

# NEWS OF THE PROFESSION

## I. Institutional News

### *The International Institute of Social History – Reorganization after fifty years*

During the conference of the International Association of Labour History Institutions (Paris 1986) Lars Wessman, a member of the Scandinavian delegation, asked me to make an informal speech on the reorganization of the IISH. Since I hardly expected anyone to be interested in this subject, I felt no reservations and was pleased to agree. After consulting our Parisian host, Prof. Alain Prost, we informed all those present that there was to be an exchange of ideas on the IISH reorganization. This would take place at the same time as the officially scheduled visit to the Archives Nationales, one of the great shrines for all archivists. Hence I expected to address merely a small select group of those interested in organizational problems, as well as the infirm and those who had already visited the Archives Nationales and had nothing better to do.

How different events turned out! As the time for my speech approached, the small lecture hall was filled to capacity and enough seats for everyone could only be provided by bringing in extra chairs. During the exchange of views after my presentation it became clear that the massive attendance was not just caused by academic interest in the subject. The problems for which we were trying to find a solution were familiar to many of our sister-institutes in Germany, France, Italy and Scandinavia. This common interest is one of the reasons for again examining the problems connected with the reorganization of the IISH, this time in writing. Furthermore, now that the reorganization of the IISH has been completed, many people have shown an interest in the new structure, in which tasks are carried out by different sections.

Because of the nature of the subject matter, it will not be possible to go into great detail, so I shall have to limit myself to the major points and global developments. To begin, I shall briefly deal with the birth of the IISH, the aims of the organization and the enormous growth of the Institute and the problems which resulted. After that I shall move on to the choices which had to be made to reach acceptable solutions. Finally, some idea will be given of these solutions, including an explanation of the Institute structure introduced from the beginning of 1987.

## I

The early history and development of the IISH from 1935 up to the period immediately after the second World War has been well documented by Maria Hunink in her study *The Papers of the Revolution*.<sup>1</sup> The aims of the foundation were, in short, as follows.

In the first place to act as a rescue service for collections which were endangered in some way: the idea was to store these collections in a safe place and to conserve them as long as the archivists or owners were themselves incapable of doing so. Later the collections were to be made available to the organizations or individuals who had left them in IISH custody. The second aim was of a more structural nature: the foundation set itself the task of doing just about everything to promote the study of social history through:

- the formation or acquisition of (international) collections important for the study of social history. This was done by appealing for gifts, borrowing or purchase;
- accessing and conserving these collections to make them available for scholarly and other serious research;
- providing oral and written information on the archives and collections available at the Institute;
- attracting scientific personnel to do research based on the collections;
- publishing the results of social-historical research in the form of an IISH series and – should it prove impossible to finance this using the Institute's resources – to promote the publishing of manuscripts of social-historical importance elsewhere;
- providing educational facilities for the study of social history.

Obviously not all of the above aims could be attained or even aspired to simultaneously and to the same extent. Initially the foundation met with many difficulties: shortages of money and personnel while having to absorb an overwhelming quantity of material which found its way to The Netherlands. This was not all that surprising: the aims of the foundation appealed to many. Especially the fact that the Institute was politically neutral, that is, was not tied to any party, made it a repository for collections from different political directions. The repression of persons and organizations by dictatorial regimes as well as the threat of war accelerated this process of acquisition. Such development meant that there was little time for accessing the collections in a more than rudimentary fashion.

The Netherlands were drawn into the second World War unintentionally and the occupation caused a number of problems for the Institute. Parts of the collections could be transferred to the safety of England in time, but the Institute and the remaining material fell into German hands. Only after the war could a normal state of affairs be restored, when the collections were returned to the Institute.

<sup>1</sup> Maria Hunink, *De papieren van de revolutie. Het Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis 1935-1947* (Amsterdam, 1986).

## II

During the 'fifties and 'sixties the Institute had a small staff and there was no point to drawing up fancy organizational diagrams based on a well-developed division of labour and allocation of tasks, responsibilities and competencies. An ever-increasing number of researchers wanted to use the collections stored at the IISH. A precarious balance had to be maintained between the work necessary to handle this flow of visitors and the large inflow of material and the work which necessarily accompanied it. Gradually an organizational structure evolved which many of the older visitors will remember. It consisted of two parts: the library and the cabinets. The librarian and her assistants had the primary responsibility for the formal accessing and the management of the collections. The "cabinet heads" – geographically or thematically specialized in certain parts of the collections – were responsible for acquisition, thematic accessing and providing information on the archive collections. There was hardly any time to pursue one's own research.

