

Fact or Fiction? German Writer A.E. Johann, a Winnipeg Communist, and the Depression in the Canadian West, 1931-1932

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RESEARCH NOTES / NOTES DE RECHERCHE

Fact or Fiction? German Writer A.E. Johann, a Winnipeg Communist, and the Depression in the Canadian West, 1931-1932

Lawrence D. Stokes

BETWEEN THE MID-1920s and his death in 1996 likely no foreign author writing in a language other than English or French published more about Canada than the German A.E. Johann (the principal *nom de plume* of Alfred Ernst Johann Wollschläger). Beginning with his diary *cum* travelogue *Mit zwanzig Dollar in den wilden Westen*,¹ which recounted his experiences during twelve months in 1927-28 with only twenty dollars to start in his pocket working as a labourer on farms and in logging camps across the prairies and northern British Columbia as well as being unemployed in Vancouver, Johann wrote at least eighteen volumes of fiction and

¹A.E. Johann, *Mit zwanzig Dollar in den wilden Westen: Schicksale aus Urwald, Steppe, Busch und Stadt* [*With Twenty Dollars in the Wild West: Stories from the Primeval Forest, Prairie, Bush and City*] (Berlin 1928). The original hardcover edition was brought out by Germany's largest pre-Nazi publishing firm, Ullstein Verlag, which also employed Johann as a foreign correspondent on the staff of its flagship liberal newspaper, the *Vossische Zeitung*; together with its revised 1980 paperback version around 200,000 copies of the book have been printed.

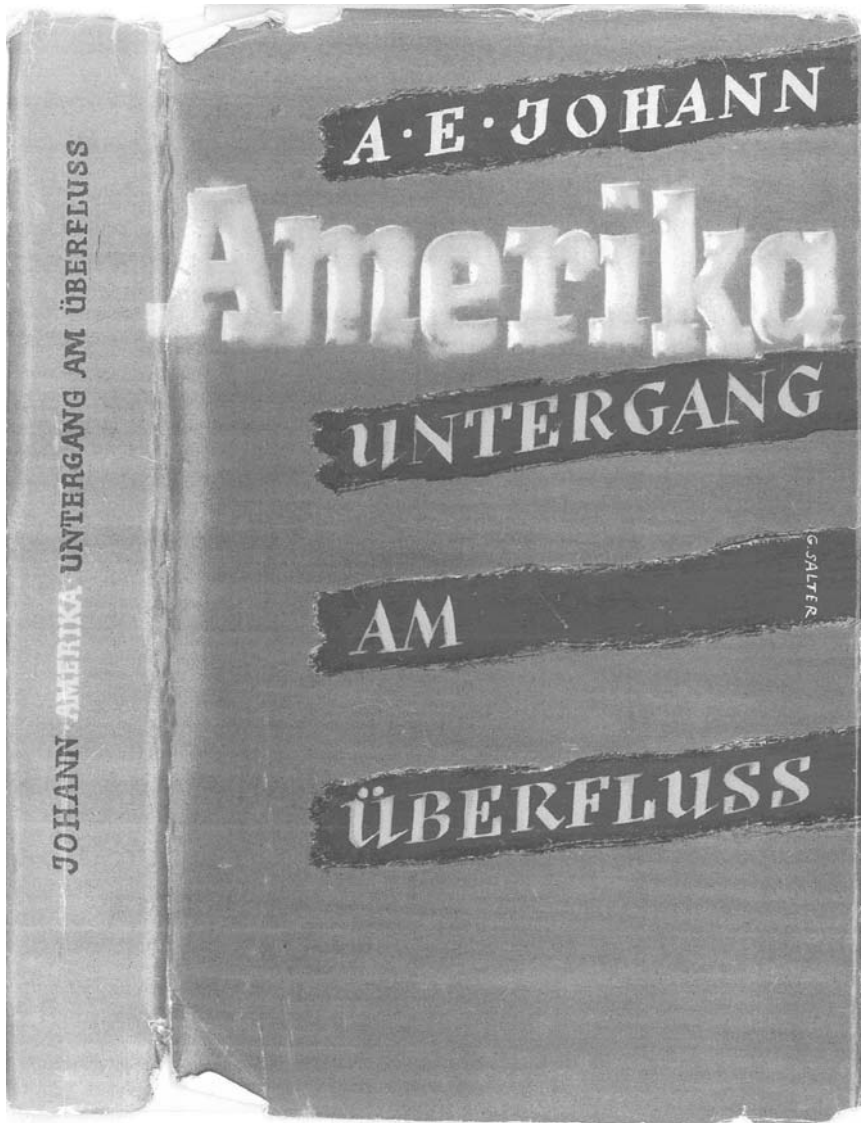
Lawrence D. Stokes, "Fact or Fiction? German Writer A.E. Johann, a Winnipeg Communist, and the Depression in the Canadian West, 1931-1932," *Labour/Le Travail*, 57 (Spring 2006), 131-42.



