

BOOK REVIEWS / КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Hakim Adi. *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013. 445 pp. \$39.95 (paper). ISBN: 978-1-59221-916-2.

Hakim Adi's book *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* is a highly interesting and solid account of the political mobilization of colonial subjects and of the political history of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in the "African Atlantic" (i.e., North America, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean) during the interwar period. The title of the book echoes that of George Padmore's important monograph *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa*, which was published almost seventy years ago. For several decades, Padmore's book remained one of the key texts on political Pan-Africanism and about the future of Africa.¹ Padmore, who is the key actor in Adi's book and was one of the leading agents of political Pan-Africanism from the mid-1930s until his death in 1958, highlighted in his book the antagonism between Pan-Africanism and Communism. He pointed out that although Communism was at one stage sympathetic towards the cause of national self-determination and the independence of the African colonies, such a policy was scrapped due to Stalin's redirection of Soviet foreign policy towards the French and British colonial powers in the 1930s. Communist anti-colonialism, from Padmore's perspective, was problematic due to its focus on class and class struggle. Political Pan-Africanism, on the other hand, had a positive future in Africa due to its focus on color and race. The key argument of political Pan-Africanism was that political as well as societal marginalization, stigmatization and dehumanization of the Black people could only be overcome by collectively combatting racism, segregation and exploitation.

Hakim Adi's research questions Padmore's negative account of the impact of communism and of the Communist International (Comintern) on the emerging anticolonial struggle in Africa and the Caribbean. Similar to other recent accounts of 'Black Internationalism' by Jonathan Derrick, Minkah Mankalani, and this reviewer,² Adi places the beginning of Black radicalism and its connections to communism among radical African Americans in the United States of America (USA) and in the debates of the Comintern in Moscow on the "Negro Question," as well as in the drafting of various "Negro

1. George Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa* (London: D. Dobson, 1956).

2. Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's 'Agitators' – Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (London: Hurst, 2008); Minkah Mankalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

Theses” during the 1920s. As Adi highlights, the debate and theses eventually positioned the Comintern and Communism as a radical alternative to bourgeois Pan-Africanism by calling for national self-determination for the oppressed in the African Diaspora as well as in the African colonies. According to Adi, the Comintern “can be said to have adopted a Pan-Africanist approach to the issue.” (p. xx)

Adi’s book analyzes the development of the Comintern’s “Pan-Africanist approach” by examining how the Comintern organizational apparatus created or engaged in the activities and networks of Black actors and organizations from the mid-1920s through the mid-1930s. His main focus is on the establishment of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), an organization officially launched at the First International Conference of Negro Workers in Hamburg in July 1930 and quietly dissolved by the Comintern in 1937. By making use of the rich documentary materials deposited in the Comintern Archives in Moscow (in addition to archival material from Britain, France, the USA and Nigeria), Adi presents a detailed account of the Pan-African policy and network of the ITUCNW and its key persons: James W. Ford, who established both the ITUCNW and its forerunner, the Negro Section (Bureau) of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), and who was its first secretary from November 1930 to September 1931³; George Padmore, who was in charge of the organization from October 1932 to the winter of 1933-34; and Otto Huiswoud, who reorganized its operations in 1934 and was in charge until 1937.

In addition to presenting the first narrative of the ITUCNW, the second part of Adi’s book contains an overview and discussion of the various regional Black radical organizations and activists that emerged during the interwar period and their links to Communism, the Communist Party and/or the ITUCNW. The outcome is the first portrait of the “radical Black Atlantic”: radical Black organizations in France and Britain, in the Caribbean, in West and South Africa. In Adi’s narrative, the ITUCNW had established links with all of them, either directly through correspondence or indirectly via its journal, *The Negro Worker* (1928-37). The center of the radical Black Atlantic was the headquarters of the ITUCNW, as it moved from Hamburg (1931-33) to Paris (1933-34), Antwerp (1934), Amsterdam (1935), and back to Paris (1935-37).

In contrast to the title of the book, however, Adi’s Pan-African focus downplays the crucial role played by the circuit of which the ITUCNW was an integral part, namely the global network of auxiliary and “independent” organizations that had been founded, funded and directed by the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU or Profintern) and its various bureaus and secretariats. Adi puts little emphasis on the crucial and at times dominant roles of the Comintern and RILU organizational apparatuses and their leading functionaries in monitoring and controlling the activities of the Hamburg Committee or Hamburg Secretariat (as the ITUCNW was termed at the RILU headquarters

3. The Negro Section of the RILU was also known as the ITUCNW (1928-29). The RILU Negro Section continued to exist until 1933/34. The Provisional ITUCNW existed in 1929-30.

in Moscow). The ITUCNW had been established as an outcome of the “Class-Against-Class” tactics that were to mark the global strategy of the Comintern and RILU during the “Third Period” (an ideological concept adopted by the Comintern in 1928, claiming that a time of widespread economic collapse and mass working-class radicalization was imminent). Established in 1930, the ITUCNW was envisioned as the potentially forthcoming Black International, but the Executive Bureau of the Comintern (ECCI) finally scrapped the idea in October 1931 and designated the organization as its agitation and propaganda vehicle in the Black Atlantic. From a Moscow-centered perspective, one might analyze the ITUCNW as one of the many International Propaganda and Agitation Committees (IPAC) that were established by the RILU during the 1920s.