In the twenty-year period from 1960 to 1980 the number of collections and visitors increased substantially. This increase was due to the IISH's good name and standing, as well as the active acquisition policy pursued by directors and staff. Furthermore the Institute exerted a certain attraction because of the presence of many important and very interesting (international) archives (Marx, Engels, Bakunin, Goldman, Trotsky, Adler, Bauer, Nettlau, Descaves, SAI etc.).<sup>2</sup>

On the demand side the pressure on the staff increased too. While at first a small number of superspecialists and members of the movement itself were the major users of the collections present at the IISH, this situation changed with the introduction almost everywhere of social history as a compulsory part of the professional education of the historian. This resulted not only in a large increase in the number of students of social history, but also in the number of researchers, nearly all of them visitors of the Institute. The increased interest for social history in other disciplines (political science, sociology, economics etc.) between 1965 and the end of the 'seventies also increased the workload substantially. The growth of the collections and the increased use made of them made a large increase in the size of the staff necessary. Twice in this period new housing had to be found for the Institute.

In the following table a number of indicators give an impression of the Institute's growth in various areas.

<sup>2</sup> A survey is given in the pamphlet *General Index of Archives and Collections (Amsterdam, 1985)*.

	1938*	1958	1968	1978	1984
Archives in km	–	–	1.6	2.8	3.4 <sup>e</sup>
Printed material in km	–	–	7.6	14.3	18.0
Books	100,000	–	350,000	425,000	500,000 <sup>e</sup>
Periodicals (total)	–	–	45,000	55,000	60,000 <sup>e</sup>
Current periodicals	1138	1393	1794	2342	2710
Pictures	–	–	–	40,000	90,000
Posters	500	–	–	10,000	21,000
Personnel	18	20	54	63	64.6
Visitors	2440	2450	3536	9245	9300
Books lent	–	–	13,356	19,172	21,936
Photocopies	–	–	125,097	248,751	–

\* 1938: Total number of records, books, periodicals, pictures etc. 350,000

e = estimate

The increase in the number of personnel did not lead to fundamental changes in the organization. The cabinet structure was maintained and despite the fact that a separate archives section was created in 1973 the acquisition and accessing of archives collections substantially remained in the hands of the cabinets. The number of these had greatly increased since 1960 and a number of assistants had been added in specific areas of study. The library had in the meantime increased substantially in size, a fact which was expressed not only in the extra space which had to be found, but also in the number of staff members. In the accompanying organization diagram the organizational structure of the IISH at the beginning of the 'eighties – just before the reorganization – is illustrated.

### III

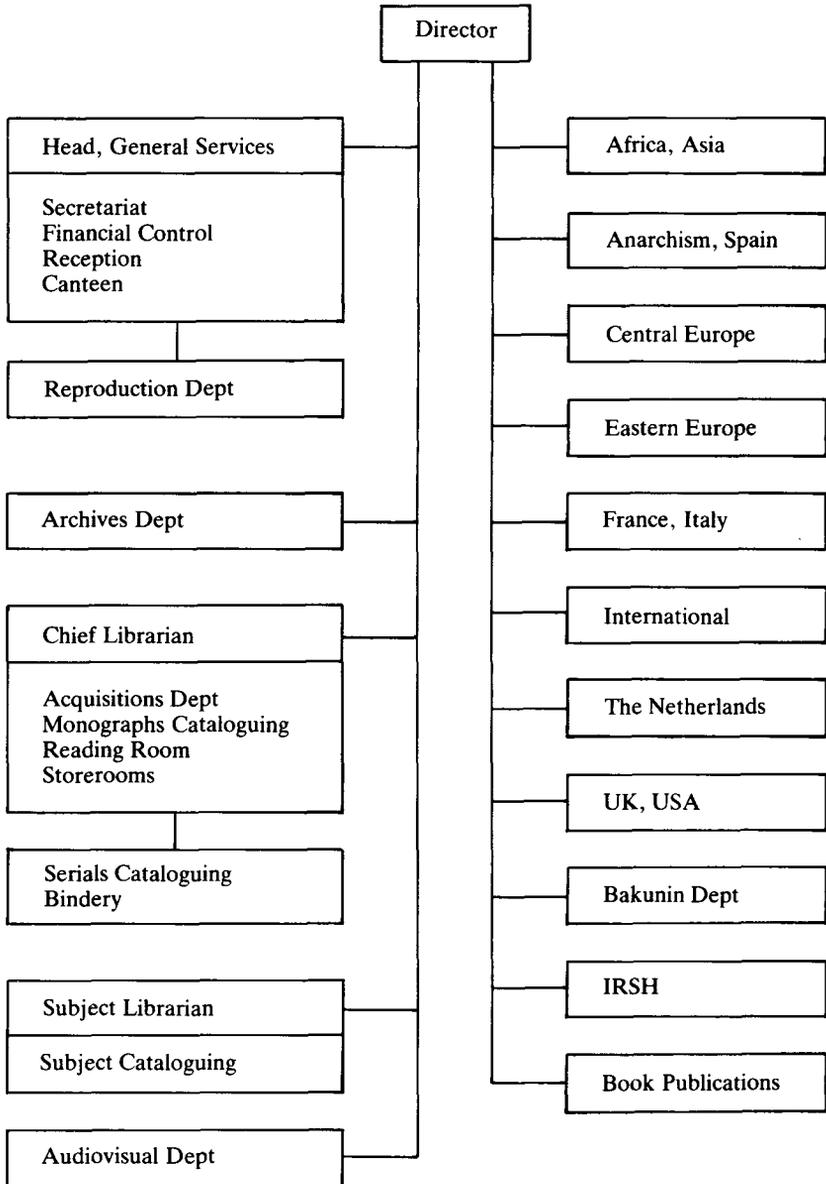
To summarize the above: the Institute had since its foundation gone through a great expansion. Although this had resulted in a large increase of personnel, there had been no real change in the organizational structure.