A.E. Johann as a farm-hand in western Canada, 1927-28. Source: A.E. Johann, *Mit zwanzig Dollar in den wilden Westen*, Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 1928; frontispiece.

nonfiction along with numerous articles for newspapers and magazines in Germany concerning Canadian themes. In their original and post-1945 revised editions his books alone appeared in an estimated total of over 1,250,000 copies.² It is surely no exaggeration to surmise that several generations of readers in A.E. Johann's homeland, prospective tourists and emigrants but also economic and political deci-

²Wolfgang Lohmeyer, "A.E. Johann — in der Welt zu Hause," *German-Canadian Yearbook*, 6 (1981), 225-37. Publication figures for the bibliography compiled by Hartmut Fröschle at the end of Lohmeyer's article were provided by Johann himself.



Source: A.E. Johann, *Amerika: Untergang am Überfluss*, Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 1932; dustjacket.

sion-makers alike, obtained a large part of their knowledge of Canada's history, geography, people, and way of life from the works of this prolific journalist, novelist, and travel writer.

Although most of Johann's nonfictional books were largely anecdotal in form (Germanists classify such travel diaries as a species of *belles lettres*),³ one volume can plausibly claim to be at least a semi-scholarly study of its subject. Completed in May 1932 and entitled *Amerika: Untergang am Überfluss* [*America: Ruined by Excess*], it was dedicated to the author's distinguished former sociology teacher at the University of Berlin, Professor Alfred Vierkandt, and also concluded with a bibliography of 37 primary and published sources consulted by Johann.⁴ None of these are specifically cited in footnotes; however, in particular the opening chapter on the Canadian Wheat Pool bristles with statistical data evidently taken from its annual Directors' Reports from 1927 to 1931.⁵ And while the term *Amerika* usually connotes in German the United States alone, Johann devotes the first 65 pages of his text to Canadian topics before proceeding to analyse at much greater length the contemporary situation in the US.

That concerned above all the impact of the Depression upon both countries with the focus on two related aspects of the economic crisis: the extent of unemployment together with the change in living conditions experienced by the jobless, especially among the rural population, and the concomitant growth of communism in North America.⁶ Besides the printed materials listed in the book it was based upon a second trip to the continent by Johann during 1931-32. The success of his initial volume on Canada prompted his publisher this time to finance his travels generously, which he therefore undertook driving an almost new "Model A" Ford purchased when he arrived in Montréal. With this reliable vehicle and enough money to stay in hotels whenever he chose, Johann set out on a 20,000-kilometre tour that once more took him to western Canada as far as the Pacific coast and then southwards from Vancouver in a circle around the US before reaching Montréal

³See Guy Stern, "Die Thematik 'Flucht und Exil' innerhalb und ausserhalb des Dritten Reiches: Eine Konfrontation," in Wolfgang Elfe, James Hardin, and Günther Holst, eds., *Deutsche Exilliteratur, Literatur im Dritten Reich: Akten des II. Exilliteratur-Symposiums der University of South Carolina* (Bern 1979), 62.

⁴The book, which sold 12,000 copies (the last printing appeared in 1933), was also published by Ullstein; after a brief period of military service at the end of World War I, Johann (who was born in 1901) studied geography, sociology, and Lutheran theology at the Humboldt University, followed by employment with the Prussian State Bank and as a bond trader on the Berlin stock exchange before obtaining a freelance reporter's position in the Ullstein press empire. Lohmeyer, "A.E. Johann," 225-26, 235.

⁵Johann, *Amerika: Untergang am Überfluss* (Berlin 1932), 5, 15-21, 254-56; see also Johann, *Mit zwanzig Dollar*, 111; and Johann's memoirs, *Dies wilde Jahrhundert* [*This Turbulent Century*] (Munich and Vienna 1989), 270, 326-31.

