world during the 1930s. As Arnd Bauerkämper and others have shown, fascism had from the very outset a transnational dimension as likeminded foreigners travelled to Rome, and later to Berlin, to gain first-hand experience of fascism in power. These individuals selectively transferred significant elements of fascist political culture to their native fascist movements. Fascist leaders also participated in cross-border contacts and networks with fascists of other countries. However, in stark contrast to the transnationalism of anti-fascism, fascist transnational contacts were in most cases not openly showcased, as fascist internationalism was in a sense a clear contradiction to the ultra-nationalism endorsed by the movement.¹³ However, the categorisation of fascist contacts across borders cannot easily be distinguished as either transnational (meaning mostly 'non-governmental' movements and networks) or international (governmental agencies, foreign policy, cultural diplomacy and international relations) as fascism was both a movement and a regime. Communist anti-fascism was, on the contrary, empowered by the promotion of cross-border co-operation and the international unity of anti-fascist forces. Significantly, the dynamics of the transnational connections were also crucially different. There was no fascist equivalent of the Comintern (during the 1920s), and although Italian cultural diplomacy naturally played its important part in presenting Italian fascism to the world, this was not the same as actively forming fascist movements in other countries.¹⁴ Anti-fascism was on the contrary rigorously centralised and actively made transnational through communist internationalism, through the political and trade union internationals and through special anti-fascist committees and organisations, such as the Antifascist World League, the International Anti-Fascist Committee, the World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, the World Committee against War and Fascism, the International Workers' Relief and the International Red Aid. These were centrally co-ordinated with the goal of establishing national

¹² Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Wolfgang Schieder, *Der italienische Faschismus* (München: C.H. Beck, 2010).

¹³ Arnd Bauerkämper, *Der Faschismus in Europa 1918–1945* (Stuttgart: Philipp Recalm jun., 2006), 39–66; Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Interwar Fascism in Europe and Beyond: Toward a Transnational Radical Right', in Martin Durham and Margaret Power, eds., *New Perspectives on the Transnational Right* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 39–66. See also Wolfgang Wippermann, *Europäischer Faschismus in Vergleich (1922–1982)* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983); Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919–1945* (London: Routledge, 2003); and António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis, eds., *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹⁴ On the early relation between Mussolini and the right wing groups in Bavaria see Alan Cassels, 'Mussolini and German Nationalism, 1922–25', *Journal of Modern History*, 35, 2 (1963), 137–57.

and local anti-fascist committees and organisations in Europe and all around the world. However, although the centre of the Comintern was Moscow, it was in fact Berlin that constituted the main stage of the transnational organisation of anti-fascism before 1933.

Previous research on the origins of socialist and communist anti-fascism during the early 1920s has predominantly focused on communist theories on the nature of fascism (*Faschismustheorien*) and on how the term ‘anti-fascism’ was used uncritically and so broadly, especially by the communists, that at certain times all non-communists were labelled ‘fascists’.¹⁵ However, the research presented here follows Nigel Copsey’s conception of an ‘anti-fascist minimum’, by which he means that anti-fascism should not only include opposition and resistance against ‘generic’ fascism or ‘true’ fascism. When analysing the various cultures of anti-fascism the definition of fascism and anti-fascism must rest solely with the anti-fascists. This new history of anti-fascism thus includes historic forms and varieties of anti-fascism that otherwise would be lost where the concept and term anti-fascism has been used against ideologies and movements that were falsely defined as fascist. These anti-fascist articulations have certainly been unattractive for the study of theories on generic fascism, but certainly vital for the study of the different strands of the culture of anti-fascism.¹⁶

Although there is a rich literature on anti-fascism during the 1930s, very little has been written on how communists and socialists responded to fascism in practice in the form of anti-fascist campaigns and movements during the early 1920s.¹⁷ During the 1920s it was the communist movement that was mainly responsible for creating the anti-fascist movement. As Helga Grebing has noted, in contrast to the communist movement, (German) social democracy never developed its own theory on fascism and, it might be added, never formed a separate international organisation to fight it during the first half of the 1920s.¹⁸ It seems that the only comparable socialist initiative to the anti-fascist organisations created before the 1930s was the International Commission for the Defence against Fascism (*Internationale Kommission zur Abwehr des Faschismus*) that was founded in 1926 and was led by the Austrian social democrat

¹⁵ See, for example, Leonid Luks, *Entstehung der kommunistischen Faschismustheorie: Die Auseinandersetzung der Komintern mit Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus 1921–1935* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1985); Thomas Doerry, *Marxismus und Antifaschismus: Zur theoretischen und politischen Auseinandersetzung des Marxismus, des Sozialismus und der internationalen Arbeiterbewegung mit dem Faschismus an der Macht (1920 bis 1984)* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1985); Stanley G. Payne, ‘Soviet Anti-Fascism. Theory and Practice, 1921–45’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 4, 2 (2003), 1–62.

¹⁶ Nigel Copsey, ‘Preface. Towards a New Anti-Fascist “Minimum”’, in Nigel Copsey and Andrej Olechnowicz, eds., *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), xiv.

¹⁷ A significant exception is the work by Larry Ceplair, *Under the Shadow of War: Fascism, Anti-Fascism, and Marxists, 1918–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). Unfortunately, it was written well before the opening of the archives in Moscow and Berlin and is therefore outdated.

¹⁸ Helga Grebing, ‘Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung und Nationalsozialismus 1924–1933’, in Helga Grebing and Klaus Kinner, eds., *Arbeiterbewegung und Faschismus: Faschismus-Interpretationen in der europäischen Arbeiterbewegung* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1990).

Julius Deutsch.¹⁹ In the Austrian socialist movement Deutsch had taken a very public role in the public campaign against the threat of fascism already from 1923.²⁰ However, due to the fact that anti-fascist campaigns were dominated by the communists during the early 1920s, the article will also be more focused on the history of international communism and its efforts to form a transnational anti-fascist movement. This will not reproduce a 'heroic' history of communist anti-fascist activism but present a critical historical analysis of how anti-fascism was used by the communists in their political campaigns.

