

FALSE ALARM

The last few months the International Institute of Social History (IISG) has rejoiced in a dubious publicity. In January the well-known German weekly *Der Spiegel* (1982, No 3) noted a “Soviet-Marxist” orientation of the IISG, in February the West Berlin television station RIAS spread a similar message. In March the conservative German daily *Die Welt* (1982, No 75), which till then had not shown much interest in our work, published a long article “Hausverbot für freie Forschung” (No access for free research) by Manfred Wilke, who claimed that the IISG, which holds the bulk of Marx’s original manuscripts, had in fact become an “Eastern dependency”, disposed to check all independent Western approaches in the field of Marxology. In May the *New Leader* (1982, No 10) published a letter from Adolf Sturmthal, professor of labor and industrial relations at the University of Illinois, who had “received news that must alarm serious individuals regardless of their political orientation”. According to him access to the Marx-Engels archives at the IISG was “now to be limited to scholars designated by the Moscow and East Berlin institutes of Marxism-Leninism”.

All these voices referred to the case of Hans-Peter Müller and Rainer Winkelmann, two young scholars from West Berlin, to whom, after five years, further admission to the IISG had indeed been denied. All the authors relied exclusively on information that came from these gentlemen. Even Professor Sturmthal, who might be expected to be professionally critical, did not feel obliged to check this information, which could at least be supposed to be somewhat biased by personal interest. Subsequent rectifications from our side were, if ever, published so late that they failed to have sufficient effect.

The IISG has existed for nearly fifty years. During this time it has gained a reputation of which it may be proud. It owes this reputation not only to the fact that it saved many valuable collections of manuscripts, books, pamphlets, newspapers, etc., which otherwise might not have survived the years of fascist tyranny, or to the fact that its collections do not have their equal in the Western world, but also to the liberal, informal way in which it made its collections, of which the Marx-Engels archives constitute a small, but certainly not unimportant part, accessible to every interested person.

Of course, there are certain rules which our visitors are expected to observe, especially regarding the use of unpublished documents: quotations up to six lines in print are free; longer quotations, in particular

those of entire documents, require our explicit consent. But these rules are by no means unusual. Similar rules are valid in most institutes of this kind (e.g., Hoover Institution, Stanford/Cal., Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn/FRG, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach/FRG).

Year by year our collections, a.o. the Marx-Engels archives, have been consulted by visitors from all parts of the world, a.o. Messrs Müller-Winkelmann from West Berlin. Unfortunately in the case of these two gentlemen there was, almost from the beginning, trouble which did not arise from their theoretical approach, but from their unusual behaviour. Nevertheless, we continued to give them the usual assistance. Only after five years did we finally deny them further admission to the IISG, because they had started to publish documents from our collections without our consent – thus grossly violating our rules after giving the impression of accepting them all the time.

The two gentlemen then began to launch a public campaign against the IISG. Trying to give to their dubious procedure – an ordinary breach of good faith – the significance of an emancipatory act, they suggested that the reaction of the IISG might have political reasons. Somewhat mystifying the affair, they alluded to an agreement of 1969, which regulates the use of the Marx-Engels archives by the editors of the new *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA).

As to this agreement we want to state quite clearly that it has not at all influenced the use of our collections, including the Marx-Engels archives, by others. In particular, it does not impose upon the IISG any restrictions concerning the admissibility of whatever research. Quite apart from the fact that there was no reason to accept any restriction, no agreement to the detriment of independent research would have gained the necessary consent of the Board of the IISG.

Neither were there any “new directives involving the use of archives”, about which Professor Sturmthal, evidently better informed than we ourselves, seems to know. Who should have given such directives? Since 1979 the IISG has been attached to the Royal Netherlands Academy of Science.

That the IISG has become an “Eastern dependency” is – to be quite clear – mere nonsense. Regarding its alleged “Soviet-Marxist” orientation it seems to us sufficient to point to its numerous publications from the 'thirties to today.

The Müller-Winkelmann affair, which does not have its equal in the history of the IISG, does not indicate a change within the latter, but, if any, one in its academic environment, where sharp competition leads to increasing rudeness. Anyway, we hope it will be clear that just because we do

not want to change our traditional practice, which is based on good faith, we will not tolerate such a proceeding.

Finally, we want to mention that in Germany recently sixty prominent academic colleagues, regardless of their political orientation, most decidedly protested against the recent endeavours to diffame the IISG in a statement published in the IWK (1982, No 2). Their gratifying statement shows that serious individuals who know the IISG are not alarmed by evidently absurd news, but disgusted by their calumnious tendency.

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Director of the IISG