⁶Johann, *Amerika*, 10.

again early in 1932.⁷ His account of this (for the time) unusual motoring expedition, and the socio-political conclusions he drew from it and from his reading for the German public, appeared in print later the same year.

Johann prepared for his second North American visit by joining the Social Democratic Party of Germany [SPD] at the beginning of 1931. He subsequently explained to a nazified writers' organization that he only did so (the SPD had meanwhile been banned) in order to improve his chances of obtaining information about working conditions in industry and agriculture. His previous sojourn in Canada had taught him, he said, that observers carrying some sort of recommendation — in this case who could present themselves as a party "comrade" — would be in a better position to secure a glimpse of the things that interested them from behind the scenes.⁸ And, indeed, one Canadian communist leader whom Johann interviewed addressed him in just this fashion.⁹ Yet, in light of the declared purpose of his trip to determine the possibility of a communist party assuming power in either the United States or Canada, it is curious that he did not become a member instead of the German counterpart of these, the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* [KPD], which moreover was engaged at that time in ruthless ideological warfare with its working-class rivals whom it regularly denounced as "social fascists" in league with the bourgeoisie.¹⁰

But that is not the most significant discrepancy involving the Communist Party of Canada [CPC] found in Johann's report on his North American experience. After analysing the reasons for the disaster which had befallen prairie grain growers (he attributed it primarily to their concentration upon a single crop without the protection afforded by a world-wide planned market for wheat), the measures adopted by different levels of government to cope with the resulting unemployment (he sharply criticized the policy of putting the jobless to work repairing or building roads "on which at many times of the year only one car each week will drive along!"), and the prospects of German immigrants obtaining relief in a country that had suddenly become "hard and repelling, even hostile" to every newcomer, Johann declared that Canada's situation nevertheless differed fundamentally from

⁷Johann, *Dies wilde Jahrhundert*, 80-89; also Johann, *Amerika*, 11-12.

⁸Bundesarchiv Berlin, R56 (records of the Reich Chamber of Literature), B0233, p. 2558, Alfred Wollschläger to the *Reichsverband Deutscher Schriftsteller* [League of German Authors], 23 December 1933. As proof of the value of this stratagem, Johann claimed that *Amerika* was the first book published in Germany to present a picture of the "rotten situation" existing in the North American trade-union and working-class movements; moreover, he added, in obvious exculpation of what had become by then his politically disadvantageous behaviour, that he had never attended an SPD meeting, had only paid dues for about three months, and had quit the party shortly after completing his book.

⁹Johann, *Amerika*, 59.

¹⁰See John Manley, "Canadian Communism, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period': The Workers' Unity League, 1929-1935," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 5 (1984, new series), 170.

that which prevailed across Europe. Most of the Canadian-born jobless, he wrote, regarded their plight as merely a piece of personal bad luck rather than the result of an irreversible breakdown of the existing economic system. Accordingly, their optimistic outlook for the future was still intact despite often having been without work for a long while. "People on the [North American] side of the Atlantic do not actually realize how bad things already are for them. The art of closing one's eyes to uncomfortable and unwelcome matters is fortunately well developed [there]." That was why, aside from a few strikes in labour camps under communist influence because of pay rates below those usual for construction work, there were no serious conflicts in Canada arising from mass unemployment.¹¹

These twin observations, on the one hand, of a marked optimism among unemployed Canadians in contrast to Europeans concerning the likelihood of finding a job once again, and, on the other, of the general quiescence of local communists in the face of this attitude, were confirmed by Johann's discussions with adherents of the CPC. The third chapter of the book carries the heading "*Genosse* [Comrade] Wachter" and comprises just seven pages. It recounts his meeting at the Ukrainian Labour Temple in Winnipeg with a group of activists from every corner of Europe whom he regaled with stories of his recent adventures in the Soviet Union, such as visiting Lenin's tomb.¹² He discovered that several of them had been trained there, from which he concluded: "They managed to convince me for the first time that today the direct influence of Moscow indeed reaches all around the world, and everywhere an increasing number of persons is to be found who have been educated in its party and propaganda schools for the revolutionary struggle according to the particular requirements of their home countries." Johann, in turn, was quizzed about the current political situation in Germany to which his interlocutors responded "with the same well-drilled contempt" for the SPD as did their opposite numbers in Berlin. One of the ethnic sections within the Canadian party consisted of Germans,¹³ and it was their chief who introduced Johann to the main figure among a half-dozen men conferring in a back room of the Temple.

