CHAPTER 8

The Independent Left

German to English

Revolutionaries tend to overestimate economic difficulties in order to lend a sense of objectivity to revolutionary solutions.¹

Mattick solicited advice about his writing from just about everyone he knew. Breaking out of the confines of the German-American socialist community continued to be his priority. With the Federation of Unemployed Workers and the United Workers Party, this had taken place. But indigenous left and liberal publications were another story. During all of 1933, only a handful of English-language pieces had appeared—in the Workers League News, the IWW’s Industrial Worker, and Workers Age, the latter through his Federation contacts. Almost everything he wrote continued to be printed in Der Freidenker. Help was needed if Mattick was to have any measure of success, and a slew of people came to his assistance.

Kristen Svanum offered to edit and translate several draft essays that Svanum referred to as ‘shockingly bad’. Mattick’s knowledge of English usage still had many gaps, and Svanum—an immigrant himself—explained that the expression ‘from top to bottom’ was not the equivalent of ‘from the top down, from the bottom up’, the title of one of the pieces.² He told Mattick that cover letters needed to be equally well-written and that he should name names—that connections were important. Ludwig Lore, the last editor of New Yorker Volkszeitung before it collapsed, offered to contact publishers on Mattick’s behalf.³ Lore had only begun to publish in English some eighteen months earlier, even though he had emigrated decades before. Based on what Mattick sent him, Lore was pessimistic about the chances for success.

Max Nomad, another non-native speaker, gave Mattick many practical recommendations. Mattick was familiar with Nomad’s work from having defended him in the pages of Der Freidenker against Communist Party critics. Nomad had just released Rebels and Renegades, with its portraits of

¹ Grossmann 1969, p. 127.
² Svanum’s essay seems not to have appeared; Kristen Svanum to Mattick, 25 December 1932; Kristen Svanum to Mattick, 10 January 1933; Weiland Herzfelde to Mattick, 19 June 1934.
³ Ludwig Lore to Mattick, 11 July 1933.
well-known radicals. It was this book, Nomad explained, that opened the world of publishing to him. Magazines were reluctant to showcase unknown authors without already-established followings. Nomad also gave specific recommendations—that an article cannot start with a quote from Marx and that the thesis statement must be up-front and in plain language, preferably with a concrete example. A literary agent and translator, if he could afford them, would help. The stuff Mattick published in *Der Freidenker* was too long and too theoretical for American magazines.4 The photographer, Fred Korth, also a German émigré, suggested to Mattick that he diversify his portfolio, another suggestion that Mattick followed.5 With Nomad, Mattick reciprocated by providing a list of contacts for his extended trip to Europe: Korsch (still assumed to be in Berlin), Pannekoek (near Amsterdam), Grossmann (Paris), Hoerle (Mallorca), Kesser (Zurich), Herzelfele (Prague), Charlot Strasser (Zurich), Hugo Urbahns (Berlin), and others.6

The most important new contact was Allen Garman. It is unclear how he and Mattick were introduced, but the friendship began as an intense and mutually-supportive correspondence that only slowly transformed into something more. Six months of letter-writing, often several times per week, were needed before they exchanged personal information and photographs, and before Garman referred to him by his first name. Garman had grown up well-to-do and was college-educated. In the 1920s, he taught at a progressive private school in Washington DC, the Emerson Institute, one of the first coed institutions of its kind. He was also a linguistic *wunderkind* and native speaker of English who picked up occasional assignments as a translator during bouts of unemployment. He was thus the perfect helpmate for Mattick, precisely the person whom Nomad and Lore had encouraged him to find—a translator and marxist rolled into one. Even better, Garman had no interest in financial compensation despite his lack of employment.

Garman had once harboured literary ambitions of his own, with occasional publications of poetry and book reviews in small, overlooked magazines.7 Mattick kept him well-supplied with a steady flow of reading material—*Neue Deutsche Blätter*, his own articles in draft and published form, and poems by Oskar Kanehl. About Kanehl’s suicide, Garman penned: ‘any man who could write such poems would naturally jump out the window, just as a final point

4 Max Nomad to Mattick, 7 July 1933; Max Nomad to Mattick, 24 July 1933.
5 Fred Korth to Mattick, 8 October 1932.
6 Max Nomad to Mattick, 16 October 1933; Max Nomad to Mattick, 17 January 1934.
7 Allen Garman to Mattick, 12 May 1934.