

## Isherwood's Description of a Communist Meeting in Berlin

The meeting had already begun. As we climbed the broad rickety staircase, we could hear the voice of a speaker echoing down the long shabby corridor. Two powerfully built youths wearing hammer-and-sickle armlets kept guard at the double doors (46). ...

The hall was large and cold. Decorated in tawdry baroque, it might have been built about thirty years ago and not repainted since. On the ceiling, an immense pink, blue and gold design of cherubim, roses and clouds was peeled and patched with damp. Round the walls were draped scarlet banners with white lettering: "*Arbeiterfront Gegen Fascismus und Krieg*" ["Worker's Front Against Fascism and War"]. "*Wir fordern Arbeit und Brot*" ["We demand Work and Bread"]. "*Arbeiter aller Länder, vereinigt euch*" ["Workers of the World, unite"] (47). ...

The hall was very full. The audience sat there in their soiled everyday clothes. Most of the men wore breeches with coarse woollen stockings, sweaters and peaked caps. Their eyes followed the speaker with hungry curiosity. I had never been to a communist meeting before, and what struck me most was the fixed attention of the upturned rows of faces; faces of the Berlin working class, pale and prematurely lined, often haggard and ascetic, like the heads of scholars, with thin, fair hair brushed back from their broad foreheads. They had not come here to see each other or to be seen, or even to fulfil a social duty. They were attentive but not passive. They were not spectators. They participated, with a curious, restrained passion, in the speech made by the red-haired man. He spoke for them, he made their thoughts articulate. They were listening to their own collective voice (48).

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--from Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories: The Last of Mr. Norris*, a novel based on Isherwood's diaries from 1929 to 1933 when he lived in Berlin.

Lynne Martin did the translations from the German.