This was "Comrade Wachter" and, according to Johann, the occasion of their encounter was the strike by coal miners around Estevan in southern Saskatchewan which took place during September 1931. The German author claimed that, al-

¹¹Johann, *Amerika*, 21-6, 28-30, 36-54, 62-6, 206. He did note, though, that in cities like Vancouver "during the winter of 1931-32 the extreme left-wing political movement was advancing with great strides."

¹²By 1931 the organization to which the building belonged was officially called the Ukrainian Labour Farm Temple Association; toward the end of the 1920s Johann had travelled across Siberia following a sojourn in Moscow.

¹³Johann reported (*Amerika*, 208) that the publication figures of the radical *Deutsche Arbeiter-Zeitung* were "increasing steadily" because its capable editors "knew especially how to exploit the plight of German immigrants in Canada for the political theory they were promoting."

3. GENOSSE WACHER

In den Kohlengruben von Estevan — im Süden der mittleren kanadischen Weizenprovinz Saskatchewan — streikte die gesamte Belegschaft. Wochenlang. Die Behörden des Bezirks schwankten zwischen schlaffer Nachgiebigkeit und rigiden Energieanfällen unentschlossen hin und her. Die Besitzer der kleinen Gruben hätten sich gern mit den Streikenden geeinigt, doch machten ihnen die Herren der großen Minengesellschaften, welche unbedingt eine Herabsetzung der Löhne erzwingen wollten, stets einen Strich durch die Rechnung. An manchen Tagen konnten die Streikenden ungestört demonstrieren, an anderen, wenn die Behörden gerade ihre mutigen Stunden hatten, fuhr die Polizei auf und schoß ein wenig. Dann gab es auf beiden Seiten Verwundete, manchmal auch Tote. Die Disziplin unter den Streikenden war erstaunlich — Streikbrecher konnten die Minenherren trotz der großen Arbeitslosigkeit nirgendwo aufreiben —, erstaunlich besonders für amerikanische Verhältnisse, wo Streikbruch unter dem Schutz der staatlichen Polizei und auch der von den Unternehmern organisierten Privattruppen noch bis vor kurzem etwas Selbstverständliches war. Die offizielle Streikleitung tagte natürlich in den Minengebieten selbst; aber hinter den Kulissen wurde der Kampf von der kommunistischen Zentrale in Winnipeg aus dirigiert.

*

Irgendwo im Nordosten Winnipegs, der größten Stadt Manitobas und überhaupt der drei kanadischen Weizenprovinzen, liegt der „Ukrainian Labor Temple“. In allen größeren Städten des kanadischen Westens gibt es ukrainische „Arbeits-Tempel“, was wir vielleicht mit Gewerkschaftshäusern übersetzen würden. Die Ukrainer beweisen besondere

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Description of the 1931 coal miners' strike in Estevan, Saskatchewan. Source: Johann, *Amerika*, p. 55, ch. 3, "Comrade Wacher."

though "the official leadership of the strike naturally resided in the mining area itself, behind the scenes the struggle was directed from communist headquarters in Winnipeg."¹⁴ From there couriers were supposedly dispatched daily by freight train to Estevan with verbal orders for the strikers, thereby avoiding the danger of letters being opened or telephone conversations overheard; and when the walkout was in danger of collapsing Johann reported that dozens of reliable unemployed

¹⁴There and elsewhere in North America, according to Johann (*Amerika*, 208), Communist street-corner agitation among different ethnic groups was "astonishingly well-organized."

men were sent by the same route to serve as pickets to safeguard the mines from saboteurs. This was how the leaders in Winnipeg and the strikers kept in close contact, a connection which he judged the police knew nothing about. Otherwise they would have raided the "nest of conspirators" in the Ukrainian Temple, since "communists were almost as thoroughly outlawed in Canada as in the United States."¹⁵

