CHAPTER 11

End of an Era

Self-Reflections

Illusions are nourished not by dreaming of the future but by thinking about the past.¹

Mattick’s world grew smaller as the war grew nearer. This meant that ‘the beautiful time’—the period in which he had devoted himself to the radical movement—‘was over’.² Every publication that had opened its pages to him between 1938–40—Modern Monthly (Modern Quarterly), Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, Der Freidenker, Rätekorrespondenz, Industrial Worker, Rote Revue, Social Frontier, The Plebs, and Proletarian Outlook—ceased to be possibilities for his work for one reason or another. Friends, too, took their leave. For the Europeans, this happened out of necessity because of actual or impending occupation. For acquaintances in the United States, it was a matter of political preference. Common ground and common bonds vanished in the rush to distinguish between democratic and fascistic forms of governance, between lesser and greater evils. For Mattick, nothing much changed in his way of thinking, but he suddenly appeared more intransigent than ever. Which system prevailed was not something that the working class determined, so why take sides?

In late 1938, Mattick tried again for a fellowship, his third attempt with the Guggenheim Foundation. This time, the Guggenheim director reached out to Korsch rather than Grossman for a conversation about the application. Like previously, Mattick proposed a colossal 200,000 word tome (500 pages), albeit with an entirely new topic. Korsch thought that both aspects, the length and the change in direction, would hurt his chances.³ Horkheimer also deemed the proposal too ambitious, and he recommended that Mattick concentrate on either the history of socialist ideas or the principles of a socialist economy,

¹ Mattick, ‘Long Live the War’, Living Marxism, Fall 1940, p. 44.
² Buckmiller 1976, p. 58.
³ Karl Korsch to Mattick, 23 December 1938 (Gesamtausgabe); Karl Korsch to Mattick, 5 January 1939 (Gesamtausgabe). Korsch, Guggenheim Recommendation, 30 December 1938 (iish: Korsch).
but not both. That the Frankfurt School journal during 1938 and 1939 assigned Mattick to review a series of books and monographs that dealt with New Deal economic policies may have been an attempt to boost his chances. Mattick asked Paul Douglas, the University of Chicago economist whose work he reviewed, and Charles Easton Rothwell, with his newly-minted doctorate, for recommendations. A further request went to the director of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, to whom Mattick offered several manuscripts.

When news of the latest rejection arrived, Korsch told Mattick in no uncertain terms that it had always been hopeless. Less than ten percent of applicants were funded, and Mattick fit none of the most important criteria—no books or book contracts, no academic titles or affiliations, no allegiance to a recognisable oppositional group, and a publication record mostly confined to obscure left-wing journals. Korsch advised him to quit wasting his time. He worried that Mattick sought defeat as a means of confirmation, a tried-and-true pattern for sectarians. None of this advice, however, deterred Korsch from submitting his own Guggenheim application the following year. Mattick, in the meantime, persisted with further solicitations to the Brookings Institution and the American Guild for German Cultural Freedom, all for naught.

Mattick’s stipend from the Federal Writers Project ended when new regulations required citizenship for eligibility. Frieda had applied already for citizenship in June 1939, and as Paul lost his position, the Matticks somehow finagled it so that she could assume his appointment. Hired as a Senior Clerk that September, she translated and summarised German publications. This was a matter of great pride for her, since it meant an independent existence,