

Spring, 1981

Dear Friends,

Attached are the sum-ups for the eight week introductory study of certain aspects of the history of international communism from a "primacy of theory" perspective. It covers, in a very brief fashion, from Bernstein's revisionism in the late 1890's to the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. It was based on a longer study guide prepared by the Tuscon Marxist Leninist Collective, although many changes were made by us, including some changes in the readings and almost complete rewriting of the study questions.

In general, we felt that this study was a valuable experience for us, not only because it introduced us to important historical material, much of which was new to most of us, but also because it was analytical from a particular point of view, "primacy of theory," which we are exploring.

We feel that we can recommend this study to groups wanting a brief introduction to this history from a "primacy of theory" perspective with one reservation. We now believe that we too drastically compacted some of the material, especially that of Weeks 4 and 6, both of which were combinations of what was two weeks each on the original TMLC study guide. We would recommend that even those groups seeking a very brief introduction would do better to expand Weeks 4 and 6, using the original TMLC study guide as an aid.

We would be interested in feedback about either the study guide of our sum-ups.

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Summary of Week 1: The Second International and Bernstein's Revisionism

Readings: Lucio Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin (1972), "Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International," p45-62,97-108
Edward Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism, 135-164
Rosa Luxemburg, "Social Revorm or Revolution," 115-134
Lenin, "Our Program," 4:210-214

1. Main Points: The central thing grasped from these readings was that Bernstein's revisionism shared an economist deviation with the mainstream Marxism of the Second International, defined as the theoretical transformation of the "historical tendency" of the breakdown of capitalism into a "law of nature." In other words, we say how the theoreticians of the German Social Democratic Party, both revolutionary and reformist, were operating within an "economist problematic." We were therefore introduced to the historical link between revisionism and economism, and say how revisionism has been historically a deviation on the level of theory.

2. Unresolved Questions: The polemic of Luxemburg against Bernstein's evolutionary socialism introduced the idea of "revisionism" as the introduction of bourgeois science, philosophy and morality into Marxism. But nowhere in these readings is the concept of "revisionism" clearly defined. The role of Luxemburg in the development of Marxism is left hazy: her critique of Bernstein is powerful, yet the implication and depth of her economism is not resolved. Another question left unresolved by these readings concerned the role of economic conditions. Granted that economism is a long standing deviation from Marxism, how do we correctly weigh the significance of economic conditions in our analysis?

3. Materials, questions etc: These readings are satisfying because there is both an analytical/historical article (Colletti) and three polemics of the period which graphically demonstrate the debate (Bernstein, Luxemburg and Lenin). This is a good example of a lesson learned throughout the study: the existence of an article which is historical and critical from a primacy of theory perspective is a great help.

These readings definitely require a presentation on the historical background. We had an oral presentation of the struggles and factions within the GSDP, and this at least is required. For this week only, we used the questions of the original study guide. These should be reviewed and edited to better facilitate an understanding of the revisionism/economism link, and to encourage an attempt to define these terms.

Summary of Week 2-3: The Russian Party-Building Experience

Reading: Lenin, What is to Be Done?

1. Main Point: Although some of us had read WITBD before, we had never clearly understood its historical context. This time, we tried to better understand the trend of Russian economism which Lenin was attacking. We were able to see that this trend was primarily characterized on a theoretical level by a belief that the proletariat could play no role in Russia's bourgeois revolution, which was seen as a necessary precondition for a subsequent evolution to socialism. Economism was therefore both closely linked to Bernstein in theory, yet very particular to Russia. Understanding that WITBD is a polemic against a deviation whose premises are out of place in an advanced capitalist country, calls into question the dogmatic way which most of the left reads this book. Nevertheless, it is important to study WITBD, not only because of the enormous role it plays in our movement, but also because it teaches us much about theory and politics.

2. Questions Unresolved: Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this book is Lenin's well-known formulations about what he seems to say are the absolute limits of working class spontaneity. The language of WITBD, taken alone, raises questions about Lenin's conceptions of the revolutionary process, and the relative roles of the class and the party. It was noted however, that this was written in 1903 (before the 1905 revolution) and in the context of a polemic against the economists' anti-theory bias.

3. Materials, questions etc: Our rewritten questions get at the above points pretty well. This section definitely requires extensive background presentation. We did it orally, but what is really required is a written summary of the various trends in Russian social democracy and the periods of Russian party-building.

A good concise source for this is Part I, Volume I of E.H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, and especially pp 15-56. Additionally it is crucial to read something articulating the economist point of view in order to avoid a superficial reading of WITBD. One short and convenient source is the "Credo," a short economist manifesto, circa 1899, which Lenin reprinted and attacked in his article, "A Protest by Russian Social Democrats." (4:167)

SUM-UP WEEK 4: The Collapse of the Second International and the Founding of the Third International

Readings: V.I. Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International"
Col. Wks. Vol. 21: p.167-188, 202-221, 241-259

V.I. Lenin, "Theses and report of Bourgeois Democracy and Dictatorship of the Proletariat" Col. Wks. Vol. 28: p.457-474

V.I. Lenin, "Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International" Col. Wks. Vol. 31: p. 184-201

* V.I. Lenin, "Five Years of the Russian Revolution"
Col. Wks. Vol. 33: p. 418-433

* Helmut Gruber, "Conditions of Admission into the Communist International" International Communism in the Era of Lenin (1920) p. 287-292

An important aspect of this session was to look at the method Lenin used to analyse this period. There were theoretical and political lines of demarcation being drawn between the class collaborationism and "social chauvinism" of the Second International and the left trend that Lenin represented. Lenin tied the content of the break between the two to its historical time, focussing on its social roots rather than individuals. This is a most important aspect of studying this history. The Second International completely downplayed the importance and role of class struggle, leaving the movement weak and splintered. The opportunists refused to take class stands that might draw attacks from the State, and short-term parliamentary gains were seen as the road to legal revolution. We tied some of this debate to the present period and electoral third party strategies being put out by some groups.

