Franz Mehring

**Literary Review of Hermann Schlüter’s**

*Die Anfänge der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung in Amerika*

Comrade Schlüter, the founder of our party archive, who under [Bismarck’s] law against the socialists fought in the front line, and who, for a number of years already, has been editing our party organ in New York, has in this work made a very valuable contribution to the history of the modern working-class movement, which he knows more intimately than most. With amazing diligence, and with an

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2 [Translator’s note: Hermann Schlüter (1851–1919) was a member of the editorial staff of the *Sozialdemokrat* in Zurich and London and organized the archives of the German Social-Democratic Party. In 1889 he was forced by Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Laws to migrate to the United States. He became the editor of the main German organ of the Debsian Socialist Party, the *New Yorker Volkszeitung*. (On Schlüter’s early biography see pp. 21 to 29 of Paul Mayer, ‘Die Geschichte des sozialdemokratischen Parteiarchivs und das Schicksal des Marx-Engels-Nachlasses’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, Vols. VI/VII, (1966/67), pp. 5–198.) Schlüter was a frequent correspondent of Engels and an intimate friend of the leader of the First International in the US, Friedrich Sorge. In the chapter of his autobiography dealing with his exile in New York, Trotsky states: ‘In the German federation old Schlüter, the editor-in-chief of the *Volkszeitung*, and a comrade in arms of Hillquit’s, was more and more yielding his influence to the young editor Ludwig Lore, who shared our views.’ (Trotsky, *My Life*, Ch. 22, ‘New York’). The year before his death, we find him writing for the organ of the Socialist Party left wing, *The Class Struggle*, edited by the future leaders of early American Communism (Hermann Schlüter, ‘Marx and the International,’ *The Class Struggle*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (May-June 1918), pp. 271–88). Schlüter retained his post as editor of the *Volkszeitung* until his
even more amazing good fortune, he has been able to gather the literary remains of the German working-class movement in the United States, and especially in New York, up to the Civil War, and in that way has been able to preserve a wealth of primary sources that, without his painstaking care, would otherwise have been lost forever.

That would have been all the more regrettable because, as Schlüter rightly puts it, it is doubtful whether there is another city in the world offering such a classical context for the observation of the different stages that the proletarian struggle for emancipation had to go through as the city of New York. It is like the physicist, who looks at the natural phenomena where they appear in their most precise form and untouched by disturbing influences. Those disturbing influences have incessantly stood in the way of the normal development of the modern working-class movement in Germany. Thus, for instance, during the 1850s, the weight of reaction deprived the proletariat even of the memory of its independent movement; during the 1860s and 1870s, the bourgeois struggles for freedom tore apart the young working-class party for more than a decade; during the 1880s, the law against the socialists forced the irresistibly growing stream into a underground course; and right to the present, a very significant part of the forces of the proletariat has to be employed in fighting for demands that the bourgeois classes should have accomplished a long time ago, but which they have ignominiously betrayed.