The Transnational Organisation of Anti-Fascism

As soon as Mussolini came to power in October 1922 the need to organise a transnational response to fascism became evident for the Comintern's leadership. One of the central issues to be dealt with first was, however, the question of whether fascism was a purely Italian phenomenon or if it was part of an international movement – an international fascism – that took different shapes and forms in various parts of Europe. The Comintern's Fourth World Congress, which gathered in Petrograd and Moscow between 5 November and 5 December 1922, had already declared that fascism was an international movement which also threatened countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, almost all the Balkan states, Poland, Germany (Bavaria), Austria, the United States and Norway. Fascism – in one form or another – might conceivably also establish itself in France and Britain. As a consequence, the 1922 Comintern Congress and its chairman Grigory Zinoviev declared that one of the most important tasks of communist parties was to organise the resistance against international fascism through a united front of the whole working class.²¹ How did the Comintern manage to make such an international understanding of fascism intelligible to the workers of the world? What kind of methods did the Comintern use to make this struggle relevant in different national contexts where there was no clear 'fascist enemy' to struggle against?

Documents from the Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii*; RGASPI) show that after the 1922 Comintern Congress the question of how to combat fascism was delegated to a new Moscow based 'Action Committee' jointly formed by the Comintern and the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU; commonly known as the Profintern) in early January 1923. The international mission of the Action Committee was to head the worldwide struggle against the 'offensive of capital' and to systematically lead

¹⁹ See, Julius Deutsch, ed. *Der Faschismus in Europa: Eine Übersicht, herausgegeben von Julius Deutsch im Auftrage der Internationalen Kommission zur Abwehr des Faschismus* (Wien: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1929).

²⁰ Julius Deutsch, *Die Fascistengefahr* (Wien: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung); and Julius Deutsch, *Antifaschismus! Proletarische Wehrhaftigkeit im Kampfe gegen den Faschismus* (Wien: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1926)

²¹ G. Sinowjew, *Die Kommunistische Internationale auf dem Vormarsch* (Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1923).

the fight against fascism in all countries. As a first measure, the Action Committee decided on 9 January 1923 to write an appeal against fascism that for the first time defined concrete measures about how to fight fascism in various countries. It was also decided that international fundraising for the fight against fascism be collected in the International Funds for the Fight against Fascism (*Internationale Kampffonds gegen den Faschismus*). The funds were to be sent to a new bureau established for this purpose in Berlin and workers' organisations of all character were to take part in the fundraising. Special invitations were also to be sent at least to the socialist International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) based in Amsterdam and to the social democratic 'Second International' in London.²² From the very beginning the idea was to form an international united front, very similar to the failed efforts made after 1933.²³ In France the PCF's newspaper *L'Humanité* started reporting in late January 1923 on the fascist danger and on fascism in Bavaria, and for example Albert Trent of the PCF's general secretariat published an editorial on 'European Fascism'. Results of the Action Committee's discussions were published on 5 February in *L'Humanité* in a first appeal 'For a United Front Against Fascism' ('*Pour le front unique contre le fascisme*').²⁴

Finally, on 22 February 1923, instructions for the Berlin-based anti-fascist committee were sent from the Action Committee in Moscow to Berlin.²⁵ These instructions signalled the beginning of a new transnational movement against fascism that can now for the first time be scrutinised as the archive documents have hitherto remained largely unused within the research on anti-fascism. The instructions were sent on the behalf of the executive of the Comintern, the Profintern and the Communist Youth International (*Kommunisticheskii Internatsional Molodezh*; KIM). The Berlin-based international anti-fascist committee, later in March 1923 dubbed the Action Committee against War Danger and Fascism, was to be led at first by a provisional all-communist leadership and then to be expanded with representatives from other international organisations of the left, including social democrats and socialists of various splinter groups. It was the duty of the international anti-fascist committee to lead the international propaganda against fascism and to immediately make contact with all communist parties, left-wing trade unions and communist youth organisations around the world and to instruct them to establish national organisations against fascism and to start fundraising for the strike funds (*Kampffonds*). Moreover, it was stated that the national committees were to reach out to all worker organisations, including trade unions, proletarian parties, cooperatives, sport organisations and individual workers to secure the broadest possible audience for its

²² Protokoll Nr. . . . der Sitzung des Aktionskomitees, 9 Jan. 1923, RGASPI 534/3/50, 3; Enderle to die Zentrale des Deutschen Schifffahrtsbundes in Hamburg; Moskau, 8 Jan. 1923, RGASPI 534/6/44, 7–9.

²³ Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism*.

²⁴ Gilles Vergnon, *L'antifascisme en France de Mussolini à Le Pen* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 23–4.

²⁵ Protokoll Nr. 7 der Sitzung des Aktionskomitees, 22 Feb. 1923, RGASPI 534/3/50, 15; Aktionskomitee der Profintern und Komintern to the CC of the KPD; Moskau, 23 Feb. 1923, RGASPI 534/6/44, 71.

propaganda against fascism. According to the instructions from Moscow, the anti-fascist committee in Berlin was to be 'completely independent' from the Comintern and the Profintern. However, the representatives of the Comintern, the Profintern and KIM were under the authority of their respective executives and were obliged to regularly report to Moscow and to receive their blessing before the launch of new campaigns.²⁶ The anti-fascist initiative was thus very similar in its structure to the Comintern's other early 'supra-party' so called 'sympathising organisations', such as the International Workers' Relief (*Internationale Arbeiterhilfe*; IAH) or the International Red Aid (*Mezhdunarodnoye Obshtchestvo Pomoshchi Revolyuzioneram*; MOPR), which strived to unite a broad base of workers in transnational solidarity movements.²⁷

Further directives from Moscow instructed the Berlin-based committee to organise large-scale propaganda, firstly against Italian fascism and secondly against fascism in other countries. The Berlin committee was to publish a regular international *Bulletin* and later launch an illustrated newspaper, as well as produce leaflets about and against Italian fascism. Moreover, the Berlin committee was responsible for organising regular and comprehensive press campaigns and to provide all newspapers of the Communist Party (CP) with articles, images and adverts. Its reports were intended for an international public dealing with the aims, fighting methods and scandalous or disgraceful deeds of the fascist movements in all countries and especially Italy.²⁸ In fact, the Comintern and the Profintern highlighted in this context the 'immaculate propagandistic work' achieved by Willi Münzenberg's Berlin-based IAH for Soviet Russia, that since autumn 1921 had published a successful illustrated journal, the *Sowjet-Russland im Bild*, in 1922 renamed the *Sichel und Hammer*, and later in 1924 renamed the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (AIZ)*, and had organised several high-profile solidarity campaigns that had been supported by a broad group of socialists, communists, artists and intellectuals. The work of Münzenberg was indeed defined as the ultimate standard that the new anti-fascist committee in Berlin was hopefully going to be able to achieve.²⁹

The public launch of the transnational anti-fascist movement in Europe was set for an international workers' conference organised in Frankfurt am Main between 17 and 20 March 1923. It was held in the midst of the Ruhr crisis, when French and Belgian troops occupied the region in response to Germany's failure to pay its war reparations according to the Versailles peace treaty of 1919. German passive resistance in the Ruhr area then brought local industry to a standstill. In Frankfurt the key conference

²⁶ Der Kampf gegen den Faschismus. Instruktion für das in Berlin zu errichtende Zentralkomitee, RGASPI 534/3/50, 47–9.

