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# The *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* in Weimar Germany

Charlotte Morton

The *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ)* was the first illustrated workers' magazine in the world and it became the most popular publication produced by the communist movement in Weimar Germany. At its height in 1931 it claimed a circulation of more than 450,000 copies a week and was, after the Ullstein-owned *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the best selling illustrated magazine in the country (Willmann, 1975). This achievement looms all the larger when it is realized that it took place under pressure on the one hand from the German Communist Party (KPD), then at the height of the Stalinist 'Third Period' and markedly less successful with its own publications, and on the other hand from a series of increasingly repressive governments eager to prosecute left-wing editors.

Contrary to some claims (e.g., Gidal, 1973), *AIZ* was not a KPD publication. Its origins can be traced to the International Workers' Relief Organization (IAH) founded in 1921 under the leadership of Willi Münzenberg, with whom final control of the magazine lay. As is well known, Münzenberg was a prominent member of the KPD, and there can be no doubt that his aim with the *AIZ*, as with his multitude of other activities, was to forward the cause of the KPD (Gross, 1974). However, for reasons which remain obscure, Münzenberg appears to have enjoyed rather more latitude than was normal for a member of the Stalinized Comintern and this, as we shall see, found a reflection in the publications he controlled.

The original aim of IAH was famine relief in the USSR and, as part of its fund-raising propaganda, it published an illustrated

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magazine entitled *Russland im Bild*. This appeared monthly from November 1921 to 1922 (initially as *Russland im Wort und Bild*) and, according to Willmann (1975), had a circulation of 100,000. (It is as well to point out here that all circulation figures for *AIZ* are contested. Gross, for example, argues that the entire left-wing press printed far more copies than it actually sold and that *AIZ* was engaged in this practice. This seems plausible.) In 1923 the magazine changed its name to *Sichel und Hammer*, continuing monthly publication but increasing its circulation to 180,000. One contributory factor to the increase in circulation was that, in the aftermath of the failed rising of 1923, the KPD and its press were banned; IAH and its publications remained legal and took over many of the functions of organizing and informing the residual party militants — tasks normally fulfilled by *Die Rote Fahne*.

In summer 1924 Münzenberg acquired the *Neue Deutsche Verlag(NDV)*, apparently as a gift from his longstanding friend, the lawyer Felix Halle (Gross, 1974: 162). This took over responsibility for publishing *AIZ*, now a fortnightly named, for the first time, *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* — from 30 November 1924, selling 200,000 copies at the same 20-pfennig price that it kept throughout its life. Finally, in 1928, the magazine changed its name yet again, to the abbreviation *A-I-Z*, and became a fifteen-page weekly.

The bare organizational history of *AIZ* is interesting enough, given its unique relation to the tortured history of the period, but the radically innovative features of the magazine can only really be grasped by comparing it with its various competitors. In common with much of what Gruber (1966) and others are tempted to agree was the Münzenberg 'empire', *AIZ* was designed to reach a large working-class audience. As Münzenberg himself wrote:

We are satisfied with the name 'multicompany'. We really did want to construct a red empire. But we are not utopians, we do not believe that we can beat capitalism by economic competition. But we do believe that it is criminal to allow the bourgeois and social-democratic organizations, without a fight, the monopoly of mass influence. We feel that everything has to be done to break through this monopoly, be it in the area of films, daily papers or illustrated magazines (cited by Siepmann, 1977: 147).

At the same time, however, the drive to win a mass audience was not, in Münzenberg's eyes, to be achieved simply by copying the methods and contents of the bourgeois press. For example, *AIZ* did share features of its layout with its competitors but, according to Münzenberg:

The *AIZ* differs fundamentally from all other illustrated papers. It is devoted wholly to the life and fight of the workers, and of all working sections of the population. It brings pictures of factories, strikes, of unemployment cards being stamped, of demonstrations, meetings, famine. . . (cited in Gross, 1974: 149).