Questions:

- ** How thorough was the break between the Second and Third Internationals on a theoretical level?
- ** Soviet model of the dictatorship of the proletariat was put out as the only model to follow. While we agree that people need to learn to how to take power over their own lives, the model of the Soviet Union seems painfully inadequate.

The original study guide had this week in two parts, one on the collapse, one on the founding of the Third International. We should have left it that way, because it was too much to cover thoroughly in one week's session. The questions were helpful, particularly in picking apart how Lenin's analysis was made. We recognized that there was a lot of reading so we prioritized, people should at least read the first three, and the other two (*) were additional, if they had time. It would have been helpful to read other sources than just official Comintern documents.

SUM-UP WEEK 5: The Program of the Communist International 1928

Reading: "Program of the Communist International 1928"

There should have been reading between Weeks 4 and 5. The struggles internal to the Comintern and the Bolshevik Party prior to 1928 should have had more clarity. The presentation on highlights of the struggle with Trotsky on one hand and Bukharin on the other was useful but could not fill the gap.

The discussion on 1928 was able to be linked to some earlier studies on Economism, particularly Bernstein's 'inevitable breakdown of capitalism' position. The core of the Comintern's theoretical approach was Economist- saying that only economics will determine a revolutionary situation, with the level of productive forces determining readiness for revolution. The lack of analysis around particular conditions in each country, lead to thinking that the most advanced capitalist (European) countries would have revolutions immediately. They failed to correctly analyse the development of capitalism and how it can continue to sustain itself. The Soviet Unions consolidation of power in the Comintern was evident in the outlook that put themselves above it on all matters.

Questions:

- **Can all errors of this period be attributed to "Economism"? Clearly there was more going on. There was alot of talk, but very little work being done to really educate people about socialism. The dictatorship of the proletariat was replaced with the dictatorship of the party in practice.
- **We know that Bukharin authoed the piece that we read, but it was basically a compromise position paper. What else was Bukharin thinking writing about in this period?
- **Tr's emphasis on 1928 as a real turning point in the International Communist Movement was not clear in this session.

It was difficult to find other documents circulating in 1928, that could have given the discussion more wholeness. We could have used some outside sources rather than simply the offical CI documents. The questions were good at picking out main ideas in the material, but we did not have enough backround in history to adequately compare the words and the practice in that period.

SUM-UP WEEK 6: Sixth and Seven Congress' Response to Fascism

Readings: Nicos Poulantzas, "Fascism and Dictatorship" p.36-52, p. 156-168

Georgi Dimitrov, "The United Front" p. 9-41, 59-64, 100-103'
108-111

Jay Lovestone, "People's Front Illusion" p. 3-12

Line of March, from Marxism and the Crisis of Imperialism (May-

This session was originally in two weeks; one week more specifically ^{June} on the "left period" of the Sixth Congress, who identified "social fascism" as the main enemy, and the second week on the Seventh Congress' response to fascism. Because we collapsed these two weeks into one, the discussion proved to be difficult, and alot to handle in one week. The shift in the position of the Sixth and Seventh Congresses from ultra-left to the right, with out any self-criticism on their part, was glaring. The errors of the Comintern basically remained within the same continuum, a view that class struggle and making revolution were simply not on the agenda. We had alot of unity on Poulantzas' artical particularly in his critique of the inevitability of the breakdown of capitalism theory held by the Seventh Comintern Congress, including Dimitrov. Dimitrov, by incorrectly identifying fascism as nearly a sector of finance capital, helped lead to many errors in stratagy and tactics used by the Comintern. Although the Seventh Congress called for a workers alliance against fascism, they worked on a popular front strategy (a tacital alliance with sectors of the bourgeoisie). This action of the Comintern in this period was to give up the fight for socialism and class struggle.

Questions:

**We had a great many questions about the nature of fascism. Does it represnt a new form of bourgeois rule? Is it more profitable for the capitalists to rule by bourgeois democracy or terror?

**Many groups look to this era in Communist history to draw their international lines from, develope stratagies around "unite front" work, etc. We want to look more closely at this period in ther future to more thoroughly understand this.

We realized, in the discussion, that the chapter on fascism as a new form of state by Poulantzas would have been quite useful. As it was, we had little to work with on the actual nature of fascism, and this held us back. Overall, there were too many reading for one week. Lovestone's article was difficult because of a lack of historical background on the CP-USA. This piece could have been sacrificed, it was not a core text. The Line of March article got a big response. It was a blatant distortion of the history we had just been reading, was pragmatist, lookin only at results, was an instrumentalist view of the state.