Once Wachter emerged from the back room Johann took the opportunity to discuss with him the chances of the revolutionary movement triumphing in Canada. When asked how long it would take before the country went communist, Wachter is said to have replied: "Neither of us will live to experience that, Comrade Johann. That day seems to be further away in this land than anywhere else." A real revolution, he opined, could only be accomplished if it was supported by the farming population; but where were farmers more individualistic than in Canada? They had no intention of giving up, or merely sharing, their hard-won property. Johann was impressed that, unlike most of his followers, Wachter was too well informed to imagine that the Soviet experiment could simply be transferred to a place which possessed such a different socio-economic structure as did Canada. In fact, according to the communist functionary, the terrible conditions produced by the Depression were probably only temporary; in his view capitalism was not on its last legs. What was more, it was not desirable that it should abruptly collapse, since the success of the Soviet Five-Year Plan rested upon the credit and goods that only the capitalists could supply. Some day, to be sure, Wachter averred that violence would have to be applied to achieve the breakthrough of communism. At present, however, the number of those in despair of the future was neither large enough nor were they sufficiently aroused. So, concluded Johann, even an intelligent communist believed that the Depression was a passing phenomenon, a phrase (he remarked) he heard repeatedly during his travels across North America. The only solution Wachter could therefore offer for the crisis was the assurance that it would eventually disappear. "Like everyone else in Europe and America he, too, was being pushed and led [by events] rather than being himself a leader."¹⁶

Wachter was, quite clearly, a pseudonym: no person by that name existed among prominent left-wing politicians in Winnipeg during the early 1930s.¹⁷ Johann probably adopted this disguise to shield his informant from becoming a victim of the witchhunt that had been launched against leading Canadian communists shortly before the Estevan strike broke out. Notwithstanding this effort at secrecy

¹⁵Johann, *Amerika*, 55-9. Johann was possibly alluding to the arrest on 11 August 1931 of eight CPC leaders who in the following November were tried, convicted, and imprisoned under section 98 of the Criminal Code, which effectively banned the entire organization. See Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988), 118.

¹⁶Johann, *Amerika*, 59-61. The first Five-Year Plan was introduced in the Soviet Union in 1929.

¹⁷See Alexander Brian McKillop, "Citizen and Socialist: The Ethics of Political Winnipeg 1919-1935," MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1970.

he does provide a number of clues in his text which, taken together, allow a virtually certain identification of Comrade Wachter. Thus, in physical appearance, ethnicity, and character he is described as “a small, unpretentious man” from a Mennonite background whom even his enemies respected for his “sagacity and personal integrity.” In addition he was a partner in a recently founded cooperative dairy and — most tellingly of all — Johann mentions that he ran as a labour candidate for mayor of Winnipeg in January 1932 when he “was able to win a surprisingly large share of the vote — by Canadian standards.”¹⁸

Each and every one of these characteristics applies to only a single known individual: veteran Winnipeg communist Jacob Penner.¹⁹ Born outside Riga in 1880 the son of orthodox Mennonites of German ancestry, Penner broke with his parents’ religious faith when he became involved in the underground Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903, the year before his family emigrated to Canada.²⁰ He was a co-founder of both the Canadian Socialist (1906) and Communist (1921) Parties, and gained 3,496 votes — out of around 50,000 cast — in the 1932 Winnipeg mayoralty election before becoming an alderman in the city the following year. Penner held that position for over two decades, interrupted only by his internment during World War II, until his retirement in 1962 and death three years afterwards. At the time he was interviewed by Johann, the Manitoba Provincial Police considered Penner the head of the CPC in that province; consequently, after it was banned later in 1931 “there was an attempt to conceal more effectively the operation of the organization and to protect key members ... such as ... Jacob Penner, from arrest and deportation.”²¹ As for his upright personality, the widely admired New Democratic Party Member of the Canadian parliament, Stanley Knowles, who sat with Penner for a short period on the Winnipeg city council, recalled that he had great respect for his erstwhile opponent “because one felt that he never let down his determination to achieve a Communist regime someday; meantime, he was an awfully good alderman.... He seemed almost in two compartments. On the one hand, there was this

¹⁸ Johann, *Amerika*, 58.

¹⁹ McKillop, “Citizen and Socialist,” 81-6, 96-8, 105-6, 111-12, 166-7; see also A.B. McKillop, “The Communist as Conscience: Jacob Penner and Winnipeg Civic Politics, 1934-1935,” in A.R. McCormack and Ian Macpherson, eds., *Cities in the West: Papers of the Western Canada Urban History Conference — University of Winnipeg, October 1974* (Ottawa 1975), 181-209; Donald Avery, “Ethnic Loyalties and Proletarian Revolution: A Case Study of Communist Political Activity in Winnipeg, 1923-1936,” in Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto 1981), 73-4, 81-4, 86, 87, 91; and Penner, *Canadian Communism*, 91, 122-3, 185-6, 277.