Although Hamburg was the focal point of Padmore’s network, the ITUCNW was but one of numerous lesser front organizations or sub-sections of the Comintern apparatus. Officially independent, the ITUCNW was linked to and its operations monitored by the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) and its secretariat in Hamburg, the International Red Aid (IRA) and its secretariat in Berlin, the League against Imperialism (LAI) and its secretariat in Berlin, the West European Bureau (WEB) in Berlin (not Hamburg as Adi claims on p. 129) as well as by various units in Moscow, such as the Negro Bureau of the RILU, the RILU Secretariat, and ultimately the ECCI. The ITUCNW (or the Hamburg Committee as it was called within the Comintern) had its office in the same building as the ISH at 8 Rothesoodstrasse in Hamburg. Its link and cooperation with the ISH was of key strategic value as the ITUCNW was projected to work among Black seamen who were to become part of the ISH organizational structure (but not that of the ITUCNW). Funding was allocated on a monthly basis through the European Bureau of the RILU in Berlin; ultimately, the money was transferred from the RILU headquarters in Moscow. Any operational and strategic decisions by the Secretary of the Hamburg Committee had to be discussed with Albert Walter, the Secretary of the ISH and with comrades in Moscow and Berlin, especially Max Ziese, who was the head of the RILU Bureau in Berlin, but also with comrades at the General Secretariat of the LAI in Berlin. All political activities and tactics had to follow the guidelines (so-called Resolutions) and instructions that were prepared by the RILU Negro Bureau and approved either by the RILU Secretariat or the ECCI. When the headquarters of the ITUCNW had to be relocated after the Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933, its operations continued to be controlled and supported by in situ ISH and RILU units and the center in Moscow.

Without the opening of the Comintern Archives in 1991, none of the narratives of the radical Black Atlantic or the history of the ITUCNW could have been written. Hakim Adi has been among the first researchers to highlight the need to travel to Moscow and evaluate the rich documentary sources that are available there. Unfortunately, what is missing in his book is a critical discussion of the documents as sources. How should one identify letters and other documents with no sender or recipient, sometimes even undated? How much of the documentary record was produced in Moscow and how much in Ham-

burg and elsewhere? By whom and for whom were some of the reports produced, such as those on the situation in West Africa in 1929? For example, Padmore's rift with the Comintern in 1933-34 is an intriguing question that has puzzled several researchers. Although Adi uses Comintern documents to evaluate the clash and he notes the letter Padmore received in April 1933 heavily criticizing his activities, Adi does not try to identify its author. (pp. 153-54) In fact, the author was Alexander Zusmanovich, who at that time ran the RILU Negro Bureau in Moscow, i.e., Padmore's immediate superior. Similarly problematic is his account of the August 1933 meeting in Paris, where the activities of the ITUCNW were discussed. The report of the meeting was written in French. Otto Huiswoud, who attended the meeting, produced a summary in English. The French report, however, never listed Huiswoud or his alias "Edward". Instead, a person called Henry was present. Unfortunately, Adi does not inform the reader how he identified Huiswoud as Henry (Woodford McClellan and others have even claimed that Henry was an alias of William Lorenzo Patterson and argued that it was he who attended the meeting in Paris).

Adi's argument that the Comintern adopted a Pan-Africanist approach and aimed to establish a radical Black Atlantic is a sympathetic but one-sided reading of the relationship between the Comintern, the ITUCNW, Africa, and the African Diaspora. Neither the Comintern nor the ITUCNW in its official publications ever changed its priority on class before race. Black workers would have to side with white workers and vice versa. The ITUCNW was identified as an organization for Black workers, not for the Black bourgeoisie or even for radical nationalists. Its mission, as projected by the ECCI in 1931, was to act as a propaganda and agitation tool, not as an umbrella organization for various local and national organizations in the Black Atlantic. The biggest challenge for the Comintern was its realization that a working class (as defined by communists) hardly existed in the African colonies and its lukewarm at best attitude toward engaging African "petty-bourgeois" or bourgeois nationalist agitators. The relationship between the Comintern and the radical Black Atlantic reached its defining moment during the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Crisis in 1935, when Italy attacked Ethiopia. Moscow remained silent while the international campaign against Italian aggression brought other groups into the forefront of Black Atlantic radicalism. Nevertheless, Hakim Adi's narrative is a path-breaking work on the Pan-African ambitions of activists tied to the ITUCNW and their connections with radicals and radical organizations in the Black Atlantic. It contributes less to studies of the Comintern and the Black Atlantic and of the ITUCNW as part of the "solar system" of the Comintern.