The criticism was raised that people should try to take more positions, rather than just lay out questions. This way a discussion could help to clarify more unity. But because of the way we've mostly been trying to familiarize ourselves with the history of the Communist International, its been difficult to really take positions on alot of topics.

SUMMARY OF WEEK SEVEN

Readings: Fernando Claudin The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform p. 15-46, 307-315, 465-473.

The focus of the Comintern and Cominform was not on class struggle or national liberation struggles. Revolution was not on the immediate agenda of the Comintern and further it was removed from the agenda entirely. The public rationale for the dissolution of the Comintern was not an adequate explanation of the reason. The Comintern, under the Soviet domination, equated the interest of the world proletariat with the interest of the Soviet Union. This relieved both the Comintern and the Soviet Union of the need to practice proletarian internationalism.

. Cominform was formed when the Soviet Union's W.W.II alliances broke down and imperialist countries no longer appeared as 'friends' to the Soviet Union. Instead of being a democratic international center Cominform was a bureaucratic center dominated by the Soviet Union. Its view of two camps continued the same theoretical framework as that of the 7th Congress (Stalinian Marxism).

Questions:

We wondered if it is possible to have one international center whose role it is to lead the international proletarian revolution since historically no international center has led a successful revolution. The question about the proper role of an international center was raised.

People were unclear about the effect the dissolution of the CI had on W.W.II and who much was really gained in 'exchange' for the dissolution.

Evaluation:

The readings were clear and helpful. The question went well.

Summary of Week 8: Khrushchev on Stalin; the 20th Congress

Readings: Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" at the 20th Congress
Althusser, "Note on the 'Critique of the Personality Cult'"

1. On the Khrushchev Speech

The speech is a good historical example of the official right revisionist critique of the Stalin area. The weaknesses of the critique are glaring, and it does not take long to list and discuss the major problems with it, especially its reliance on a listings of Stalin's evil habits to explain so much of Soviet history.

It may be that this speech is the best available summation of the revisionist critique of Stalin, but it might be useful to study some other statements from other sources in the Communist movement which indicate how this critique was adopted around the world.

Although we learned a lot about Communist history by reading the speech, and it should be definitely retained in the study guide, it is not the best piece for introducing the Primacy of Theory conception of the Stalinian deviation. It is easy enough to conclude from reading the speech that the analysis is simplistic and inadequate, but because Khrushchev does not elaborate on any of the concepts he applies in his critique (socialist legality, collective leadership, etc), it is difficult to reconstruct his theoretical framework in detail.

2. On the Althusser article

This brings us to the reading from Althusser that is supposed to help us analyze the speech from the POT perspective. Althusser attempts to show that Khrushchev's right-wing critique of Stalin actually falls within the same economist-humanist problematic that was behind the politics of the Stalin era.

We didn't have much trouble with the idea that Khrushchev does not break with Stalin's economism, but we had a lot of trouble with Althusser's notion of humanism. In fact, most of our discussion focused on this concept. We scheduled an additional study session in order to try to sort out this problem. Even after a presentation of the history of humanism as a historical category, we were left with many questions. We looked at humanism as a strain of Marxist philosophy which reflects the intrusion of certain Hegelian notions into Marxism. We compared humanism with some of the basic ideas of social democracy and bourgeois democracy. We looked at the old "determinism vs free will" debate in philosophy as perhaps another expression of the economism-humanism pair. We didn't however, reach any solid conclusions on this problem.

Althusser's article is not very helpful in concretely analyzing the Khrushchev speech. It needs to be studied in depth on its own in conjunction with a clear introduction to the concepts it develops, especially humanism. We realized from this study that we need more of a background in philosophy to critically evaluate Althusser's ideas. Therefore, we feel that a basic study of the philosophical currents which have affected Marxism and which are contending within it today should be part of a general introduction to Primacy of Theory. Someone should be working on developing this study.

COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is intended to give us a brief overview and background to International communist history for the period **1900 to 1937**. This is important for our future study of Bettelheim's work. The study guide is slightly modified from a study guide prepared by TMLC last year.

Week 1: The Second International and Bernstein's Revisionism

Readings: Lucio Colletti, "Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International," p45-62, 97-108.

Edward Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism p135-164.

Rosa Luxemburg, "Social Reform or Revolution" p115-134.

V.I. Lenin, "Our Programme" Col. Wks. Vol. 4: p.210-214..

As the second expression of the international co-ordination of the working-class in the class struggle, importance of the Second International is obvious. Also, from the collapse of this body during the First World War the modern Communist movement, as we know it, arose. Most important, however, is the theoretical/political problematic of the Second International and what it says about the state of theory and practice at that time. Many deviations from Marxism find full expression in the Second International and provide solid reasons for that organization's opportunism, miscalculation and demise. By analyzing these deviations and reconstructing the problematic from which they emerged, an understanding of our period will be greatly enhanced. For, in many respects our movement has never made more than a verbal break with the Second International when contrasted to the necessary theoretical labor to initiate a profound break. Having never applied itself to theoretical practice, the U.S. Communist movement is caught in the same revolving door of bourgeois ideology as was the Second International. If we can draw the necessary links between the theory and practice of the Second International and the present we will see the historical roots of our movement's weaknesses and be better able to deal with them on a concrete level.

