

EDITOR'S REMARKS

Class and Parties

Twenty-some years ago the interests of historians of the working class shifted sharply away from parties and organizational leaders toward the actions, aspirations, and thinking of the working people themselves. Increasingly sophisticated historical methods were applied to the analysis of culture, of "every-day life" and workplace and community relations, in an effort to reconsider the sources of working-class initiative in history. The questions raised by this line of inquiry produced a convergence of research interests and of discoveries between studies of Europe and studies of North America, which overshadowed earlier emphases on the differences between the trajectories of workers' movements on the two sides of the Atlantic.

Sean Wilentz has asked in this issue's Scholarly Controversy whether what we have learned from the new social history either helps answer questions that long dominated movement histories, or else gives us reasons to discard some of those questions explicitly. He replies that the venerable notion of "American exceptionalism" is misleading, not because the United States would belatedly follow a European path (as has been argued), but rather because the Euro-centric concept of a mass-based socialist or communist party as the appropriate index of class consciousness diverts attention from the ways in which workers in the United States have battled the system of wage labor. Neither Michael Hanagan nor Nick Salvatore is convinced by this argument. The ways in which working-class struggles have been embedded in a county's political structure do make a difference, which affects both our understanding of the past and our prospects for the future, writes Hanagan. And Salvatore adds that the historic incorporation of American workers into the hegemonic ideology cannot be ignored by historians, let alone wished away.

The mission of Scholarly Controversies is not to resolve major theoretical debates, but to pose them as clearly as possible. It is for this reason that readers of *ILWCH* are invited once again to submit their concise responses for publication in the next issue (by February 30, 1985).

The issues raised by Wilentz, Hanagan, and Salvatore reappear in the review essays, albeit with different points of emphasis. Barrett argues that the cultural traditions which gave American socialism its content and appeal also inflicted crippling limitations on the movement in the twentieth-century context of imperialism and modern war. Victoria Bonnell, drawing on revealing studies of the varieties of Russian working-class experiences before and during the revolutions of 1917, writes that it is wrong to oppose the "autonomous" consciousness of workers to movement ideologies, because prolonged interaction with social democrats clearly affected the ways in which Russian workers "spontaneously" formulated their own problems and desires (the same issue Mary Nolan had raised in connection with Austrian workers in *ILWCH* No. 25). Bernard Moss has inverted the problem. He describes the ways in which various members and institutes of the French Communist Party have reassessed their own party's history in the light of the questions inspired by the

recent behavior of the working class. He contends that discussions of historic tendencies and of recent reformations of both program and styles of work are as relevant to the redefinition of socialism as a class objective as they are to our understanding of the origins and evolution of this important political party.

Finally, a word about ILWCH's future. 1986 will mark the centennial of the Haymarket Affair and the thirtieth anniversary of the Popular Front. Each of those anniversaries deserves a special issue of our journal. Your suggestions and contributions concerning both issues will be warmly appreciated. Please write the editors your thoughts about what we should do or what you would like to contribute as soon as possible.

D.M.