²⁰ Jacob Penner, “Recollections of the Early Socialist Movement in Winnipeg,” *Marxist Quarterly*, 2 (Summer 1962), 23-30.

²¹ McKillop, “Citizen and Socialist,” 112; and Avery, “Ethnic Loyalties and Proletarian Revolution,” 81.

revolutionary Communist approach that he never got away from. But you couldn't fault him as a public representative."²²

Was Johann's depiction of the Estevan strike accurate, in particular that it was being managed by "five or six men" including Comrade Wachter who met nightly at the Winnipeg Ukrainian Labour Temple to discuss events and plan strategy? With regard to the former, although his succinct summary of the labour conflict mentions that it was marred by violence (which, as it happened, on 29 September 1931 took the lives of three miners), Johann neglects to add that the killings were the result of an "onslaught" initiated against the strikers by a detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police — an institution upon which the German writer elsewhere heaps paeans of praise.²³ Even more serious from the standpoint of his reliability in treating this still-controversial event, there is not the slightest suggestion in the more recent studies by Stephen Endicott, Steve Hewitt, and S.D. Hanson that its course was guided by communist officials located in Winnipeg's Ukrainian Temple.²⁴ Nor do these comprehensive works contain any reference whatsoever to Jacob Penner's participation in it, a silence which two of their authors explicitly confirm corresponds to the contents of the original documentation they examined. Not least of all, both his sons (themselves accomplished scholars) also deny that Penner was directly involved in the struggle in Estevan.²⁵

In the face of such seemingly unanimous evidence to the contrary, is it conceivable that Johann's version of the role allegedly played by Comrade Wachter in the Estevan walkout might nonetheless be true? Unfortunately, it is only feasible here to approach this question in general terms because none of the writer's private

²²Cited in McKillop, "The Communist as Conscience," 200.

²³Johann, *Amerika*, 55-6; see also A.E. Johann, *Pelzjäger, Prärien und Präsidenten: Fahrten und Erlebnisse zwischen New York und Alaska [Fur Trappers, Prairies, and Presidents: Travels and Encounters between New York and Alaska]* (Berlin 1937), 159-61, 306-8; and Steve Hewitt, "September 1931: A Re-interpretation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Handling of the 1931 Estevan Strike and Riot," *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (1997), 159-78, who concludes that the guilt of the police for the violence which occurred "seems clear."

²⁴See S.D. Hanson, "Estevan 1931," in Irving Abella, ed., *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1919-1949* (Toronto 1975), 33-77; and especially Stephen L. Endicott, *Bienfait: The Saskatchewan Miners' Struggle of '31* (Toronto 2002), 37, 46, who does nevertheless establish connections between both the Ukrainian temples and the Workers' Unity League [WUL, the communist labour organization] in Winnipeg and their counterparts in the area of the strike — but no managing role for any temple.

²⁵Letters from Steve Hewitt (Birmingham) and Stephen L. Endicott (Toronto), 11 and 26 May 2005; and telephone interviews with Norman Penner (Toronto, through his wife) and Roland Penner (Winnipeg), 24 March and 10 May 2005. According to the latter, who is in possession of his father's papers, these do not allude to a conversation with A.E. Johann; nor did Jacob Penner ever tell members of his family that he or anyone else masterminded the Estevan strike from Winnipeg.

research files, which could conceivably have held notes on his conversation with the Canadian communist politician, survived the wartime bombing of his Berlin residence.²⁶ Some contemporary reviewers and also subsequent literary critics, however, have expressed doubts about either the validity of interpretations he put forward of certain developments or else the veracity of various anecdotes related in Johann's books. For instance, in a 1933 review of *Amerika* Louis Hamilton took him to task for exaggerating when he stated that "hundreds of thousands of unemployed Canadians could not allay their hunger even with dry bread" while living beside huge stocks of unsold wheat. Yet, Hamilton had to concede "alas!" that there was "more than an element of truth in [Johann's further] suggestion that the worst thing that can happen to the western farmer is a good wheat crop," and he expressly praised the "sane, correct, and instructive information" the author presented on the failure of the Canadian Wheat Pool to cope with the agricultural Depression.²⁷ Perhaps a more pertinent example concerns a lengthy incident Johann recounted in his first volume about Canada which he said had been confided to him by an elderly trapper. It dealt with the fate of three young German-speaking settlers who in order to escape military service against their homeland in 1914 had fled into the bush where they were finally murdered by another Scandinavian draft-dodger. One informed commentator described this "fantastic story" as no more than a tall tale told to a "greenhorn" newly arrived in the country.²⁸ That may have been so, though during World War I hostility, including isolated acts of violence toward "enemy aliens" perpetrated by their fellow-citizens, is well documented.²⁹ In this and similar cases, therefore, stories repeated by Johann for which verifiable proof is absent ought not to be dismissed out of hand. Moreover, when he presents factual data in *Amerika* and elsewhere this is acknowledged to be beyond dispute. In his publications which appeared prior to the Third Reich, Johann appears to have been a generally trustworthy chronicler of the Canadian situation.³⁰