²⁷ For a broad overview see, Hartmann Wunderer, *Arbeitervereine und Arbeiterparteien: Kultur- und Massenorganisationen in der Arbeiterbewegung (1890–1933)* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1980). On the IAH and the MOPR see, Helmut Gruber, 'Willi Münzenberg's German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921–1933', *Journal of Modern History*, 38, 3 (1966).

²⁸ Der Kampf gegen den Faschismus, RGASPI 534/3/50, 49.

²⁹ EK der KI und RGI to Zetkin, Waletzki, Reinhard and Schulz; Moskau, 26 Feb. 1923, RGASPI 534/6/44, 76–7. See further on Münzenberg and his transnational solidarity campaigns in Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

speeches were given by the prominent German communist Clara Zetkin, who had been active in the socialist movement since the 1870s, and the general secretary of the Profintern, Solomon Lozovsky (1878–1959). Zetkin emphasised, contrary to earlier general descriptions of international fascism made by the chairman of the Comintern, Grigory Zinoviev, that one needed to be more careful when labelling adversaries as ‘fascists’. She clearly stated that fascist movements, including the Italian one, could only be based in modern industrial states where mass movements could be constructed of the petty bourgeoisie, small peasants and workers. Despite outward similarities Admiral Horthy’s ‘white terror’ in Hungary did not make Hungary a fascist country, but one under the authoritarian rule of junkers and militarists. She warned, however, that Italian fascism was already ‘spinning its threads’ from Italy to Germany, especially Bavaria, where Hitler’s paramilitaries were transforming it into a fascist state.³⁰ Indeed, the man called “Germany’s Mussolini” in nationalist circles was already on the path to national notoriety. During late 1922 and early 1923 the Nazi Party had become a political force to be reckoned with and already in November 1922 rumours had started circulating that Hitler was planning a putsch to overthrow German parliamentary democracy.³¹

Zetkin also declared in her speech in Frankfurt that the workers had to learn their lesson from the Italian catastrophe and actively resist the victory of fascism elsewhere. If necessary, she argued, violence had to be met with violence, and workers therefore needed to be organised into armed self-defence units, so-called ‘proletarian hundreds’ (*Hundertschaften*). Zetkin also made the first public appeal for the formation of an international ‘action-committee against fascism’, which after the conference was formed into the Action Committee against War Danger and Fascism. Here the aim of anti-fascism was firstly directed against Italian fascism and the Italian state and supported the idea to organise a boycott of imports from Britain and the United States to Italy. However, according to Zetkin, the most effective way of fighting Italian fascism internationally was for workers to concentrate on fighting fascism in their own countries.³² In a way this made perfect sense, as the battle in Italy had already been lost to fascism. This was also the impression conveyed when a representative of KIM, Alfred Kurella, reported to Moscow in September 1922 about his recent meetings with local workers’ organisations in Rome, Florence, Venice, Trieste and Turin. In a depressing report, he noted that in most cases fascist bands ruled the cities and provinces. Kurella’s conclusion was that the state of the Italian workers’ movement was in fact much worse than generally assumed: ‘one can speak of a totally extraordinary defeat’. Fascism was victorious everywhere.³³

³⁰ Speech by Zetkin in Frankfurt a.M., 23 Mar. 1923. Reproduced in Theo Pirker, ed., *Komintern und Faschismus: Dokumente zur Geschichte und Theorie des Faschismus* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1965), 115–8.

³¹ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 131.

³² Speech by Zetkin in Frankfurt a.M., 23 Mar. 1923, Pirker, *Komintern und Faschismus*, 118.

³³ Report from Alfred Kurella to the EC of the Communist Youth International, 17 Sept. 1922, SAPMO–BArch, RY 7/I 6/5/2, 1–6.

According to Zetkin an international information campaign was needed to highlight the ‘absolutely worker-hostile’ character of the Italian fascist regime and its efforts to systematically destroy all worker organisations and institutions. She also urged that international mass meetings and demonstrations against fascism and against the representatives of the fascist Italian government be organised. The struggle also needed to be pursued through national parliaments, which were to be encouraged to send commissions to Italy to inspect the condition of the working class. Zetkin argued that it was the left’s duty to hammer into the consciousness of every worker that the destiny of the Italian working class would become their own destiny if they did not engage themselves in an energetic, revolutionary struggle against fascism. They could not wait until fascism had grown into a powerful movement but had to crush every emerging fascist organisation in the world while it still was possible.³⁴ In a similar vein, the Profintern’s assistant general secretary, the Spanish communist Andrés Nin (1892–1937), warned in a pamphlet directed to American workers that the only way to defeat international fascism was through the formation of the united front and the organisation of ‘proletarian hundreds’.³⁵ Likewise, the British Communist Party reported closely in its weekly on the events in the Ruhr area about the growing danger of war and the need to prepare against the ‘peril of Fascism’. Echoing the anti-fascist call made at the Frankfurt conference, the British readers were warned that ‘the aim of the Fascisti is to crush all workers’ organisations and to make the wage-earner the unwilling tool of the capitalist’.³⁶

After the Frankfurt conference the ‘International Action Committee against War Danger and Fascism’ was established. It was headed by two chairpersons – Zetkin in Berlin and Henri Barbusse in Paris – although it seems that its activities were mainly coordinated from Berlin.³⁷ Later that month, the Comintern delegated Zetkin to give an official report on ‘the struggle against fascism’ during the Comintern Executive’s enlarged plenum held in Moscow from 7 to 11 June 1923. Controversially, this was the same plenum where the high-ranking Comintern official Karl Radek gave his ‘Schlageter Speech’, which invited the National Socialists to form a united front with the communists. Although it was meant to divide the Nazi ranks, Radek did more harm than good as the image of communism as the vanguard of anti-fascism was thereafter easy prey for its critics.³⁸

Meanwhile, one of the first concrete missions of the international anti-fascist committee was to approach the presidium of the international socialist congress that was taking place in Hamburg, which reunited the London-based Second

³⁴ Clara Zetkin, Resolutionsentwurf über den Faschismus [1923], RGASPI 495/161/53, 1–5, here 4–5.