Eduard Bernstein is the consummate expression of the revisionist deviation in Marxism, a perfect example of bourgeois ideology penetrating the Marxist science within a process conditioned by the class struggle. His example is important today since, in the last instance, the same material and ideological forces producing his deviation in the late 1890's are reproducing a similar trend in Euro-communism in the present. However, a simple comparison of Bernstein with the Euro-communists is not sufficient for understanding the revisionist problematic itself. We must question and examine the very political significance applied to the concepts of theory and theoretical practice as it has been understood, both then and now, to unravel the revisionist enigma. The nature of the state and proletarian dictatorship, the relation between theoretical practice and the other practices, plus the very character of the anti-revisionist critique, are all aspects of the class struggle that is waged in all countries at all times. By studying the way in which the class struggle of Bernstein's time gave rise to his deviations from Marxism we will find a key to their reproduction in our conjuncture.

Colletti is a Kantian/- Marxist philosopher with certain Trotskyist sympathies. His analysis here is very important.

1. In the historical article by Abendroth two reasons are given for German Social Democracy's capitulation to its ruling class during the First World War. These are: "fear of being outlawed" and "Fear of losing mass support." How could the Political, organizational and theoretical suppositions of a Leninist party take into account these factors *prior* to such a crisis, thereby alleviating such a capitulation to the bourgeoisie? How does this relate to our positions on theory and fusion in regards to the historical experience of the CPUSA?
2. Discuss the economist problematic of the Second International (and Bernstein) and its relation to "immiseration" and the "breakdown theory." How does this fit into Colletti's discussion of "social capital?" How are aspects of this problematic seen in the US movement?
3. Why did German Social Democracy's repudiation of Bernstein make no difference in the long run? How is this similar to the repudiation of dogmatism/revisionism by certain sections of the anti-dogmatist, anti-revisionist movement?
4. Discuss Bernstein's idea of the nature of bourgeois liberalism and his contention that socialism is its most "organized" form. What does this say about his conception and understanding of Marxism's scientificity?
5. Discuss Bernstein's view of the nature of the state and the proletarian dictatorship. Is this a Marxist view? Where have we heard this view espoused most recently?
6. Bernstein said he tested Marxist theory with empirical reality, yet he was unable to provide theoretical proofs authenticating his "theoretical" conclusions. His discourse lacked the necessary rigor for remaining on the terrain of the Marxist problematic. Instead of using the Marxist science to aid in producing knowledge about the new era of monopoly capitalism, Bernstein simply took this new phenomena at face value and compared it to the finished product of someone else's theoretical production. What does this say about Bernstein's conception of theoretical practice and in what form does this conception find reproduction nationally and internationally at the present time? Why is it necessary for the PWOC and the *Guardian* to rectify it in their own practice? Why must we?

Week 2 - The Russian Party-Building Experience

Reading - What is to Be Done (WITBD) Ch. I,II,III.

Priority Reading - WITBD Ch. I Part D.
Ch. II Parts A,B,C.
Ch.III Parts A,C,D,E.

Discussion and Study Questions

I. Spontaneity and Consciousness

In Chapter II of WITBD Lenin exposes and critiques the theoretical basis for the narrow emphasis on trade union work by his fellow social democrats. This emphasis or "trend", Lenin claims, is "incorrectly and too narrowly described as 'Economism.'" More generally, Lenin described this trend as a "slavish cringing before spontaneity."

In the first part of our study we will try to reconstruct the particular revisions of Marxism which provide a theoretical justification for "bowing to spontaneity." Lenin's analysis is a starting point, but because he intermingles his exposition of the theory with polemical attacks and sometimes obscure examples, it is no easy job to dig out the basic theoretical concepts he is criticizing.

- A. To begin with, we need to look at what Lenin means by spontaneity. Bernstein observed correctly that capitalism does change and even transform itself dramatically on the basis of certain inherent contradictions even in the absence of the conscious struggle of the proletariat as a class against the bourgeoisie. We could call this the spontaneous evolution of capitalism driven by its own internal contradictions and by a multiplicity of concrete class conflicts. This spontaneous evolution of capitalism, however, is not directly and immediately towards "socialism" nor towards a cataclysmic breakdown.

Questions

1. How can we relate the "worship of spontaneity" to the theory of evolutionary socialism? to the theory of the breakdown?
2. What kind of conflicts and political reactions are generated spontaneously by capitalism?
3. What does it mean to say that the trade union struggle arises "spontaneously?"
4. What are the limits of these struggles that arise spontaneously, and why, theoretically, do these limits exist?

E. Lenin asserts that the experience of the conflicts and contradictions that capitalism produces everyday for the working class does not lead directly to "socialist" consciousness. We need to look next at what Lenin means by "socialist" consciousness as a theoretical category. Lenin seems to define socialist consciousness as the understanding of the theory of scientific socialism as advanced by Marx and developed by others. Another way to put this would be that socialist consciousness is an understanding of the historical role of the proletariat in general and a grasp of a current scientific socialist program in particular.