What were the stronger and weaker sides of the Institute? Before describing these, it is well to point out that there had been no real changes in the aims of the IISH. These were (and are) the following:

- the collecting of (international) social-historical material (along with the related tasks of accessing, conservation, administration of material and making it available, providing information);
- research;
- publications;
- education.

In comparing these aims with the actual activities, it is noteworthy that acquisition, administration, making material available and providing information were traditionally the stronger sides of IISH work. The accessing of the collections did not keep up with the input of material, hence the continually growing backlog. Research done by the staff of the Institute, as well as the publication of findings, came last on the list of financing priorities. The educational work

Diagram 1: Before the reorganization



amounted to little more than the 'careful' guidance of researchers and university students and giving help in setting up exhibitions.

The disproportionate attention given to some matters in preference to others can be explained by the historical development of the IISH. In a small institute the division of labour must be limited, as I have already noted. In principle everybody has to be able to do everything, which meant a large number of tasks for every member of staff. This large number of tasks had to be done in a limited amount of time. Despite the fact that this was an obstacle to efficiency, no other solution was possible for an organization with such a small number of staff members. One consequence of this situation, in which everyone had to be available to do everything, was that the boundaries between tasks, responsibilities and competencies were not always clearly delineated. This is no problem for a small organization, but as soon as an institution like the IISH grows and a number of separate sections are created attention must be given to this question. This is necessary if only to avoid conflicts about competence, duplicated effort, different methods of doing the same work in different sections and a situation in which highly qualified personnel had to do less qualified work.

A glance at the first organization diagram will show that many of the above-mentioned matters are implicitly illustrated there. The number of tasks carried out in the cabinets was very large. They included acquisition, thematic accessing, making collections available, written and oral correspondence on collections, research, publications, conference attendance, exhibitions, attending to visitors in their research activities, general correspondence etc. etc. Little wonder that the increased number of visitors and the increased demand for written information led to a situation in which the research and publications of staff members were, in fact, a luxury addition to the normal work of the cabinet staff. On average no more than 10-15% of working hours could be devoted to research.

The library used to be divided into sections according to the type of material (books, papers, documentation material, periodicals), and the method of handling it (formal and thematic accessing, acquisition, lending etc.). This was not always done logically and as a result the formal accessing did not always follow a uniform system.

In view of the fact that the cabinets were from the first responsible for acquisition, accessing, administration, presentation and information, it is not surprising that at first there was no separate archives section. Even when this was created, it remained limited in extent and there was no clarity – in view of the already mentioned archives-related tasks of the cabinets – about the division of labour, responsibilities and competencies between cabinets and the archives section.

#### IV

In order to build a more efficient and optimally functioning organization, a thorough reorganization was decided on in the second half of 1983. A policy note was drawn up by the Board of the institute. It was to serve as a firm guideline for the reorganization. A committee of national experts in the field of

library and archives organization was set up to advise on the most suitable structure for the collections section of the IISH. Finally the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences appointed an administrator, an outsider who would have to carry out the reorganization. He would be supported by a committee, also set up by the Royal Academy, whose members would be experts on the relevant areas of specialization (policy, organization of personnel affairs, law, science).