The attempt to reach a mass audience meant something of a departure from the practices of the KPD press. According to Ricke (1974), the communist press in this period looked to the tradition of press theory established by Mehring who, writing in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in 1907, argued:

We should never think to compete with the news system of the capitalist press. Our press would then completely lose its propagandist thrust because it would damage its principles in favour of profit. We can only repeat: a principled press can never be a newspaper, a newspaper can never be a principled press (cited by Ricke, 1974: 45).

This distance from the capitalist press was not merely one of content. Despite the radicalization of large numbers of talented visual artists during the Weimar period, the KPD seems always to have had some difficulty in integrating them into its work (Katalog, 1977: 174–76). Münzenberg, of course, is well known to have had no such difficulty: Heartfield is only the best known of his many collaborators.

In fact, Münzenberg could claim to be putting into practice the ‘Theses on the Press’ of the Third Congress of the Comintern, and after 1926 his relative independence from day-to-day party control fitted in with the ‘unity’ policy and even received express Comintern approval (Ricke, 1974: 63).

However, the advent of the ‘Third Period’, with its sharp division between the party and other organizations, and its characterization of the SPD as ‘social fascist’, led to some changes. Lily Corpus-Becher became editor in place of Höllering and clashes with party functionary Paul Friedlander became increasingly frequent (Gross, 1974: 161). As we shall see, even this degree of pressure did not always succeed in suborning the whole of the Münzenberg apparatus to the latest twist of the party line.

On the other hand, the differences between *AIZ* and its bourgeois competitors were enormous and systematic, ranging from the nature of the journalists and photographers it employed through to the way in which it was distributed. To begin with, work on *AIZ* was collective, a feature which often disturbed prominent collaborators.

Gidal, for example, claims he stopped working for the magazine when the editors changed the text he had provided to go with his 'Hamburg by Night' photographs (1973: 26). The full-time staff was always very small; Lily Corpus-Becher, who worked for the magazine from the beginning and was editor from 1927 to 1933, says the editorial staff only ever consisted of five people, even during the most successful period (Siepmann, 1975: 7). She claims: 'I did most of the text and signed it mostly anonymously but also under various pseudonyms, to give the impression of a richly staffed editorial office.'

This paucity of numbers was compensated for in a number of ways. The most conventional of these was for journalists working for other Münzenberg papers, such as *Berlin am Morgen*, to help out on *AIZ* (Siepmann, 1977: 150). This, however, cut both ways; *AIZ* journalists also worked for other papers. Thus Lily Corpus-Becher was, while editing the woman's page of *AIZ*, also editor of the KPD womens paper, *Die Proletarierin*. Much more innovative to *AIZ*, however, was its transformation of the established KPD practice of employing local worker-correspondents into the field of photo-journalism.

This development owed much to yet another Münzenberg organization, the Association of Worker Photographers (Münzenberg, 1978: 51-3), but its introduction to *AIZ* fell to Höllering, the first editor. According to Gross (1974: 164), it was he who: 'pioneered a public effective style of picture reportage.' Höllering, an Austrian, had previously published the sports paper *Die Arena*, which was designed by Heartfield with much of its content written by Egon Erwin Kisch and Berthold Brecht. Only the last of these was not prominently associated with *AIZ*.

In its early years the technical standards of the photographs produced by groups of amateur and part-time photographers were often so low that the paper was forced to rely heavily on the agencies (Gross, 1974: 163), but Höllering's aim was for worker-photographers to produce: 'Clear, simple, beautiful pictures of your world . . . *AIZ* needs photos for its documentaries' (Katalog, 1977: 467).