Questions

1. Where does socialist consciousness come from?
2. Discuss the relationship between the spontaneous workers' movement and the communist movement and the basis of their fusion.
3. What kind of political experience did Lenin claim that workers needed in order to begin to develop "socialist consciousness"?
4. Concretely, what kinds of political struggles going on today would meet Lenin's criteria for political experiences that could contribute to the development of socialist consciousness?

II. Theoretically, the "worship of spontaneity" has its roots in Bernstein's evolutionary socialism and in the similar economic determinism of the "breakdown theory." Politically, the worship of spontaneity was expressed predominantly as reformism, although Lenin mentions that it could lead to terrorism as well.

Questions

1. What kinds of struggles were being waged by the trade unions at the time WITBD was written?
2. What did Lenin see as the main problems with and the limits of these struggles?
3. What general conclusions can we draw about the relationship of struggles for reform to the struggle for revolution?

Study Guide for Week 3

Reading : What is to be Done? - V.I. Lenin

Chapter IV - Sections A,B,C,D.

Chapter V - Section B

(The rest of Chapter V is optional)

Introduction - In these last sections of WITBD, Lenin makes a strong case for the formation of an all-Russian, secret, disciplined, centralized organization of professional revolutionaries. There are some important general lessons to be drawn from these readings, but we must be careful not to take Lenin's formulations in WITBD to be the blueprint for a Communist Party. That is one of the errors that the dogmatist sects of the New Communist movement in the U.S. have made.

Questions

1. List all the political, historical, and organizational reasons that Lenin had for writing WITBD. Within the pages of WITBD there is a whole coherent analysis of the conjuncture in Russia at the time Lenin was writing, but it is never really spelled out clearly. In looking at the reasons Lenin had for writing WITBD, you should try to reconstruct this conjunctural analysis.
2. Lenin's basic strategic goal in writing WITBD was to unite the bulk of Social Democrats into a single, national, disciplined party. Ultimately, this party was indeed formed, and it seems that WITBD played a very important role in the process. It may be helpful to compare the method and style Lenin employs in WITBD and the way he constructs his argument to some modern-day polemics. What can we learn from Lenin about the importance of open ideological struggle and about how to construct effective, comprehensive, yet principled discussions about the problems that face our movement?
3. At the time that Lenin wrote WITBD, he was probably correct in his assessment that a centralized organization of professional revolutionaries was acutely needed. What were some of the particular conditions in Russia (the state of the working class movement, the repression by the Czar, etc.) that led Lenin to this conclusion? What role may objective conditions play in setting the stage for the development of a Party and how may these objective conditions influence the pace of the ideological struggle that should precede Party formation?
4. In WITBD Lenin contrasts revolutionary professionalism and amateurishness. He tries to link professionalism

to the political struggle against the Czar and amateurishness to the politics and theory of the Economists.
In what way does amateurishness flow from Economism?
Is this always the case? (Consider the highly disciplined, centralized organizations that the CPUSA has)

5. We often refer to the fusion line as economist.
Consider the various elements of economism that Lenin lays out in WITED (worship of spontaneity, amateurishness, etc.). Which of these elements do we see in the Fusion line today and which are absent?

* In order to stimulate discussion, it may be helpful for individuals to take particular responsibility for answering one question in detail with a brief presentation. If your initials appear beside a question, try to focus on that question in more detail and come prepared to start off the discussion.

8/11/80 The Study Committee

STUDY GUIDE WEEK 4 The collapse of the Second International
and the rise of the Third International

There are five readings being handed out for our next session. The readings describe and analysis the collapse of the Second International and the rise of the Third.

The Second International was officially founded in July, 1889 and continued to exist until the 1940's. With the outbreak of the First World War virtually all of the parties of the Second International supported their own 'fatherland' in the war. This threw the Second International into disarray. After the end of the War the Second International continued to exist but it did so on a much lower level than before and it had little impact. The "Berne yellow International Conference" which is referred to in some of the readings was the first post War meeting of the Second International and was held in Feb., 1919. The term 'yellow' is a descriptive adjective added by Lenin.

The Third Communist International (Comintern) was founded in March of 1919 with its First Congress held in Moscow. A total of seven congresses were held. The Second Congress was held in July/August 1920. The Third Congress was held in June/July 1921. People should bear in mind some of the things that were happening in Russia between the founding of Comintern and the Third Congress. After the October 1917 revolution socialism had to be built in a country that was devastated by W.W.I. Important in this is the effect that the concessions of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March, 1918) with Germany had on the economy. A Civil War was fought against the Mensheviks from 1918-1921. This civil war included the military invasion by imperialist powers (including American troops). Also during this time Russia was hit by a devastating famine. During this period 'War Communism' was instituted to cope with the situation. All land and property was seized by the state, commodity transactions were controlled, all labor was nationalized, and all goods were rationed. In March of 1921 the New Economic Policy (N.E.P.) was introduced to recover from the effects of War Communism. We will be studying the NEP a lot more in the coming months.

The Fourth Congress of Comintern was held in Nov./Dec. 1922 and this was the last Congress that Lenin attended. Lenin was incapacitated by a stroke soon after the Congress and he died in Jan., 1924. The Fourth Congress decided to hold Congresses every two years rather than yearly. The Fifth Congress was

held in June/July, 1924 and the Sixth Congress was held in 1928. The Seventh World Congress was held in 1935 and was the last one held. The Third International was dissolved by Stalin in May of 1943 as a show of good faith to the Allies during the Second World War.

