

management, forest property, and environmental governance. In highlighting the continuities in Chinese forestry, this book also provides hints on the potential of historical practices to contribute to contemporary environmental issues. Furthermore, offering vivid insights into labourers, who played a crucial role in different stages of timber production, such as cutting, processing, and transportation, Zhang's book fills a gap in current knowledge about the history of forest labourers. In short, this thoroughly researched study is of significant value to environmental, economic, and social historians dealing with forestry institutions, timber trade, and forestry labour.

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GREEN, JOHN. Willi Münzenberg. Fighter against Fascism and Stalinism. [Routledge Studies in Radical History and Politics.] Routledge, London [etc.] 2019. xiii, 288 pp. Ill. £120.00. (Paper, E-book: £34.99.)

During the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the German Willi (birth name Wilhelm) Münzenberg, born in 1889 in Erfurt, a town in Thuringia, was a prominent propagandist and creative organizer, as well as an initiator of various media concerns supportive of socialist internationalism and solidarity, and of the Soviet Union as leader of the communist movement. He fought capitalism, imperialism, war, and fascism. In the early summer of 1940, as a refugee in France, shortly after the Reichstag fire on 27 February 1933, he died a still not clarified violent death as he sought to escape the persecuting Nazi occupier. What prompted John Green to write a new (the fifth) biography of Münzenberg?

In the "Introduction" he enumerates multiple yet interrelated reasons for his endeavour by reviewing three of his biographical predecessors: Babette Gross, Münzenberg's life partner since the early 1920s: *Willi Münzenberg. Eine politische Biographie* (1967, English translation 1974); Sean McMeekin: *The Red Millionaire: A Political Biography of Willi Münzenberg: Moscow's Secret Propaganda Tsar in the West, 1917–1940* (2003); and Stephen Koch: *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (2004). He does not include Alain Dugrand and Frédéric Laurent: *Willi Münzenberg. Artiste en révolution (1889–1940)* (2008), though it is in the "Select Bibliography".

Besides the account of personal and political eyewitness Babette Gross, whose work he judges "undoubtedly the most accurate portrayal" (p. 3), Green, following the "Select Bibliography" and the "Acknowledgements", relies on well-researched case studies, particularly those published in the last ten to twenty years, as well as on re-edited or translated reminiscences of contemporaries up to those of Babette, and those of her son from an earlier marriage, Peter Gross, *Willi Münzenberg – A Memory* (2007). Green draws also on autobiographical writings of Münzenberg

himself, and on archival research of his own. Based on these more or less “personal” sources, and drawing on some background references to standard works like Eric Hobsbawm’s *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (1994), he explores, in the course of only 275 pages, the development of Münzenberg’s personality, work, and fate in relation to the microcosm of radical organizations, in particular the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD – Communist Party of Germany), the Comintern (Communist International), and their actors. The microcosm, in turn, is embedded in the macrocosm of international policies, with Germany and the Soviet Union in the first place. Green presents the biography in a rather narrative, often discursive style, posing rhetorical questions, and he frequently underlines his critical views by quoting statements at length from third parties.

The biographical narrative is chronologically structured, from “Early Life” under conditions of hardship and destitution, his early engagement in the socialist youth movement, followed by his emigration to Switzerland, where Münzenberg met leading Bolsheviks, including Lenin and Trotsky, and other socialists, and, moreover, where he began to form an International Socialist, then Communist Youth Movement (Chapters 1, 2, and 4). “French Internment and Mysterious Death” is the last, the fourteenth, chapter, which is devoted to his profile. Thematic interruptions to the biographical chronology, such as “Germany in Turmoil” – about the political and social impact of the last phase of World War I – or “The Communist Party and the Civil War in Germany” during the first years of the 1920s (Chapters 3 and 6, respectively), emphasize the political coherence of Münzenberg’s various enterprises. In most cases, the encouragement to undertake action came from Moscow, as well as the bulk of the money – of which he had to give account, though many times it was paid reluctantly and after urgent appeal, as Green proves.