The financing of *AIZ* has remained a rather obscure and hazy area. Obviously, given the overall objective of the Münzenberg organization, the aim was never to get rich. Part of the problem centres around the nature of the advertising material the magazine carried. Both Willmann and Pinkus were associated with the

financial aspects of *AIZ*, the former from the outset and the latter as advertising manager in 1931–32; unfortunately, they give contradictory accounts. Willmann argues that advertising was ‘only a very small source of income and concentrated mainly on Soviet trade enterprises and various media publications’ (1975: 124). Pinkus, on the other hand, argues that while *AIZ* ‘always relied on copy cost revenue’, it began by handling advertising in the form of ‘insert leaflets which were aimed at small shopkeepers and local traders’; he adds that advertising later ‘amounted to a considerable source of income’ (cited in Siepmann, 1977: 150). Whatever the financial picture really was, a glance at copies of *AIZ* published between 1928 and 1931 shows that advertising occupied a prominent place. In 52 issues published between these dates, between one and a half and two pages, in issues of fifteen pages, were devoted to it. The firms concerned were far from small or local ones, including as they did Telefunken, Stollwerck, Biomalz and Chlorodont.

The question of whether the magazine accepted payments from Moscow is more difficult to resolve. We know from Brandler (1977) that the KPD press was subsidized by the Russians from very early on, and it is equally obvious from a glance at, for example, Münzenberg’s film operation that, even if there was no direct subsidy, his commercial relations with concerns in the USSR was of considerable advantage to his specifically German activities (Welch, 1981). Gross says, with reference to the early days of *AIZ* and *NDV*:

When all sources dried up I went for help to the Party Treasurer ... Arthur König... He always helped us even if the party leadership was not exactly delighted at having competition. Ruth Fischer at this time described her old friend Münzenberg as a robber knight because he was setting up his own organization without asking her permission (1974: 148–9).

Whether this sort of financial support was asked for, or granted, on other occasions is a matter for further investigation. On the face of it, it seems unlikely that a magazine with around half a million readers, substantial advertising revenue, limited full-time staffing and many contributors who were pleased to give their work free, required heavy or regular direct subsidy (Katalog, 1977: 466).

Distribution was the final area of difference between *AIZ* and its competitors. *AIZ* used the *Kolporteur* system of voluntary distributors, which involved taking the magazine to its audience rather than relying on the audience to come to a sale point. This

system was, and is, a common feature of the revolutionary press, and in its early stages *AIZ* relied heavily on the existing KPD network. Münzenberg, however, went on to establish his own network, organizing 46,000 people by 1931 (Willmann, 1975: 123).

The existence of such a network meant that *AIZ* was sold in a number of locations not normally associated with press distribution, including parks, public meetings, homes and workplaces. During elections, which could be very violent, distribution was organized from trucks covered with posters. Despite these precautions, it could still be a dangerous business: two sellers were killed by nazis in 1932 (Willmann, 1975: 210). *AIZ* itself carried material about attacks from 1928 onwards. The other advantage of the system was that it freed the magazine from pressures imposed by the bourgeois distribution networks. The postal service was as obstructive as possible and, according to Pinkus: 'Many kiosks were in the hands of the Hugenberg empire, which permanently tried to sabotage and hinder the distribution of communist papers and magazines' (cited in Siepmann, 1977: 150).

The *Kolporteurs* were recruited from the unemployed and the party organizations, and according to Pinkus, 'were paid a very small wage which helped to augment their unemployment pay'. They were organized through the monthly *AIZ Kolporteur*, which Pinkus claims had a circulation of 3,000-4,000. This publication and the organization which went with it were needed because the role of the seller was more than simply to distribute copies. The *Kolporteur* often organized a group of readers and led their discussion of the content of the magazine (Siepmann, 1977: 105-106).

Organizing the readership in order to produce an active rather than passive consumption was a feature of the text of *AIZ*. Although it rarely carried readers' letters, it often appealed to them in very familiar terms. For example, issue 10, of 1931, celebrated the tenth anniversary of the magazine by praising the readers and asking for a greater effort in the future. The second decade would:

... need even greater courage and enlightenment, for which it will need you (*du*), you the unknown soldier of the proletarian struggle, you the man in the factory, you the woman in the mills, the peasant behind the plough, the employee behind the typewriter, the housewife in the housing block, because the half million copies we send weekly round the world must soon grow to a million.

The thoroughly familiar and trusting tone of this piece: the personal address *du* (thou): the characterization of the magazine as a great

collective achievement, and the use of emotion and a pathos-inducing vocabulary are all characteristic of the style developed by *AIZ* in an effort to reduce the distance between itself and its readers.