The aims of the Institute were used as points of departure for the reorganization and the tasks of IISH personnel would be derived from these aims. The number of people who would carry out these tasks and the amount of money available for the Institute were fixed beforehand.

As has already been pointed out, the tasks can theoretically be derived from the aims of an organization. First, however, a number of other facts have to be made available if the next step is to be made: actual proposals for numbers of personnel etc. In other words, there have to be answers to questions such as: how much and what kind of material enters the Institute annually; what percentage of that is uninteresting in view of the priorities of the collections; how many visitors does the Institute have to process every year; what kind of demands do they make on the facilities; what kind of consequences does this have for the choice of accessing system; what kind of questions must Institute staff be capable of answering and what kind need they not be prepared for; for which *kind* of visitors should the Institute be prepared, specialists or the general public; do we want to participate in the national and/or international lending traffic; do we want to computerize the collections or not; is microfilming, microfiche and conservation to be done elsewhere or at the Institute; should we develop our own system or use those already available on the open market; do we emphasize thematic or formal accessing?

Only by answering questions such as these can the number of persons needed in every task structure be quantified or coherent lists of tasks be developed and a rough organization scheme be designed in which tasks, responsibilities and competencies are clearly demarcated (not just between different sections, but also *inside* sections).

## V

Clear choices have been made for the new organization of the IISH, based on these kinds of questions. Of the main goals of the Institute: collection formation, information, research, publishing and education, only the last has been given a lower priority temporarily. The other tasks will have to be carried out as completely and efficiently as available personnel resources and material means allow.

Certain decisions seem to me to have been of decisive importance for the new organization structure of the IISH. In the first place the securing of the research component inside the Institute. The many tasks which used to be carried out inside the cabinets were split up along functional lines, into work supporting the collections – and everything connected with them – and work supporting scholarly research. In practice this meant that the cabinet structure had to be abandoned: some of the cabinet staff and assistants would have to devote

themselves fully to research, while the others would continue their old work, but now as scientific staff in the collections section. This implied the formation of two large, more or less functionally separated, divisions: 'Research and Publications' and 'Collections'. The ties between researchers and collections would be maintained to a certain extent by involving them in research programmes based on subjects covered by the Institute's collections.

A second important choice involved bringing together in one division all activities connected with the collections (archives, documentary collections, books, periodicals, audio and visual material, papers etc.) and sub-dividing this, not according to the *type of material*, but according to *working methods*. Hence three sections were created in the collections division:

- Acquisition and thematic accessing (including in principle all types of material; the composing of thesauruses etc.)
- Library and archive technology (administrative elaboration of acquisition, formal accessing, guarding of automated systems, archive inventory etc.)
- Administration and accessibility (reading room, magazines, conservation, reproduction, written and oral information provision).