Münzenberg frequently extended or transformed missions and tasks according to his personal assessment of what would be needed for success, including winning over prominent fellow campaigners and sponsors beyond the radical working class and national borders. The first and most far-reaching example – already expressed in the heading “The Comintern’s Emissary in Western Europe” (Chapter 5) – that the author presents is the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH – Workers’ International Relief). It was established in 1921 on Lenin’s orders with the aim of organizing a broad relief movement for starving Soviet Russia. The IAH grew to form the basis of the “imperium” of books, press, and products of the visual arts – the so-called Münzenberg Concern (*Konzern*) – as well as the cradle of numerous, on the surface non-partisan, organizations and sub-organizations at national and transnational levels. They engaged with humanitarian, judicial, political, social, or cultural issues. With regard to the latter, Green opens a new perspective, demonstrating the intermediary role that intellectuals and artists of the liberal-to-left political spectrum played in the process of workers’ cultural initiatives and, moreover, of friendship with the Soviet Union (Chapter 9, “The Influence of the KPD and Münzenberg’s Organisation on Working-Class Culture in Germany”).

In the majority of cases, Münzenberg delegated the establishment and management of the organizations and their activities more or less discreetly to comrades, openly to highly respected non-party individuals, while he himself pulled the strings

behind the scenes.<sup>8</sup> Both components can be clearly seen in the “League against Imperialism (and Colonialism)” and its two congresses of 1927 and 1929 (Chapter 10 – see here, too, the pictures), and around the Reichstag fire counter trial that took place in London in September 1933 under the auspices of the newly formed World Committee for the Relief of the Victims of German Fascism (Welthilfskomitee für die Opfer des deutschen Faschismus – the author refers to it as “World Aid Committee”) (Chapter 12). The World (Relief) Committee and its branches, including the World Committee against War and Fascism, gradually took over or transformed functions of the IAH.

The information on “Münzenberg’s British Secret Service files” in Chapter 15, with hints at equivalent US Secret Service files, may challenge broader national-level research in this field as well as international comparative research drawing on sources of other countries; a few references to Moscow archives are to be found in the notes (but these are unlikely to be available in the foreseeable future).

Chapter 13, “Battles with the KPD Leadership”, is rather irritating, especially in its shifting chronology when dealing with the period from the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern onwards. As to the German Popular Front movement, Green neglects my own three-volume study *Deutsche Volkfront 1932–1939* (2004–2005). Further, he makes a number of mistakes. Georgi Dimitrow was appointed General Secretary of the Comintern only at its Seventh World Congress in July/August 1935. Münzenberg was not the leading figure in initiating the formation of the German Popular Front: the idea had been launched by Social Democrats, and a preliminary committee – the “Vorbereitender Ausschuss zur Schaffung einer deutschen Volksfront” – had already been set up before he returned from the Seventh World Congress and the so-called Brussels Conference of the KPD. The discussion group he then set up merged with the preliminary committee at the broader meeting on 26 September, which, too, was held at the suggestion of the Social Democrats. Further, there was a difference between the small Lutetia Comité and the greater Lutetia-Kreis. The meeting on 2 February 1936 was agreed by all parties to the latter, the invitations written by several leading members of the Lutetia Comité. And, finally, the many quotations evidencing the increasing insults directed at Münzenberg by KPD leaders miss the background to those insults: the impact of the Spanish Civil War on the Comintern and the KPD (and on other communist parties), on the one hand, and on Münzenberg, on the other.

The final chapter, Chapter 16, “Summing up Münzenberg’s Historical Contribution”, reveals one of the author’s main reasons for writing this biography, namely, to bring his protagonist closer to the generation of the present time, as he seems to have been almost forgotten, or was simply not known, at best neglected, or even ignored by historians of radical movements. In historicizing Münzenberg, Green tries to capture for the twenty-first century his revolutionary spirit, his restless activism in support of national and international solidarity in the fight against capitalist exploitation, war, and fascism. At the same time, though in far fewer words, Münzenberg figures as a warning of the pitfalls of idealism, namely, absolute,

<sup>8</sup>Each chapter includes brief biographies of lesser-known personalities in Münzenberg’s network (in the “Index” they are given in italics).

obedient commitment (at least up until the Seventh World Congress) to an ideological, “all-encompassing apparatus” (p. 273) and blind loyalty (*Nibelungentreue*) to its leader – in this case, until Stalin’s pact with Hitler in August 1939. In this light, the second half of the subtitle of the biography, “Fighter against [...] Stalinism”, is debatable.

On the whole, Green has written a biography of Willi Münzenberg as objectively as possible, free from ideologies such as anticommunism or conspiracy fantasies. It is a pity, then, that it is marred to some extent by a number of infelicities. The titles of the German-language books cited contain many grammatical errors. Fanny Ehrensperger was not the mother of Münzenberg’s son Uli, as Green concludes (p. 52, n. 14), nor were Adele Kluser or Babette Gross. At almost the same time, Babette was pregnant with her son Peter. I am aware of the identity of the mother, but for privacy reasons I shall refrain from revealing it here.

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