The more formal channel of readers' letters was reserved for reinforcing campaigns run by the magazine, such as the defence of Sacco and Vanzetti; Heartfield compiled a montage of letters as part of the struggle against Paragraph 218 (the section of the constitution banning abortion which was the target of a major KPD campaign).

The question of campaigning, of course, shifts the focus of attention from matters of organization to the political focus and direction of *AIZ*. The year 1928 marked the final maturing of *AIZ* in its mass form, and saw a change of editor and the KPD's shift to the 'Third Period' line, so I have chosen to look at the publication from then onwards. Overall, while it is true to say that the paper moved closer to the KPD line and reflected both the general communist ideology and the party's immediate political needs, it is notable that it showed greater moderation in language and tone than did the party press. Thus, in the 52 issues produced in 1928 we do not find any use of the term 'social fascist', and attacks on the SPD in general are fairly muted at the outset, although denunciation of *Land* governments, in particular that of Prussia, are fairly sharp.

Concern with the SPD's role within Germany was often linked with concern about the growing risk of war, particularly since the question of fresh military construction in Germany (pocket battleship 'B') was one of the major political issues of the year. In general, this political material was woven into the news and current affairs coverage. Thus, for example, if we look at issue 13, we find that a report on communications and transport innovations is linked with the recurrent theme of the military threat posed by technological advance: 'in our capitalist world, highly developed technology combined with 'planes, poison gas, ammunition and a mechanized army will result in genocide.' The next issue continues the theme with a report on the cruise of warship *Emden* and 'its propaganda voyage for north German imperialism', a Heartfield montage of Admiral Zenker and new warships.

The SPD, and in particular its role in various *Länder* governments, comes in for criticism throughout the year. Issue 14, in a report on the system of justice headlined 'Murder, Suicide, Accident', concentrated on the Prussian police and their SPD president. This material was part of a campaign for an amnesty for political prisoners, the failure of which provided a further supply of



ammunition for the next issue. The accusation was that: 'The Social Democrat *Reichstagfaktion* had, though the defeat of political amnesty, failed to convict the right-wing *putschists*, but continued to hold 325 proletarian prisoners.' This attack, while concentrating on the parliamentary leadership, can be seen as the opening shot in a much more extensive campaign denouncing the SPD for treachery. Issue 16 included a generalized attack on the SPD president in Hesse: 'The Social Democratic President, a friend of Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig of Hesse, betrayed the working class by giving subsidies to the church . . . the workers, and not only those in Offenbach, will wage the same hard battle against the government of the grand duke-loving president as against Social Democratic coalition politics in general.'

The May Day issue, number 17, returned to the theme of SPD responsibility for the police under the headline 'The Gents who once Celebrated the First of May Command the Police Forces Today.' It was continued with a Heartfield montage featuring a line up of police presidents, prominent amongst them Zörgiebel, 'who emanated from social democratic ranks [but] who trains his team for battle with the plebs.' As the election campaign hotted up, these denunciations of the SPD for its role in the repression of the workers' movement intensified. The theme was continued and generalized after the election, with attacks on the Austrian SPD for expelling Georg Lukacs and Bela Kun, and on Albert Thomas in France for war-mongering. Münzenberg himself, writing about the Comintern Congress in July (issue 26), continued the argument and took it on to the theoretical level.

The SPD government, however, did make some concessions by freeing Max Holz, a well known guerrilla leader from Saxony, and abandoning the treason trial against *AIZ* contributor and poet Johannes Becher. Attacks on the SPD moderated during this period, although this may well have been the result of the factional struggle inside the KPD over the new direction adopted by the Comintern Congress (see Degras, 1971: 550–71. Münzenberg may have had private reservations, as Gross claims, but he was a firm supporter, in public at least, of the Neumann-Thälmann *Zentrale*.)