People should read (reread) the narrative that was part of the TMLC study guide of this period. It is the text accompanying Week 4 of the proposed study guide that was distributed in early August. It provides a PoT perspective on this period and these readings.

READINGS:

Of the five readings being handed out four of them were written by Lenin.

1. "The Collapse of the Second International" LCW 21:241-59. This was written in 1915 and we are reading from section VII to the end. Hereafter referred to as "Collapse".

2. "Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" LCW 28: 457-74. This was written in 1919 and was presented to the First Congress. Hereafter referred to as "Theses".

3. "Theses on Fundamental Tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International" LCW 31:184-201. This was written in 1920 and was presented to the Second Congress. Referred to as "Fundamental Tasks"

These first three readings are the priority reading.

4. "Five Years of the Russian Revolution" LCW 33:418-32. This was written in 1922 and was presented to the Fourth Congress. This was Lenin last public speech. Lenin discusses the first year of the NEP. We will not be discussing this article at the upcoming session but it is important background on the NEP and it is an essential foundation for our future study. Referred to as "Five Years"

5. "The Organizational Construction of the Communist Parties and the Methods and Scope of Their Activities." This document was adopted by the Third Congress in 1921. In "Five Years" Lenin refers to this document as "excellent" but "I am sure no foreigner can read it" LCW 33:430 because it's "too Russian" and can not be implemented by others. We include this reading for reference and to help you with "Five Years". It also will help us in our understanding of Comintern. Read it as the last item.

QUESTIONS:

1. Lenin's method of studying the Second International's betrayal of socialism was not to look at the individual biographies of the leaders but rather to ask three questions:

a. Where did social chauvinism spring from?

- b. What gave it strength?
- c. How must it be combated?

What answers did Lenin arrive at for these questions? Look particularly at the method that he used in answering these questions.

2. In "Collapse" Lenin says "Opportunism has been nurtured by legalism" (p.247).

- a. Why did that happen?
- b. Is this always true?
- c. In "Theses" and "Fundamental Tasks" Lenin urges parties to do both legal and illegal work and to have both kinds of organizations. He also talks about the importance of doing parliamentary work. How did he suggest that people avoid opportunism and yet continue to do 'legal' revolutionary work? Can this lesson be applied today?

3. In "Theses" and "Fundamental Tasks" Lenin discusses the dictatorship of the proletariat in contrast to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (or 'bourgeois democracy').

- a. What is the difference between them?
- b. What was the basis (conjuncture, economic development of capitalism) for Lenin's class perspective compared to that of the advocates of 'pure democracy' or 'democracy in general'?
- c. In "Theses" Lenin says that "There can be no alternative but dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or dictatorship of the proletariat." (p.463). Do you agree? Why?

4. Summarize Lenin's criticism of the Second International over the time period of the four party Congresses that we have read.

- a. How were lines of demarcation drawn theoretically?
- b. How was the new Third International to be different? Give specifics.
- c. After the theoretical break was made how was the political break made with the Second International?

5. Based on the readings and what you know about the period describe the conjuncture in which these pieces were written. Why were these documents written (what was their purpose)?

Week 5: The Program of the Communist International (6th Congress-1928)

For years the Comintern had intended to develop a program concretizing the strategy and tactics of the world Communist movement, but it was not until the 6th Congress that this long awaited program arrived. Written by Nikolai Bukharin, the leading theoretician of the Comintern, the document reflects a compromise between Bukharin and the 'corridor congress' under Stalin's influence which pushed through its proposals concerning such questions as the attitude to Social Democracy and fascism. These compromises reveal, in embryo, the rudiments of the ultra-left "Third Period" whose tragic results we will study next week.

In our previous readings of the world movement we have repeatedly emphasized the lack of theoretical practice found in these movements. In many respects our emphasis for the next two weeks will be directed to the results of this poverty as reflected in the other practices of the Communist movement.

You will receive the entire text of the program, but you should concentrate on the following sections, which correspond to the areas for discussion: 179-195; 209-228. The full program will also be background for the discussion of the Comintern's line on fascism next week.

QUESTIONS

- I. The Crisis of Capitalism
 - a. What does the program have to say about the collapse of capitalism in general, and in the particular conjuncture of 1928?
 - b. Does this analysis fit into the tradition of the "breakdown theory?" (see Colletti, p 52, from Week 1)
 - c. Does the economic crisis of 1929, the victory of Hitler in 1933, and the outbreak of war in 1939 confirm the program's analysis?
- II. The Defense of the USSR
 - a. What place does the program give to the USSR in the overall strategy for world proletarian revolution?
 - b. What effect would likely flow from the emphasis on the defense of the USSR on the theoretical and political practice of parties in other countries?
- III. Strategy and Tactics
 - a. What does the program say about the strategy for revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, and what tactics are mentioned in furtherance of this strategy?
 - b. Was this an adequate program to guide the work of the parties of these countries?
 - c. To what extent are the shortcomings of the program in this respect due to insufficient theoretical practice?