³⁵ Andreas Nin, *Struggle of the Trade Unions against Fascism* (Chicago: The Trade Union Education League, 1923), 36–7.

³⁶ ‘Frankfurt Call’, *The Workers’ Weekly*, 9 (7 Apr. 1923).

³⁷ Internationale Aktionskomitee gegen Kriegsgefahr und Faschismus to the KPD’s Polbüro; Berlin, 13 Apr. 1923, SAPMO–BArch, RY 1/I 2/3/226, 1.

³⁸ Sekretariat des EKKI to the Zentrale der KPD; [Moscow], 21 Apr. 1923, SAPMO–BArch, RY 5/I 6/3/93, 41. See further in Pirker, *Komintern und Faschismus*, Wolf-Dietrich Gutjahr, *Revolution muss sein. Karl Radek – die Biographie* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2012), 570–81.

International with the so called Vienna International (also called the ‘Two-and-a-Half International’) into the Labour and Socialist International (LSI). The congress was officially approached in the name of the action committee’s member organisations, including the Comintern, the Profintern, the communist parties of Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Czechoslovakia and Poland, as well as local groups of the independent socialist and social democratic parties of Germany, and revolutionary trade unions of Russia, France, Germany and Czechoslovakia.³⁹ In an open letter to the congress the Berlin-based Action Committee against War Danger and Fascism spelt out the necessity to take common action against fascism and requested that it be allowed to attend one of the plenary sessions and to present their programme.⁴⁰ However, Friedrich ‘Fritz’ Adler (1879–1960), the secretary of the LSI, argued that this was impossible owing to there being insufficient space in the congress programme and because the major political differences between the two internationals left no hope for successful negotiations. The socialists based their movement on democratic principles and, according to Adler, until the communists abandoned their belief in the dictatorial rule of a minority, a united front between the LSI and the Comintern was an impossibility. Not even the danger of fascism or war served as a legitimate ground for co-operation.⁴¹

Similar efforts to initiate united front negotiations with the IFTU were somewhat more successful, as Edo Fimmen, who at the time was the Secretary of the IFTU and the International Transport Worker Federation (ITF), had agreed to negotiate with the communists. Fimmen had in May 1923 agreed on behalf of the ITF – but without permission from the IFTU – to take part in united front negotiations in Berlin together with representatives of Profintern in order to establish a joint bureau in Berlin to support workers who were persecuted by the Italian fascists. When Fimmen’s actions surfaced they produced a huge international scandal and demands within the IFTU’s bureau that Fimmen immediately resign from his post as Secretary. The planned common fight against fascism was as a consequence halted before it could even begin.⁴² These two examples show that a collaboration between socialists and communists on an international level (a united front ‘from above’) was simply out of the question. The non-cooperation offered, however, the communists the opportunity to depict themselves as anti-fascist vanguards, leading the fight against ‘war, fascism and hunger’. As shown in the official newspaper of the British Communist Party, *Workers’ Weekly*, the communists were the ones committed to actively combatting fascism, while the LSI was passively waiting in the background.⁴³ Anti-fascism meant action and the communists were striving hard to make this their hallmark in the transnational anti-fascist movement.

³⁹ RGASPI 480/3/7, 21.

⁴⁰ RGASPI 480/3/7, 21–2.

⁴¹ ‘Die Hamburger Konferenz will kein proletarische Einheitsfront’, *Inprekorr*, 24 May 1923, IISH, LSI Archives, 20b, 29.

⁴² Münzenberg to Radek, 9 June 1923, RGASPI 495/18/181, 97–99.

⁴³ ‘Are you on the Fence?’, *Workers’ Weekly*, 36 (12 Oct. 1923).



Figure 1. (Colour online)

'Are You on the Fence?', Depicting how the communist international is leading the fight against war, hunger and fascism. *Workers' Weekly*, 36, 12. Oct. 1923 (Working Class Movement Library, Salford).

It seems, however, that after the Frankfurt conference the activities of the Berlin-based 'Action Committee against War Danger and Fascism' were rather uncoordinated. Mümpel reported in May 1923 that the Frankfurt conference had turned out to be a total failure for the united front efforts. Only communist organisations and representatives had been willing to sign up to the initiative to fight fascism. Moreover, and quite contrary to the visual representation of communist activism, most communist parties had been utterly unengaged in the matter and had not responded in any way to the many circulars and calls to fight fascism that the action committees in Berlin and Moscow had posted. This also reveals the general problem of making anti-fascism into a transnational movement, as the relevance of fighting fascism was perhaps not clear to workers in countries where, during the first half of the 1920s, there were no groups or parties calling themselves fascist. This explained why, according to Mümpel, the planned international 'agitation week' against fascism had turned out to be a total fiasco and no so-called 'border meetings' where workers from different countries could demonstrate their unity in the struggle against fascism could be organised. Although the practical manifestations

of transnational anti-fascism were unsuccessful, the plans show how the showcasing of transnational cooperation formed an elementary part of the anti-fascist movement from the very beginning. Major events were not framed in national contexts but planned internationally and border meetings were supposed to show the power of anti-fascist solidarity. Lastly, Münzenberg reported that the level of success had been even more disastrous when assessing the fundraising efforts achieved during the first months of the campaign. Minimal sums had been collected for the *Kampffonds* in Germany and Czechoslovakia.⁴⁴