The same period saw *AIZ* remedy a striking omission: issue 30 carried the first of three reports on fascism in Italy. However, in November, issue 44 carried a two-page retrospective of the ten-year history of the republic, arguing:

...the judges are worse than under the Emperor, industry governs more potently than before the war, the Junkers are there as always and the church celebrates victory after victory . . . with the help of the Social Democrats we kept the same police commissars; we changed the facade but the shop stayed the same.

The great contrast with the failures of the SPD's Weimar offspring was of course the USSR, and *AIZ* spent many pages extolling its virtues. Even much of the sports coverage was of Russian-organized events, for example the report in issue 10 of the *Winterspartakade* in Moscow.

More centrally, the magazine was concerned to present the economic achievements of the USSR and to counter reports in the bourgeois press. Issue 11, for example, replied to the charges of one Dr. Schmitz, writing in the *Münchener Illustrierte* of construction failures in southern Russia, with glowing reports of housing estates and pictures of the new Odessa theatre. Issue 18 reported on the achievements in Kirgistan, and the following one contrasted the happy lot of Russian peasants with that of their German counterparts, cowering under the threat of the landlord. Issue 21 carried a two-page article on civil aviation in the Soviet Union. In fact, every issue published in 1928 contained some material about the USSR — from street theatre and worker-photographers to, inevitably, Stalin himself. His fiftieth birthday in December was the signal for his picture to be run on the cover and for pages of material in his honour.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the political role of *AIZ* was limited to its direct political coverage: as the use of Soviet sports material suggests, the magazine aimed to give every aspect of life a political edge. The report on Hamburg, in issue 6, provides a good example: it gives a systematic picture of the lives of two opposed classes: 'slums' are contrasted with 'elegant homes', and 'hard-working sailors' are contrasted with the 'high-living bourgeoisie'. The Hanseatic history of the city is used to illustrate the part played by workers in building its wealth. The range of industries covered in this way was very wide, ranging from those in which there were strike actions to report, such as mining, chemicals and steel, through reports of industrial accidents and train crashes which were blamed on 'the greed for higher dividends, higher profits, at the expense of safety' (issue 26), to human interest stories about people doing unusual jobs. In Issue 40, for example, there was a story about 'Rastelly the Juggler' which showed how 'a master of his craft works long hours for little wages.' The same theme was

taken up in the next issue, which commented on circus workers in general:

their job is one of great toil and hardship, where the length of the working day is seldom discussed. The moment the circus management thinks it necessary, workers must be available for any kind of work. Only by political co-operation with the proletarian worker can there be realistic hope in the battle for better conditions.

History, of course, was a natural subject for this kind of approach: issue 1 started a series of studies of the revolutionary workers' movement with an article on Lassalle. Scientific and technical questions might seem a less likely area for *AIZ*'s characteristic class perspective and agitational style, but even a report on the *DIN* (German Standards Bureau) in issue 16 found a need for the 'lightening of the workers' load' and condemned the 'bureaucrats' heartless attitude.' Clothing, too, was part of the class struggle; the women's page of issue 5 gave hints about how to make sports dresses for proletarian women, since: 'sports dress should not be a bourgeois prerogative.'

One of the consequences of running this broad range of material was that, according to Willmann, *AIZ* enjoyed a measure of immunity from the increasing censorship of left-wing publications: 'the unique format of its reports and essays by intellectuals made it difficult for the Weimar authorities to forbid it' (1975: 84). So, for example, Kisch could write, in issue 39, a short story about a 'Lifebelt on a Little Bridge', discussing the uses to which it could be put, for example in cases of people driven to suicide by capitalist society, and mention only in passing the explosive political point that this was the bridge from which the body of Rosa Luxemburg was thrown in 1919. And J.R. Becher, writing under the pseudonym 'Theobald Tiger', could fill *AIZ* with material of a distinctly subversive nature but in poetic form.

This relative immunity became crucial as conflicts grew in 1929. When *Die Rote Fahne* was banned in the wake of the battles in Wedding on May Day, *AIZ* escaped closure and was able to carry photo-reports of police attacks in issue 20 and, in later issues, report on the KPD-initiated committee of inquiry, whose backers also included prominent *AIZ* writers like Kisch, Alfons Goldschmidt and Otto Nagel (Willmann, 1975: 84).