WEEK 6: Sixth and Seventh Congress's Approach to Fascism

The period of the late twenties and early thirties held many challenges for the World Communist Movement. With the dislocation of the economic depression and the rise of fascism, the Communist Movement was in a position to engage in broader and more intensified struggles than had been the case before. However the analysis of this conjuncture, the role of the party and its relation to other parties, the trade unions and mass organizations was sharply sectarian. This led to a weakening of those forces whose cohesion was essential to resist fascism. This sectarianism was greatly influenced by economist and dogmatist errors, which shaped the political line of the Communist movement.

The historic results of this sectarianism contributed to the triumph of fascism in Germany and a calamitous world war.

This period of communist history is significant in more than a detached, historical sense. Many sectarian, ultra-left groups in our own movement draw their legitimation from the 'Social fascist' period. A number of other groups share the same perspective as Dimitroff. Our critique of the past is, in a very real way, a critique of our present.

Shortly after the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 the 10th Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) introduced the ultra-left 'Third Period' whose embryonic character was already present in some of the Sixth Congress compromises.

The bankruptcy of this line became clear after its disastrous results in Germany and elsewhere, showing the need for a new course.

The new course of the Seventh Congress was a seemingly remarkable shift from the ultra-left to the ultra-right, a shift that both pleased and disoriented many Communists. Communists were pleased because it meant an end to the sectarian isolation of the Third Period, and disoriented because this shift contained little self-criticism concerning the Comintern's previous direction and the reasons for that direction's abandonment.

This shift was not as much of a change as one would assume, but merely a different expression of the same problematic whose lack of rigor concerning the class question was key. A hazy and indefinite conception of class forces and struggle were juggled about, as Comintern history shows, with little concern for their complexity. The result of this was an 'either/or' swing from the Communist Party being the working class, to the Popular Front where non-Fascist bourgeois elements were touted as being the 'people', with little or no warning as to the possible consequences of such a strategy.

Georgi Dimitroff was a Bulgarian Marxist, who in 1933 was the chief defendant in the Reichstag Fire trial. He was acquitted and he went to the USSR. In 1935 he replaced Molotov as the General Secretary of the Comintern, just a few months before the Seventh Congress in 1935. He remained General Secretary until the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943. The readings are reports and speeches the Dimitroff made to the Seventh Congress and they represent the official Comintern position.

Jay Lovestone was the Executive Secretary of the CP-USA from 1927-29. He was the leader of one of the major factions in the CP-USA (known as the 'Lovestone-Pepper Group' - the other was known as the 'Bittelman-Foster Group'). Lovestone and his group were expelled from the CP in June 1929. Through the 1930's they constituted the 'CP/O (Opposition - sometimes also referred to as the CP-Majority Group)'. From the 1940's onward Lovestone became rabidly and notoriously anti-communist. As part of his professional anti-communism he did international anti-labor work for the CIA. Lovestone is associated with the term "American exceptionalism". What that term really meant and the importance of that issue will be studied in the coming weeks. (see TR 8:19-21 and TR 9:50-51)

Nicos Poulantzas was born in Greece in 1935 but lived most of his adult life in France. He studied under Althusser and he wrote five books on politics and class struggle (Political Power and Social Classes, Classes in Contemporary Capitalism, Crisis of the Dictatorship, Fascism and Dictatorship, and State Power Socialism) before he took his own life last year. TR and others consider Poulantzas to be one of the major new theoreticians helping to understand and solve the crisis in Marxism.

READINGS:

1. Georgi Dimitroff The United Front (1935) p.9-41, 59-64, 91-93, 100-103, 108-111.
2. Jay Lovestone The People's Front Illusion (1937?) p.3-10.
3. Nicos Poulantzas Fascism and Dictatorship (1970) p.36-52, 156-165.
4. Line of March Vol. 1, No. 1, May/June 1980 p.25-27.

Questions:

- 1) What did the strategy of the United Front and the Popular Fronts consist of? How did it shape the work of Communists in the trade unions and the relations of Communists to other parties? How did this differ from the approach in the Third Period ('social fascism')? How is it similar to the CP-USA's "anti-monopoly" strategy? (see Line of March Vol. 1:No.2 for a discussion of the CP-USA's strategy).
- 2) Discuss Poulantzas' presentation of the history of the United and Popular Fronts in the Comintern. Discuss his critique of the class basis of fascism, the links between the United and Popular Fronts, and Dimitroff's view of bourgeois democracy?
- 3) How does Lovestone use the primacy of class struggle to illustrate the political and theoretical errors of the Third Period and the Popular Front? How is the unity of theoretical and political practice perceived?
- 4) According to Poulantzas how did the Comintern deny "itself the means of successfully struggling against the resistible rise of fascism."? (p.52). Pay attention to how the Comintern was economist.
5. Compare the Line of March article with the readings. How helpful is it politically? theoretically? What errors do they repeat? Compare the Line of March approach to the question of the United Front with the PoT approach to Afghanistan (TR 17). Which approach is more helpful? Why?