To animate the campaign Münzenberg had been appointed secretary of the Action Committee against War Danger and Fascism in May 1923 and he travelled to Moscow in July to plan together with Karl Radek the future 'character, magnitude and structure' of the committee in Berlin.⁴⁵ When Münzenberg returned to Berlin in early August 1923 the anti-fascist committee started immediately collecting all ethno-nationalist (*deutsch-völkisch*), nationalist and fascist newspapers that were published in Germany. This represented a significant turn for the anti-fascist movement, as its first concern was no longer Italian fascism but rather the radical Bavarian right. The first goal of the committee was to get hold of all German 'fascist' newspapers and to collect all printed material accessible, including brochures, programmes, party leaflets and literature. It was Münzenberg's contention that within three weeks the committee was going to have a complete collection of the fascist and anti-fascist published material available. According to the plan, the committee would first collect all material concerning Germany, before arranging similar collections in Prague and Vienna.⁴⁶ As another example of continuity in the anti-fascist movement, these ideas were clearly repeated after 1933 in the form of the 'International Antifascist Archive' established in Paris by Willi Münzenberg's Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism.⁴⁷

The move to analysing and fighting German fascism coincided with the dramatically worsening social, economic and political crisis in the Weimar Republic. The escalating situation led the German Communist Party (KPD) together with the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) RCP(B) and the Comintern to start planning a German 'October' revolution that later would turn into a total defeat of the KPD in Saxony, Thuringia, Hamburg and then Germany overall. Before the 'stillborn' revolution came to its conclusion in late October 1923, the communists envisaged

⁴⁴ Münzenberg to Aktionsausschluss der Komintern und Profintern & Exekutive der Komintern; Berlin, 14 May 1923, RGASPI 534/3/50, 63; Münzenberg to the Executives of the Profintern, the Comintern and the Aktionsausschluss der Kom. und Profintern; Berlin, 14 May 1923, RGASPI 534/3/50, 64; Münzenberg to Kuusinen, 13 Aug. 1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 109.

⁴⁵ Münzenberg to Piatnitsky, 26 Jul. 1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 102–102ob.

⁴⁶ Münzenberg to Präsidium der Komintern, 2 Aug. 1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 103–5.

⁴⁷ See further in Ursula Langkau-Alex, *Deutsche Volksfront 1932–1939: Zwischen Berlin, Paris, Prag und Moskau, I: Vorgeschichte und Gründung des Ausschusses zur Vorbereitung einer deutschen Volksfront* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 110–3.

that anti-fascism could function as a central rallying call in their efforts to win over the masses for the revolutionary cause.⁴⁸

Münzenberg reported to the Comintern in late October 1923, after the defeat of the KPD, that the anti-fascist committee in Berlin had taken on the American example to organise anti-fascist organisations consisting of communists, intellectuals, social democrats and bourgeois radical groups. Such organisations had also been formed in France and Sweden. In the United States radical Italian exiles and immigrants had already in April 1923 formed the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America (AFANA).⁴⁹ According to Münzenberg, a number of intellectuals, including Henri Barbusse, Anatole France and Edo Fimmen had expressed their willingness to support the anti-fascist cause, as well as the formation of an international league.⁵⁰ The Initiative Committee's appeal for the establishment of an International Antifascist League, part of which is reproduced at the beginning of this article, signalled the global ambition of the International Antifascist League and the first effort to unite communists, socialists, intellectuals, artists and other sympathisers for the anti-fascist struggle. It was also the first time an international organisation used the term 'anti-fascist' in its name. This was also the beginning of the transformation of the anti-fascist committee into the International Antifascist League, later renamed the Antifascist World League in December 1923.

In early December 1923 Münzenberg reported that the anti-fascist committee in Berlin had started cooperating with youth and intellectual circles in order to establish 'local groups' of the Antifascist World League. Münzenberg anticipated in the following days the arrival of comrades from several countries to discuss the establishment of anti-fascist committees in their native countries. Fimmen had visited London among other places to help organise the creation of the British section of the Antifascist World League.⁵¹ This example shows how communists and left socialists were actively trying to make anti-fascism into a transnational movement, but it also raises the question of the origins of anti-fascism in various national contexts.

Copsey has argued that the origins of anti-fascism in Britain can be traced to the inaugural meeting of the British Fascisti (BF) on 7 October 1923 when communists disrupted the fascist gathering. Although British fascism was a minor threat at the time, the communists were in fact responding in line with Zetkin's initial instructions on how best to fight Italian fascism, namely through the active struggle against domestic fascism. The communists' actions show that they had already been educated on the dangers of fascism as an international phenomenon, and thus they also were able to make the fight against the BF intelligible, worth the risk and effort of

⁴⁸ See, further, papers in Bernhard H. Bayerlein, Leonid G. Babichenko, Fridrich I. Firsov and Alexander Ju. Vatlin, eds., *Deutscher Oktober 1923: Ein Revolutionsplan und sein Scheitern* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2003); Werner T. Angress, *Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921–1923* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁴⁹ John P. Diggins, 'The Italo-American Anti-Fascist Opposition', *Journal of American History*, 54, 3 (1967), 579–81.

⁵⁰ Münzenberg to Exekutive der Komintern, 28 Oct. 1923, RGASPI 495/18/181, 152ob.

⁵¹ Münzenberg to 'WG' [Comintern]; Berlin, 4 Dec. 1923, RGASPI 495/18/181, 163ob.

physical resistance. Moreover, the BF's use of the term 'Fascisti' in its name made the link to the Italian regime rather obvious. The first organisational manifestation of British anti-fascism was called the 'People's Defence Force', inaugurated in January 1924, which also followed the Moscow-based initial call for proletarian self-defence organisations in all countries.⁵² It must, however, be remembered that the communist parties of the world were in most cases small minority movements with a limited influence on the national political scene. Although deemed irrelevant as political forces in national contexts, the communist parties and the supra-party international organisations were nevertheless extremely well connected through the transnational world of the Comintern, providing them with a distinct transnational influence.⁵³

The Antifascist World League continued its activities in Berlin until late summer 1924, but the Comintern's interest in the danger of fascism was by this point clearly diminishing. Münzenberg made on 23 July 1924 an offer to the Comintern that he would personally manage the Antifascist World League. The committee would hereafter not, however, have a high public profile, but would instead work as a sort of information bank for the international fascist movement. This information would then be delivered to the Comintern and could be used for anti-fascist propaganda. Contrary to Münzenberg's wishes the agitprop department of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) decided in the end to dissolve the Antifascist World League on 9 September 1924, which brought to an end the first phase of the transnational anti-fascist movement.⁵⁴ Paradoxically, shortly after the murder of the Italian socialist Giacomo Matteotti on 10 June 1924 – which started the radicalisation of Italian fascism – the Comintern abandoned its anti-fascist initiative. Parallel to these events the Soviet Union and Italy signed a trade treaty in February 1924, and between 1925 and 1927 the Soviet Union was the main supplier of oil to the Italian navy. Economics and good foreign relations, rather than anti-fascist action, were prioritised by the Soviet state.⁵⁵

Inventing the Culture of Anti-Fascism

In the last section of the article I will analyse the two major, but largely overlooked, publications launched as a part of the communist anti-fascist campaign, *Chronik des Faschismus* and *Hakenkreuz*, but I will also show how Münzenberg used the already existing illustrated newspaper *Sichel und Hammer* for the anti-fascist cause. These publications form a distinct cultural history of the early anti-fascist movement and show how the Comintern's anti-fascist organisations described above strove in practice to mobilise the masses for the anti-fascist cause and to educate them on the dangers

⁵² Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Houndmills: Macmillan press, 2000), 5–7.