If *AIZ* was by now fairly well established, it was also the case that

it would still have to cope with some sharp changes in the outside world. Economic and social crisis, together with a rapid rise in the activity, membership and votes of the NSDAP, faced the entire left with new challenges. *AIZ*'s response to the rise of the nazis, and its attitude to the KPD initiatives in this period, reveal the complex tensions between Münzenberg, the KPD leadership and the magazine's editorial collective. Since the policy pursued by the KPD during turned out to be a horrible disaster, nobody today defends it with any enthusiasm, and retrospective claims to opposition, such as Gross makes for Münzenberg, have to be treated with a certain scepticism. However, the text of *AIZ* and other Münzenberg publications reveals some of the differences in their contemporary public manifestations.

*AIZ* denounced the nazis, who were usually characterized as 'thugs' and 'bandits' rather than as a serious social force. If we examine the issues for early 1931, when the nazis were a rising force, we find a curious combination of denunciation of the NSDAP and a tendency to call almost anything 'fascist'. Issue 1 reported the dismissal of Hans Meyer from the Bauhaus under the headline 'Bauhaus on its Way to Fascism'. The next issue reported at some length, on the 'Pictures of the Week' page, the formation of a new KPD fighting organization to replace the banned Red Front Fighters. Issue three reported the wave of strikes and lock-outs under the headline 'Burning Ruhr', and saw: 'the massive police intervention as a new step on the way to a fascist dictatorship ... why else would police chief Severing in Prussia and Meyer in Bockum transform the Ruhr on the first day of the strike into a military encampment?' Issue four linked fascism and the church in a discussion of Paragraph 218: 'there is broad agreement between the wishes of the pope and the demands of the NSDAP.' The same issue also carried two pages of photographs of the '65 worker-editors behind bars.'

On the other hand, the Pictures of the Week page carried frequent reports of distinctively nazi atrocities: most had photos of workers killed by them. Issue 6, for example, contrasted the pictures of 'two non-party workers killed' by the nazis with a picture of Göbbels addressing a nazi meeting. Issue 7 had nazi victims contrasted with Göbbels in his new car, while issue 12 put together photos of nazi marchers and nazi victims, as well as a report of an anti-fascist congress in Berlin. Issue 13 carried more pictures under the text: 'Murderers and attackers of workers ... the bandits are not

satisfied, now they shoot defenceless workers.' The next issue reported the funeral of the worker Henning, who had been murdered by nazis. All this presented the nazis as thugs and social outcasts, not as a serious threat within society.

By the middle of the year, however, explanations of the social roots of fascism had begun to appear, often under the signature of Alfred Kurella. In issue 20, he wrote: 'Fascism is not a phenomenon implanted by terrorism and supported at the point of bayonets, but a conviction of the middle classes that have been bribed with privileges.' Even so, the accounts of the appeal of fascism stressed its demagogic aspects rather than providing any real analysis. For example, in issue 27 there was a report on the economic state of the petit bourgeoisie which contained the following optimistic prognosis:

If the frivolous demagogic agitation of the National Socialists and the present leagues and associations of the middle classes, with their muddled unenlightened brochures, still fog up the little man's vision, the petit bourgeois realizes more and more that it has to take up the fight for its existence by joining with those whose misery springs from much the same causes.

It is not until issue 44 that there is a really comprehensive report on National Socialism as a political threat, with the space and stylistic treatment *AIZ* reserved for serious political movements. A three-page report of an attack by the SA on workers in Brunswick carried a detailed pictorial presentation of where and when the attacks were mounted and who their victims were, together with the story of their families and details of the SA troops involved. The report linked this attack with others, ending with the warning: 'What happens in Brunswick is nothing new. It is simply the continuation of the trail of blood which is behind every step of the National Socialist murder gangs.' Although characteristically, the report linked the activities of the NSDAP to the political stance of the Brunswick Land government, it also pointed to the growing institutional and cultural base of the fascists.