²⁶During the 1970s while preparing some of his books on Canadian themes, Johann lived for a few years in Toronto and near Tobermory on the Bruce Peninsula, but he eventually returned to Germany; his literary *Nachlass* [estate] apparently only includes materials from the years after 1945. See Johann, *Dies wilde Jahrhundert*, 77, 153-8, 339; and letter from Rudi Zülch (Knüllwald), who is preparing a biography of Johann, 25 July 2005.

²⁷Louis Hamilton, "Recent German Books Relating to Canada with some Remarks on Early Publications," *Canadian Historical Review*, 14 (June 1933), 195; see also Johann, *Amerika*, 15-16.

²⁸Shalom Weyl, "North-America (Canada and the United States) in German Literature, 1918 to 1945," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1952, 45-6; see also Johann, *Mit zwanzig Dollar*, 21-8.

²⁹See John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History* (Waterloo 1983), 107-30.

³⁰After 1933, however, Johann became an increasingly strident Nazi propagandist, for the most part directed against the United States which culminated in his "*Hetzschrift*" ["hate book"] entitled *Das Land ohne Herz: Eine Reise ins unbekannte Amerika* [*The Heartless*

As far as Wachter/Penner is concerned, there seems no doubt about the actual identity of this figure: even Jacob Penner's size (between five feet and six to seven inches, weighing around 125 pounds)³¹ corresponds to Johann's description of the person he interviewed. Besides, how else would the visitor from Germany have acquired the detailed personal information that he published on the communist functionary except from a meeting with the man himself? Whichever of them decided then to resort to a pseudonym, the grounds for doing so were doubtless justified; between August and November 1931, every leading personality in the CPC had sufficient reason to fear for his or her freedom. That applied especially to someone who, as Johann reported was the case with Wachter, had also been associated in any capacity with the fatal course which events took in Estevan.³² And, not surprisingly, the tight secrecy with which Johann says this was accomplished would have precluded any trace of it appearing in the archival records that have survived. Of course, one cannot exclude the possibility that the author ascribed to a composite figure he called Wachter the physical and personal characteristics of Jacob Penner together with a leadership function in the miners' strike which may actually have been the responsibility of a group of Winnipeg communists.³³ Another conceivable interpretation is that, contrary to his usual practice, Johann may simply have invented the entire incident relating to Comrade Wachter either to inject an element of mystery and conspiracy into his book in order to sell more copies or else to substantiate his own impression of the relatively upbeat attitude of Canadians as contrasted to Europeans toward the further development of the Depression. Wherever the truth may lie, A.E. Johann's brief account provides a tantalizing perspective on western Canada's labour situation at the turn of the year 1931-32.

I am grateful to my Dalhousie University colleague Todd McCallum, the family of Jacob Penner, and the editor as well as two anonymous referees of Labour/Le Travail for their indispensable assistance in preparing this note. All translations from German are mine.

Country: Journey through an Unknown America] (Berlin 1942); see also Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gesplante Bewusstsein: Deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit 1933-1945* (Munich and Vienna 1983), 128; and Ulrich Ott, *Amerika ist anders: Studien zum Amerika-Bild in deutschen Reiseberichten des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt/Main and Bern 1991), 255-74.

³¹Information from Roland Penner.

³²Alternatively, could it have been possible that for internal party reasons Wachter preferred not to be identified by name with the negative prognosis of revolutionary prospects in Canada which he had expressed to Johann?

³³Professor Stephen Endicott suggests that perhaps the communist interviewed by Johann was not Penner at all but rather John Weir who was indeed involved in the strike, though not as its director "from the back rooms" of the Labour Temple, and that while organizer Joseph Forkin in Estevan probably requested "help of various kinds" from Winnipeg he likely did so instead from WUL headquarters. Letter to author, 26 May 2005.