⁵³ Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁵⁴ Letter from Münzenberg to Bela Kun, Leiter des Agitprop bei der Komintern; Berlin, 23 Jul. 1924; Beschlussprojekt auf die Sitzung des Präsidiums; Agitprop IKKI No. 344, 9 Sep. 1924, RGASPI 495/30/62, 15.

⁵⁵ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 172, 338.

of fascism in Europe and beyond. These strategies and methods developed by the anti-fascist movement are of special significance for the analysis of the continuities of the interwar anti-fascist movement.

The first issue of the *Chronik* was published on 20 August 1923. From the first issues onwards it followed closely the German ethno-nationalist (*völkisch*) far right movement, but reported also in every issue on fascism in different countries. Already in its first issue it showed in an article on fascism in Hungary that it followed Zetkin's earlier critique that Horthy's regime was not a fascist one. This did not mean that there was no Hungarian fascist movement in the making, however. On the contrary the *Chronik* reported that it was only now that a 'Central European variant of the fascist movement' was being born in Hungary as the rightist general Julius Gömbös (1886–1936) was striving to mobilise Hungarian workers away from social democracy to fascist mass movements. Gömbös would indeed during his time as Hungarian prime minister (1932–1936) welcome the rise of the National Socialist mass movement in Germany, although he never strived for such a mass mobilisation in Hungary and depended in the end more on a traditional authoritarian rule.⁵⁶

In the eleven issues of the *Chronik* published in 1923, the journal analysed and reported on fascism in Austria, Yugoslavia, England, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Romania, Denmark, the United States, Finland, France and Spain. This effort to describe fascism and various proto-fascist movements of the far right in the world clearly emphasised the active articulation of a culture of anti-fascism that from the beginning was based on an international understanding of fascism.⁵⁷

In most cases the articles in the *Chronik* were anonymous, but its named contributors included such characters as Emil J. Gumbel (1891–1966), Leo Lania (1896–1961) and Giulio Aquila (1893–1943). These individuals and their writing also provide an opportunity to illuminate further the continuities of the anti-fascist movement and its networks of 1923. Gumbel, a professor of statistics in Heidelberg, was a pacifist and socialist who in several high profile publications of the early 1920s had documented and discussed politically motivated murders of socialists and communists in Weimar Germany. As an ardent anti-fascist intellectual, he participated during the 1930s in the efforts to form a German Popular Front as well as in other anti-fascist initiatives among German political exiles in France.⁵⁸ Lania had been member of the Austrian Communist Party but had broken with it in 1921. He was the author of two major works in 1923–1924 that warned the public of the dangers of National Socialism and reported on secret German rearmament. During the 1930s Lania would work for the German anti-fascist newspapers *Pariser Tageszeitung* and *Pariser Tageblatt*,

⁵⁶ 'Faschismus in Horthy-Ungarn', *Chronik des Faschismus* 1 (20 Aug. 1923). On Gömbös and fascism in Hungary see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Hitler's Foreign Policy 1933–1939: The Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, 2010), 89–93; Jason Wittenberg, 'External Influences on the Evolution of Hungarian Authoritarianism, 1920–44', in António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis, eds., *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 221–3.

⁵⁷ *Chronik des Faschismus*, 1–11 (1923).

⁵⁸ Arthur D. Brenner, *Emil J. Gumbel: Weimar German Pacifist and Professor* (Boston Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 1–2, 144–61.

and then emigrate to the United States, where he worked for the US Office of War Information.⁵⁹ Aquila (Giulia Sas, born as Julius Spitz) had originally been a member of the Hungarian Communist Party but also worked for the communist movement in Austria, Italy and Germany, where he concerned himself principally with the Mussolini regime. In 1923 he published with the Comintern's Hamburg based publishing house one of the first comprehensive accounts on fascism in Italy and on the fighting methods against fascism. The book echoed the Action Committee's call to organise anti-fascist movements in all countries, as this was defined as the supreme way to combat fascism.⁶⁰ In 1924 Aquila would go on write with Münzenberg the official report on the fascist movement for the Comintern's Fifth World Congress.⁶¹ Aquila was also involved together with Münzenberg, Henri Barbusse and the Comintern in organising the first international anti-fascist conference in Berlin in March 1929 and the activities of the new International Antifascist Committee founded the same year.⁶²

The Action Committee against War Danger and Fascism in Berlin, which later in November 1923 was renamed the Antifascist World League, was starting to produce a significant number of reports and publications on the German *völkisch* and fascist movements. In late August 1923 Münzenberg sent a report to Moscow on the *völkisch* movement in Bavaria and a report on the rising number of meetings and propaganda activities of the *völkisch* movement since the appointment of Gustav Stresemann as German chancellor. In fact, Münzenberg claimed that he was so well informed that after ten days he could travel to Moscow to give a detailed presentation on the organisation and structure of the German *völkisch*-movement.⁶³ They followed sixty '*völkisch*-fascist' newspapers, could describe in detail the various groups and organisations and had in depth information regarding organisational structure, strength and programme of several groups.⁶⁴ In fact, the committee was making partially successful attempts to infiltrate the most important fascist centres through the establishment of informants (*Vertrauensleute*), who were sending the most important information to the committee in Berlin.⁶⁵ In light of these efforts Münzenberg assessed that the anti-fascist committee in Berlin was one of a kind and the only institution that had such a comprehensive archive on the fascist movement.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Hardt, Hanno, 'Lania, Leo', *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 13 (1982), 615.