On a general level, therefore *AIZ* seems to have shared some of the KPD's elisions and emphases, but with regard to at least one major tactical line the latter pursued at the time — the notorious 'Red Referendum' — it does not appear to have followed the party line regardless. Propaganda for this issue, about a nazi initiative to unseat the Social Democratic *Land* government of Prussia by way of

a popular vote, is in fact conspicuously absent. In general, coverage in the run-up to the 9 August vote was dominated by glowing reports of economic progress in the USSR — to which the KPD presumably could not object — and economic reporting concentrated on the steady immiseration of the proletariat. Issue 30, published just before the poll, did not mention the party line, restricting itself to a familiar type of attack on the Social Democrats in general as warmongers:

The Social Democracy will participate in the coming war, for whose preparation it had played an active part with all its physical and ideological means. It will do this with the same national chauvinism and 'Hurrah Patriotism' as it did in the last war.

So far as *AIZ* was concerned, then, the evidence would seem to support Gross' contention that, 'from 1931 onwards Münzenberg found himself more and more in opposition to party policy' and had, together with his editorial team, frequent confrontations with Friedlander (1974: 161). It must be noted, however, that while Gross claims that this refusal to back the party line too closely was also true of his *Welt am Abend*, she states later that Münzenberg himself wrote the editorials supporting the KPD position on the referendum in his *Berlin Am Morgen*, since, with the banning of *Die Rote Fahne*, this had to act as the daily voice of the party (1974: 215).

The most sensible conclusion to draw from all this is that Münzenberg enjoyed a degree of freedom unusual in the KPD, but that he remained a loyal party member bound by the norms of discipline. Maintenance of this position probably involved a great deal of tortuous negotiation of a formal or informal kind, and in this propaganda for the USSR, another great *AIZ* staple, probably played a useful role.

The character of this material usually differed little from the examples we have given from 1928, although the five-year plan — now well under way — and reports of its shortcomings in the bourgeois press, gave a new intensity to the reporting. In this task, the depth of the crisis in Germany provided *AIZ* journalists with ready copy. Issue 28, for example, argued:

The crisis in the capitalist countries is getting worse and worse, new trade outlets are missing and the resistance of the colonized peoples against their imperialist exploiters is growing. In their desperation the imperialist countries are trying to prepare a war of intervention against the Soviet Union, the only country in the world which knows no hunger no oppression and no unemployment.

On at least one occasion, this propaganda for the alleged achievements of the USSR led to a public row. Issue 38 carried an eleven-page story of 'Everyday Events and Experiences of a Moscow Family'. The story of the Filipovs, attributed by some to Heartfield, apparently provoked mirth among Russian officials, such was the rosy picture it painted of Moscow life (Gross, 1974: 150). The report began at the breakfast table, inviting the reader to:

Look at what the Filipovs have on their breakfast table. This graphically shows under which priorities the Soviet state regulates its food supplies during the execution of the five year plan . . . although food rationing is still necessary they have eggs, milk, tea, bread, sausage and sugar.

This beautiful fairy story continued by following father and his two sons to an idyllic factory, while mother drops the younger child off at the kindergarten before collecting her shopping at the co-operative.

The Social Democratic press eagerly seized the opportunity to send an investigative team to try to find this wonder-family. They could find no trace of it, nor of the address given in the report: not surprisingly, they claimed the whole thing was a fabrication. The controversy was so great that, in issue 45, *AIZ* admitted that: 'We unfortunately gave an incorrect address, so some readers' letters were undoubtedly returned.' However it went on to claim that 'another social democratic delegation looked foolish after having been introduced to the Filipovs.'

Whatever effect such an embarrassing episode might have had, it did not affect the overall strength of *AIZ*, for which 1931 was an immensely successful year; by the end of December it was claiming half a million readers. Issue 41 contained figures that showed that, while the bulk of the magazine's readership was unemployed, they were overwhelmingly working class. Skilled workers made up 42 percent of the total, unskilled workers 33 percent, and white collar workers 10 percent. By contrast, only 2 percent of the readership were self-employed and just 1 percent were classified as 'bureaucrats'.