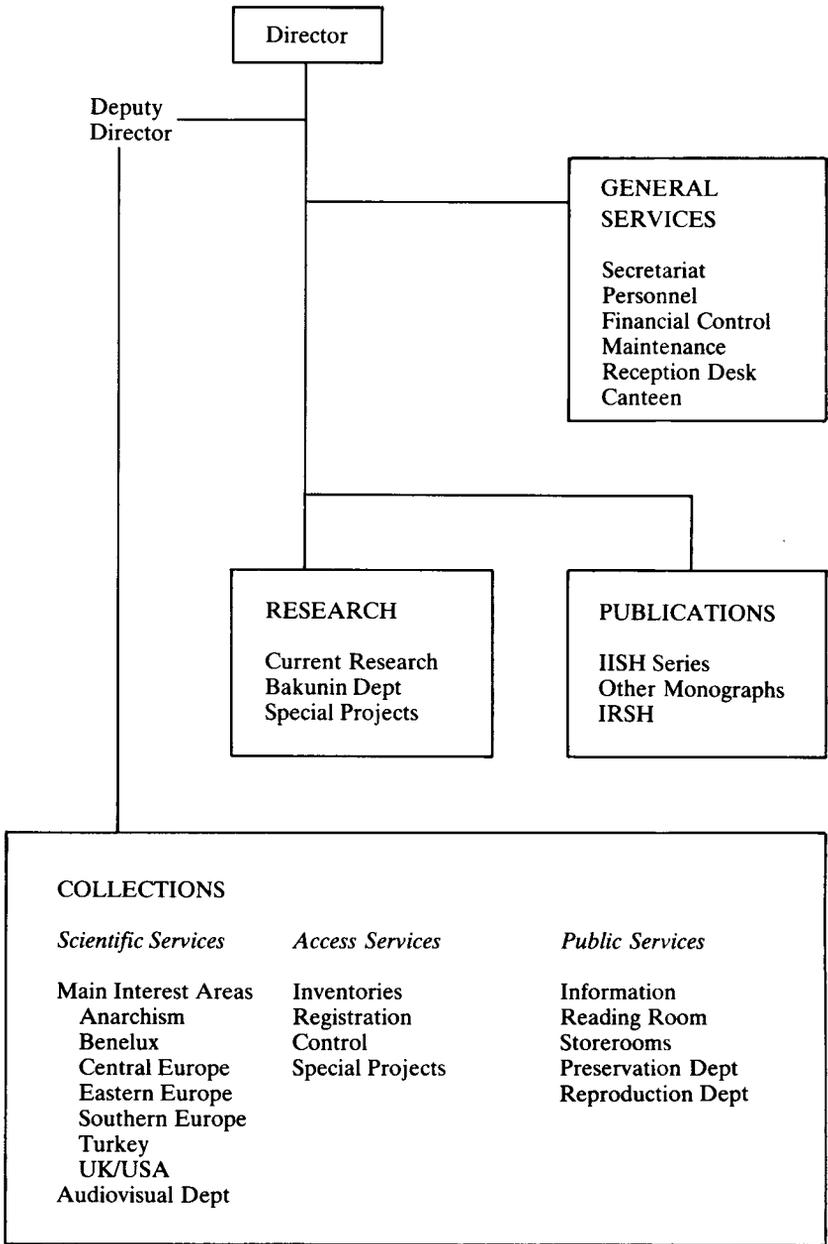
A third important choice was the relatively thorough allocation of tasks, responsibilities and competencies amongst not only the sections, but also amongst individuals working in different sections. Explicit allowance was to be made for this in the annual budget preview. In the fourth place the choice was made to combine the indexes of the collections into one automated data-base (retro-actively) in which emphasis was to be given to *thematic* accessing of the collections. This has not only made it possible for visitors (specialists in social history) to consult all of the material through one computer databank, but also has the advantage of preventing all kinds of 'duplicated' work. (The description of acquisitions is, for instance, used as the basis for the ultimate formal accessing of printed material). It has now become possible to weed out duplication in large gifts quickly and efficiently.

Finally an attempt has been made, not just to adapt the separate function descriptions in such a way that they consist of a functionally coherent packet of tasks, but also to ensure that a similar level of qualifications is needed for the separate components of the function. This is meant to prevent a situation in which part of the staff is overqualified for some of the tasks making up a function. The above description is presented in the second organizational diagram.

## VI

The IISH has worked with the new organizational structure since January 1987. If we compare the diagrams illustrating the situation before and after the reorganization, two points are worth noting: one is that the number of personnel has not grown but that the distribution of the staff over the different sections has changed considerably; and the other that the old structure has more or less disappeared. It is naturally too early to answer the question whether the reorganization can be considered a success. Furthermore, one could quite rightly question whether I, whose task it was to shape the new organization, am

Diagram 2: After the reorganization



the most suitable person to answer these kinds of questions. Having said that, I feel I can nevertheless make certain observations: a considerable number of tasks which in the past were carried out only partially or not at all, is now being fulfilled; the amount of time spent on scholarly research has, on balance, increased considerably; the number of IISH publications – by its own staff and others – has increased drastically; the acquisition (internationally) of interesting archives and of mixed collections – an activity at which the Institute has always excelled – has greatly increased (this was also due to certain changes in policy). Similar points can be made concerning the accessing of collections of printed materials, archives, audio and visual materials; microfilming and microfiching of large collections now takes place on a scale which was not possible until recently. All these examples show without exception that the reorganization has resulted in a more efficient use of personnel and financial means and has hence made it possible to carry out more thoroughly the tasks derived from the Institute's aims. It is also a remarkable fact that – besides the increase in productivity which has already been mentioned – a very large number of new activities are being taken up by the sections and individual staff members. These activities contribute substantially towards the realization of Institute goals, while they are not part of the formal, that is compulsory, task package of these sections or members of staff.

In writing the above, I hope I have fulfilled at least part of the promise I made in the introduction: giving the reader some idea of the problems which appear at some time in the existence of every small- or medium-sized institute, and the way in which we at the IISH have tried to find solutions for those problems. Time will tell whether these were lasting and/or creative solutions. The experiences up to now allow the future to be faced with some optimism, at least for the moment.