⁶⁰ Giulio Aquila, *Der Faschismus in Italien* (Hamburg: Verlag Carl Hoym Nachf. Louis Cahnbley, 1923). On Aquila, see Hermann Weber and Andreas Herbst, *Deutsche Kommunisten: Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2008), 71.

⁶¹ M. Willi [Willi Münzenberg] and Giulio Aquila, *Bericht über die faschistische Bewegung, Frühjahr 1924: Unterbreitet dem Fünften Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale* (Berlin: Neuen Deutschen Verlag, 1924).

⁶² *Faschismus: Bericht vom Internationalen Antifaschisten-Kongress, Berlin 9. bis 10. März 1929* (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1930).

⁶³ Münzenberg to 'Werte Genossen', 23 Aug. 1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 111.

⁶⁴ Münzenberg to 'Lieber Genosse', 7 Sep. 1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 119.

⁶⁵ Münzenberg to Lozowsky, Berlin, 28 Aug. 1923, 'Beilage: Die gegenwärtigen Stand unserer Arbeit', Berlin, 27 Aug. 1923, RGASPI 534/3/53, 27.

⁶⁶ Münzenberg to 'WG' [Comintern]; Berlin, 4 Dec. 1923, RGASPI 495/18/181, 163. Sadly, this unique archive has not been located.

The first issues of *Chronik des Faschismus* had had a print run of under 1,000 copies. The print runs of the satirical *Hakenkreuz* were on the other hand much more impressive. Two hundred thousand copies of the second issue of the paper were printed, according to a report from Münzenberg to the Comintern.⁶⁷ *Chronik des Faschismus* had, according to Münzenberg's report to Moscow, experienced rising demand. The first six issues had by then been distributed to approximately 3,000–4,000 subscribers. According to Münzenberg the majority of the editions had been distributed to non-communist circles; especially in Germany the newspaper had found its main group of subscribers among left-wing socialists and the radical bourgeoisie.⁶⁸ The print runs of *Sichel und Hammer* also increased steadily in 1923. Münzenberg reported to the Comintern that in January 1923 the pictorial sold 150,000 copies, whereas already in February the print run had increased to 250,000. In comparison to other communist publications these numbers were indeed impressive. For example, the KPD's daily newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*, had a print run of 30,000, and the Comintern's journal, *The Communist International*, 10,000. By the end of 1925 *Sichel und Hammer/Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (AIZ)* had sold a total of 3,575,000 copies. During the late 1920s the *AIZ*'s print runs would continue to steadily increase to over 500,000 copies.⁶⁹

The first issue of the *Hakenkreuz* was published as a four-page section of Münzenberg's illustrated newspaper *Sichel und Hammer*. The cover of the *Hakenkreuz* featured a drawing by John Heartfield, who during the 1920s and 1930s would become most famous for his groundbreaking political photomontages mainly published in Münzenberg's *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* and the KPD's publishing house Malik.⁷⁰ In the cover art democracy and Soviet communism were explicitly opposed. Whereas democracy in the West was about to plummet into darkness and fascism, communism in the East was on the rise and standing steadily like a rock against the forces of the counter-revolution. The obvious implication was that only communism could successfully resist and combat fascism, whereas unprotected, weak democracies were defenceless against the menacing army of the fascist forces.⁷¹

In the same issue of the *Hakenkreuz* satirical drawings were used to convince readers that the only salvation from the danger of fascism was the united struggle of the workers in co-operation with Soviet Russia.⁷² The Social Democratic Party was also an often recurring object of satirical drawings, in which the contrast between the social democratic leadership and the social democratic workers was emphasised. For example, when the SPD's Carl Severing was associated with the prohibition of the

⁶⁷ Münzenberg to 'Lieber Genosse', 7 Sep. 1923, RGASPI 538/2/19, 119. Münzenberg claimed that the edition had been 250,000 copies in a report sent to Lozowsky, 28.8.1923, RGASPI 534/3/53, 28.

⁶⁸ Münzenberg to Exekutive der Komintern, 28 Oct. 1923, RGASPI 495/18/181, 152–152ob.

⁶⁹ For print runs, see further in Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity*, 73, 122–3.

⁷⁰ See further in Cristina Cuevas-Wolf, 'Montage as Weapon. The Tactical Alliance between Willi Münzenberg and John Heartfield', *New German Critique*, 36, 2 (2009) and Anthony Coles, *John Heartfield: Ein politisches Leben* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014).

⁷¹ John Heartfield, 'Absturz im Westen / Aufstieg im Osten', *Hakenkreuz*, 1 (Sept. 1923).

⁷² 'Dichtung und Wahrheit', *Hakenkreuz* 1 (Sept. 1923).



Figure 2. (Colour online)

John Heartfield: Weak democracies falling to fascism: Soviet Russia standing like a rock against the waves of the counter revolution. "Absturz im Westen / Aufstieg im Osten", Hakenkreuz, 1 (Sept. 1923) © Kuvasto 2016.



Figure 3. (Colour online)

Social democracy and fascism: Anti-fascism stands for the united front from below, *Hakenkreuz* (Nov. 1923). (Library of the Federal Archives, Berlin-Lichterfelde).

(communist) proletarian defence forces in Prussia, social democracy was represented as a force standing on the side of the reaction. In contrast, the social democratic workers of Saxony were depicted as dedicated participants in the proletarian defence forces against fascism together with the communists. It was an effective illustration of the united front from below, in which workers united despite the inability of the internationals or political parties to cooperate.⁷³

Further illustrations depicted the devastating consequences of a fascist rise to power in Germany. It was predicted that the German ‘*völkisch* national dictatorship of the bourgeoisie’ would have devastating effects on the German working people. Like the *Chronik*, the *Hakenkreuz* also printed the symbols of the fascist movement and illustrations of the movements’ main characters, including Mussolini and Hitler, in order to educate the workers and to help them recognise the symbols and faces of the enemy.⁷⁴ Thus, the anti-fascist movement engaged in the cultural battle, applying its anti-fascist reading of fascist symbols, including the *Totenkopf* used in the Italian Fascist movement and the National Socialist Swastika. These icons, utilised by the fascists to symbolise national unity and strength were constructed into menacing symbols of war and oppression to be combatted. As such they were made into an

⁷³ Sozialdemokratie und Faschismus’, *Hakenkreuz* (Nov. 1923).