This success, however, stood in sharp contrast to the worsening external situation. In the next twelve months, *AIZ's* political difficulties multiplied. In July, von Papen carried out his coup d'état in Prussia and *Vorwärts* found itself banned, alongside *Die Rote Fahne*. In September, it was *AIZ's* turn; issues 47 and 51 were

confiscated by the police, the former for Heartfield's montage of von Papen, the latter for its coverage of the fifteenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. Münzenberg fled into exile on 27 February 1933, using the willingly loaned passport of a young paper seller. On 5 March, 'the offices of the IAH, the publishing companies and all the newspapers belonging to the Münzenberg organization were closed and the buildings occupied by the police' (Willmann, 1975: 224).

A new *AIZ* was set up in Prague, which was the centre of KPD exile activities. Circumstances were, of course, very different. Although some of the former contributors were able to escape and continue their work — Heartfield, for example, got out of his Berlin home just before the SS arrived — they were forced to adopt new methods. According to Hermann Leupold, the flow of pictures from worker-correspondents inside Germany dried up and '[s]o it became necessary to use the pictures sanctioned by Göbbels and to put them in the service of the anti-fascist journalistic struggle' (cited in Siepmann, 1977: 176). This led to a heavier emphasis on montage, where very short texts can condense maximum information into the minimum of space. Willmann says that while the total circulation in the Prague days never exceeded 12,000, it was, in part at least, smuggled across the German border in 'Persil and pudding packets, journals and advertising brochures, by couriers posing as tourists, sportsmen and housewives.' With the 1935 change of line by the Comintern to the 'Popular Front', *AIZ*, which by now was very much a party publication, changed its name to the *Volks-Illustrierte*, under which title it continued publication until its final dissolution in 1938.

What lay behind this remarkable story? A large part of any answer obviously hinges on the special talents of Münzenberg. He was evidently a man possessed of quite exceptional organizational abilities who, in addition, had the right political connections both inside and outside the KPD. This allowed him to pursue a number of projects which did not fit directly with the tactical objectives of the KPD: anybody who could, with a few telephone calls, round up a list of sponsors headed by Albert Einstein, clearly had qualities which could excuse the odd lapse. According to Pinkus, Münzenberg had a theoretical grasp of the tasks of the press which caused him to justify his independence from the tactical imperatives of the party line: 'Münzenberg differentiated very clearly between the different levels of propaganda-enlightenment-agitation and the inter-party arguments, and for him the questions of practical mass effectiveness ultimately had priority' (cited in Siepmann, 1977: 155).



This cannot, however, be the whole story. The Comintern and Münzenberg finally parted ways, and he was involved in so many projects during his time as a leader of the KPD (he was a Reichstag deputy) that we cannot assume either that the party regarded him as completely indispensable or that he was solely responsible for the success of *AIZ*. The format of the magazine must go a long way towards explaining its success. The frequent use of photo-documentary and photo-montage material were its most distinctive aspects, in common with its competitors. In the end, *AIZ*'s success rested upon a working-class readership which wanted something other than that provided by the bourgeois press. *AIZ* reported the squalour and misery of workers' lives, material that the competition would dismiss as uninteresting; in addition, it represented their hobbies and interests. The inescapable conclusion is that there was a large audience of workers who not only enjoyed the magazine's ideological explicitness, but also the type of involvement required to interpret reality through the characteristic pictorial form. The origins of its success are best summed up in the comments of one reader quoted by Siepmann (1977: 155):

One comes home from work and on reading one's *AIZ* finds the pictures and short reports most absorbing and so simple to understand. They can be read with a minimum of physical and mental exertion and at the same time give the maximum background to political life.

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The only complete run of *AIZ* I have been able to locate is in the Berliner Staatsbibliothek, and I would like to thank the staff for their co-operation.

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