*Eric J. Fischer*

## **II. Announcements**

### *Glorious Revolution*

On 2nd December 1988 the Istituto Socialista di Studi Storici (Florence) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Bonn) will organize a workshop on the occasion of the tricentenary of the English Glorious Revolution. The following subjects will be covered: (1) English radicalism during the Glorious Revolution, (2) the revolution of 1688 and the birth of the liberal constitutional system, (3) the revolution of 1688 and religious tolerance, (4) the revolution and the issues of peace and work. Those who are interested can obtain further information from Dr Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, ISSS, Via Ricasoli 49, 50122 Firenze, Italy.

### *Dimensions of European Unity in the Postwar World*

The Department of European and Modern Dutch Studies of the University of

Hull will hold an international conference on "Dimensions of European Unity in the Postwar World", in late September 1989.

This conference, which forms the last part of a three-stage inquiry into the historical development of aspirations to European unity, will focus upon the post-war years prior to the signing of the Rome treaties. The central questions are: to what extent and along which dimensions was Europe unified in this period? By recalling the lost perceptions of Europe as well as explaining the success and limitations of the perceptions which held sway it is hoped that the conference will contribute to an understanding of the current problems and nature of Europe. Contributions are solicited regarding, *inter alia*, international agreements and programmes, international institutions, ideologies and movements, and social structure and cultural identity.

While the working language of the conference will be English, it is appreciated that some participants may wish to submit their papers in advance in another European language. Should that be the case, every effort will be made to provide appropriate linguistic aid, beforehand and during the conference sessions themselves.

The proceedings of the conference will be published, as the third volume of a three-volume series on "European Unity in Context".

Proposals for papers should be directed to Dr P. M. R. Stirk, Department of European and Modern Dutch Studies, University of Hull, Hull HU6 7RX, Great Britain.

### *International Congress of Historical Sciences*

The XVIIth International Congress of Historical Sciences (Madrid 1990) will encompass a series of study groups in which social-historical subjects will be covered.

\* Revolutions and reforms: their influence on the history of society. Responsible are J. Herrmann, Direktor des Zentralinstituts für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR, Leipzigerstrasse 3-4, 1086 Berlin, GDR; C.N. Degler, Professor of American History, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305, U.S.A.; and J. Carreras Ares, Facultad de Historia, Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain.

\* Anthropology, social history, cultural history. Responsible are G. Ranki, Institute of Historical Sciences of the Hungarian Academy, 1 Uri u 53, 1250 Budapest, PF 9, Hungary; and Y. Bromlej on behalf of S. Tihvinskij, President of the National Committee of Historians of the USSR, Dm. Ulianov Street 19, 117036 Moscow, U.S.S.R.

\* Education and technical schools in modern society. Responsible: J. Purs, National Committee of Historians of the ČSSR, Vysehradská 49, 12826 Prague, ČSSR.

\* Women since the Industrial Revolution. Responsible are I. Blom, Universitet I, Bergen, Historisk Institutt, Sydneplass 9, N 5000 Bergen, Norway; and F. Baltazarek, Institut für Wirtschaftswissenschaften der Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Wien, Dr Karl-Lueger-Ring 1, 1010 Wien, Austria.

\* Peace and War in the twentieth century. Responsible: A. Narochizky, on behalf of S. Tihvinskij, President of the National Committee of Historians of the USSR, Dm. Ulianov Street 19, 117036 Moscow, U.S.S.R.

\* Social policy in the 19th and 20th century. Responsible: G. Ritter, Institut für Neuere Geschichte, Trautenwolfstrasse 3/1, 8000 München 40, Federal Republic of Germany.

\* National consciousness, unity and popular movements in Asia and Africa. Responsible: S. Chandra, 161 Jawaharlal Nehru University Campus, New Delhi 110067, India.

\* States and empires in sub-saharan Africa. Responsible are J. Devisse, 14 avenue de la Porte de Vincennes, 75012 Paris, France; M. Tymowski, Historical Institute, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland; and I. Geiss, University of Bremen, Postfach 330440, 2800 Bremen 33, Federal Republic of Germany.

\* Centre and peripheries. Responsible: I. Wallerstein, Fernand Braudel Center, State University of New York at Binghamton, Binghamton, New York 13901, U.S.A.

\* Illness and society. Responsible are: W. Bynum, The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP, Great Britain; and J. Riley, Department of History, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405, U.S.A.