⁷⁴ *Hakenkreuz*, 1–3 (1923).

elementary part of the culture of anti-fascism which over the twentieth century were turned from alternative readings to a hegemonic understanding of these symbols.⁷⁵

The illustrated journal *Sichel und Hammer* was used on several occasions for the effective transfer of the culture of anti-fascism in Germany, as well as within the entire German-speaking world and beyond. It advertised the new anti-fascist publications to hundreds of thousands of people and reissued material previously published in the *Hakenkreuz* and the *Chronik*. It ridiculed the *völkisch* movement and printed a satirical illustration of Hitler on its front cover. It also covered the trial against Hitler in Munich, held between 6 February and 1 April 1924. Even after the termination of the anti-fascist committee in 1924 the *AIZ* continued to disseminate the culture of antifascism to a broad public in Europe.⁷⁶

Contrary to official CP publications, the *AIZ* and the various publications of the supra-party organisations, such as the International Workers' Relief or the International Red Aid, were not directed at a communist readership but rather a much broader public. According to a 1929 readership survey, the *AIZ*'s was comprised of 42 per cent skilled workers, 33 per cent unskilled workers, and 10 per cent white-collar workers.⁷⁷ The official publications of the CPs were mainly read by party members and left-wing trade union members, whereas the publications of the international organisations had a specific mission to reach broad sections of the population that normally were beyond the limited influence of the party. This also elevated their role as popular, alternative anti-fascist media outlets. Here we see a clear difference between the articulations of anti-fascism in specific communist publications that subscribed to a strict communist ideological framework as opposed to the way that the international organisations strove to articulate anti-fascism as a broad political and cultural project that was relevant for the entire working class.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The initial message of anti-fascism was above all a message based on international workers' solidarity directed against a common enemy-in-construction. But, at the same time, the embittered conflict with the social democrats led already in 1923 to the representation of social democracy as a force standing on the side of the reaction

⁷⁵ On the analysis of images and visual sources, see Gerhard Paul, *BilderMACHT: Studien zur Visual History des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013); *idem*, 'Das Jahrhundert der Bilder: Die visuelle Geschichte und der Bildkanon des kulturellen Gedächtnisses', in *idem*, ed., *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder: 1900 bis 1949* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 14–39 and Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

⁷⁶ *Sichel und Hammer*, 5 (1923).

⁷⁷ 'Das Wachstum der AIZ', *AIZ*, 41 (1931).

⁷⁸ See further in Rainhard May, 'Proletarisch-revolutionäre "Öffentlichkeit", die IAH und Willi Münzenberg', in Reinhard May and Hendrik Jackson, eds., *Filme für die Volksfront: Erwin Piscator, Gustav von Wangenheim, Friedrich Wolf – antifaschistische Filmemacher im sowjetischen Exil* (Berlin: Statti kino, 2001), 32–85.

and – ultimately – on the side of fascism, as it refused to join the radical and often confrontational anti-fascist politics of the communists.

However, for the most part the formation of the anti-fascist movement in 1923 was, indeed, premature. There was no basis for making anti-fascism into a mass movement, both because the threat of international fascism seemed too indistinct and remote and because Italian fascism itself had not yet become as repressive as it would be after 1925. In Germany Hitler's failed bid for power resulted in the disintegration of the German National Socialist movement, which had formed the principal threat after Mussolini's Italy.

What then were the legacies and continuities of the first anti-fascist initiatives? The international strategy articulated in 1923 was of crucial importance for future efforts to form anti-fascist alliances. The united front from above that strove for the top-down collaboration of communists and socialists proved to be an impossibility in 1923, just as it would be in the early 1930s after the rise of the Third Reich. The main scene of united front and broad anti-fascist alliances were henceforth not going to be realised in formal collaboration between the internationals but much more in the form of 'sympathising organisations' such as the Antifascist World League, followed by such as the 'International Antifascist Committee', the 'International Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism' and the 'World Committee against War and Fascism'. Anti-fascism was above all made into an affair for these 'united front' organisations but was also articulated in such international organisations as the IAH and the MOPR. All this changed, however, with the coming of the Popular Front period in 1935, when the formation of broad anti-fascist alliances was no longer the sole duty of the so-called 'sympathising organisations' but instead became the direct business of communist parties.

As a consequence, although the Antifascist World League was abolished by the Comintern in 1924, the legacy of the transnational movement against fascism lived on in other international organisations, committees and the central leadership including Münzenberg, Zetkin and Barbusse, before being taken up by communist parties in the mid-1930s. The culture of anti-fascism was, however, heavily dependent on a strong fascist threat. Only with the rise the Third Reich and the outbreak of the Italo-Abyssinian War and Spanish Civil War was there a possibility to make anti-fascism a strong part of the global left's culture.⁷⁹

The images reproduced in this article constituted three distinct visual representations of the communist understanding of anti-fascism that especially reflect on the role of the communist movement in the fight against fascism. Firstly, they visualised the idea of the communist vanguard standing in the forefront of the battle, secondly, they showed the important role of the Bolshevik revolution as an alternative to brutal militarist fascism and 'weak' parliamentary democracies and, thirdly, they depicted the ambiguous role of the social democratic party that was being separated from the workers, who in times of crisis joined the anti-fascist troops in a united

⁷⁹ See, for example, Joseph Fronczak, 'Local People's Global Politics: A Transnational History of the Hands Off Ethiopia Movement of 1935', *Diplomatic History*, 2 (2015), 245–74.

front 'from below' with the communists. As shown above, the situational realities stood often in stark contrast to these visual representations, but they nevertheless play a significant role in the analysis of the communist anti-fascist culture and in understanding how communists tried to use images to persuade the masses to their side of the struggle.

As fascism became a tangible threat to European culture and civilisation after 1933 anti-fascist figures such as Münzenberg, Barbusse, Fimmen and Gumbel already had gained a decade's experience of anti-fascist organisation and propaganda and were prepared to construct a powerful response. As shown here, the fight against fascism was not limited to street battles and physical confrontations but rather extended to the field of cultural propaganda and the production of counter images of fascism and National Socialism. Even though fascism had by the early 1940s physically crushed Europe's anti-fascist movement, one could argue that it had already lost the cultural battle, forming the basis for the European post-war 'antifascist consensus'.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7–11.