

## **SECTION III. RESEARCH PROJECTS AND DISSERTATIONS – WORK IN PROGRESS**

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### **The Origins of ‘Anti-Fascism’: Transnational Movements against Nazism, Fascism and the ‘White Terror’ in Europe, 1923-1940**

The aim of the project is to write the first comprehensive transnational history of communist antifascism, 1923–40. Conventionally, the making of a transnational antifascist culture in Europe is dated to 1933 and the establishment of the Third Reich, or even later to the beginning of the Popular Front Period and the beginning of the Italo-Ethiopian war in 1935 and the Spanish Civil War in 1936. The hypothesis of this research project is that hitherto overlooked early international (non-governmental) antifascist organisations, created already in 1923, innovated significant repertoires of resistance and transnational networks that are of crucial significance for the historical and contemporary understanding of fascism and antifascism in Europe. The project shifts the focus of interwar antifascism from the post-1933 era to the formative years for 20th century anti-fascism between 1923 and 1940, while 1933 remains a significant point of analysis that enables the study of the continuities and discontinuities, transfers and interconnections of transnational antifascism. How were the first international antifascist movements and organisations created during the 1920s, and how were varieties of antifascism spread transnationally through these organisations?

Although there was no basis for making antifascism a mass movement in Europe before the 1930s, the project argues that the culture(s) of antifascism were invented and refined throughout the preceding decade, which in a crucial way deepens our understanding of the post-1933 antifascist strategies and campaigns in Europe. Geographically, the study follows the main locations of the international antifascist organisations in Western Europe, including Berlin, Paris, and London. The movement’s complex relations to the Soviet Union, the Comintern and the international socialist movement are also of crucial significance. The research is based on three levels of analysis:

1) Transnational networks and organisations: The organisations included in the analysis consist of the *Antifascist World League*, the *World Committee against War Danger and Fascism*, 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*. Besides these sympathising international organisations created within the framework of the Comintern and the Profintern, the analysis will further include the *Internationale Kommission zur Abwehr des Faschismus* created by the *Labour and Socialist International* (LSI). Other international initiatives were headed by the *International Federation of Trade Unions* (IFTU) and the *International Transport Workers’ Federation* (ITF) that will be contrasted to the activities to the organisations mentioned

above. The hypothesis of the study is that the activities of the first group of international organisations played a pivotal role in the creation of transnational networks that transferred the articulations and cultures of antifascism across borders starting from 1923. The project will especially focus on the key role played by the German communist Willi Münzenberg through his involvement in the antifascist movement from 1923 to 1940. The above organisations attracted also a number of sympathising intellectuals and their personal networks into the antifascist movement, including Albert Einstein, H.G Wells, Lion Feuchtwanger, Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, Georg Bernhard Shaw and Maxim Gorky, whose moral support was of profound significance in the realm of cultural internationalism.

2) The articulations of antifascism: Via the study of the articulations of antifascism by the international organisations and their protagonists, the aim is to investigate the role of socialists, communists, intellectuals and others in the shaping and breaking of antifascist alliances. What kind of movements between 1923 and 1940 were defined as fascist, and how did antifascists articulate their resistance strategies? How did the varieties of antifascism relate to the reformist Left, also labelled "social fascism" by the communists, and the national socialist Right in the era before and after 1933? How inclusive or exclusive was the envisioned antifascist alliance? What was the relation between the concepts of "antifascism", "resistance" and "opposition" both before and after 1933? The project investigates further the turn from conceptualising fascist terror as a form of 'white terror' to a distinctive new form of 'brown terror'. Moreover, it analyses the antifascist efforts to constantly distinguish appearances of 'international fascism' that in the press of the above mentioned international organisations was seen not only in Europe, but also in Japan, China and in the USA (in the form of the Ku Klux Klan).

3) The visual culture of antifascism: A vital part of the study includes the analysis of visual material commissioned by the transnational antifascist movement. Did the articulations of antifascism correspond to its iconography? How did the visual representations of the fascist threat change over time, 1923–39? The antifascist movement engaged from 1923 in a broad cultural battle, applying its antifascist reading of fascist symbols such as 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 instead constructed into menacing symbols of war and oppression to be combated, and made into an elementary part of the culture of antifascism that during the 20th century were turned from alternative readings to hegemonic understandings of these symbols.

The research is based on archival material collected from the *Russian State Archive of Social and Political History* (RGASPI, Moscow), the *Bundesarchiv* (Berlin), the *International Institute of Social History* (IISH, Amsterdam), the *National Archives* (London), and the *Arbetarrörelsens arkiv* (ARAB, Stockholm). The material consists of organisational archives, correspondence, unpublished protocols, and resolutions. Further, emphasis will be put on international antifascist publications and posters that convey unique articulations and visualisations of fascists as the 'other.' Central published sources include among others the first illustrated antifascist journal *Das Hakenkreuz* that was published in Berlin in 1923. Other major publications include *Chronik des Faschismus*, *Mahnruf: Organ für internationale Solidarität*, *Eulenspiegel*, *AIZ*, *Der Gegen-Angriff* and *Die Zukunft*. Further publications by Willi Münzenberg's *Neuer Deutscher Verlag* (Berlin) and *Editions du Carrefour* (Paris) will be included. The project is funded by the Kone Foundation in Finland and will be completed by the beginning of 2017.

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