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WEEK SEVEN: THE DISSOLUTION OF THE COMINTERN
THE BEGINNING OF THE COMINFORM

In June of 1943, the Communist International, which for years had been hailed and assailed as the leading center of the international Communist movement, was dissolved. The circumstances surrounding the dissolution, the reasons for it and its effect on the Communist movement are the subject of this week's readings. We will examine how in this crucial period, priority was given not to the advancement of the class struggle internationally, but to the interests and needs of the Soviet state.

The readings for this week also describe the beginnings of the Cominform (the Communist Parties' Information Office) and the reasons for this new organizational and political orientation. Claudin lays stress on four interrelated political phenomena of the time: 1) The Soviet Union's participation in the partitioning of the world into "spheres of influence"; 2) The attempt by the Soviet Union to limit or crush the revolutionary aspirations of the masses of people emerging from World War II; 3) The necessity of constructing a "satellite system" to maintain control of Eastern Europe; and 4) The emerging hard-line of the West initiating the "Cold War".

Since these points are enumerated throughout the second volume, we will try to verbally fill in the gaps which the readings do not cover.

*NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Fernando Claudin is a Spanish Marxist who was expelled from the Spanish Communist party in 1965 after 32 years history with it. His two volume work, The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform, is an attempt to interpret historically the reasons for the failure and degeneration of the Communist movement.

Claudin's current political orientation appears to be Euro-Communist, whough we know few specifics about it. In any case, his book raises important and timely questions about the crisis of Marxism and the world Communist movement.

WEEK SEVEN:

READINGS: Selections from Fernando Claudin, The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform, Monthly Review, 1975.

1. All of Chapter 1 (pp. 15-45)
2. From chapter 5: "From Comintern to Cominform" (pp. 307-315)
3. From chapter 6: "The Cominform and the New Tactics" (pp. 465-473)

QUESTIONS:

The Dissolution

1. According to Claudin, what were the real reasons behind the initiative to dissolve the Comintern at that historical moment?
2. What was the public rationale for the dissolution of the Comintern as articulated by the ECCI? Do you agree with the ECCI that "any sort of centre would encounter insuperable obstacles in solving the problems facing the movement of each separate country." (p 40)
3. What instructions did the resolution dissolving the Comintern give to the now independent Communist Parties? Whose interests did these instructions serve? What implications does this have for the concept of proletarian internationalism as practiced by the leaders of the Comintern?

The Cominform

4. What was the theory of the "two camps" which formed the basis of the Cominform's international strategy? How was this a change from the period of the 7th Congress?
5. The Cominform placed great reliance on the terms "democratic" and "anti-democratic." Referring back to our earlier readings from Lenin, can we critique the use of these terms theoretically. What about the statement that the preservation of peace is the fundamental task of the post war period. (p 470) What is the theoretical basis of this?

Week 8: Khrushchev on Stalin

In late february of 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, nearly three years after Stalin's death, made a secret speech at the 20th party Congress of the CPSU offering his critique of Stalin and the period that has been given his name. This was a time of struggle within the party for the leading position. Earlier in the Congress it became clear that criticism of Stalin would be greeted in a positive manner by the delegates. So to secure his position, and to avoid being outdone, Khrushchev hastily drew up his assessment of the period in which he played more than a minor role. The speech rapidly became public, for example it was printed in the New York Times in June 1956. The shock caused by his speech in the world communist movement is hard to underestimate. For years, Communists everywhere had been raised on assumptions of Stalin's infallibility and genius. Overnight, this all changed. Expulsions and resignations followed in parties around the world as 'de-Stalinization' came to the forefront. This speech of Khrushchev's was another one of those manifestations of the "crisis of marxism" that all in the movement has suffered through since at least the 1930's. While alluding to this crisis in theory and practice of the movement in general, and the Soviet Union in particular, Khrushchev contained the understanding of this crisis within the non-concept of the "cult of the personality", ignoring the structures of Soviet society, the role of the Party, and all of the other instances that Marxists should use to analysis a specific social formation and a specific situation. For this reason the chance for something new to be liberated by this crisis coming to a head never happened because it was never intended to happen. Thus no real change occurred, in a fundamental sense.

In addition to the 'thumbnail sketch' of persons mentioned in the reading that is supplied with the speech the following might be helpful.

- NKVD (p.31): Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs- the political police
- OGPU (p.33): Unified State Political Administration- also the political police
- AUCP(B) (p.33): All Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)- this was the name of the CP from 1925 until 1952 when it changed its name to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
- Komsomol (p.41): Young Communist League-the youth group of the Party
- Kolkhozen (p.51): collective farms

Readings: Louis Althusser, "Note on 'The Critique of the Personality Cult'" Essays in Self Criticism p.78-93. This was written in 1972 as part of a two part response to John Lewis. Lewis is a British Communist philosopher who wrote "The Althusser Case", a critique of Althusser which appeared in Marxism Today the theoretical/political journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Nikita Khrushchev, Speech 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, February 24-25, 1956. p. 19-73.

Questions:

1. What is Khrushchev's critique of the Stalin period?
 - a. how does he account for all the deviations from Communist practice that are found in this period?
 - b. what do you find inadequate in his account?
2. According to Althusser what is the difference between Stalinism and the Stalinian deviation?
3. How does Althusser say that Khrushchev capitulated to the same deviation that he was critiquing?
4. What is economism/humanism?
 - a. how and where does it arise?
 - b. what is the relationship between economism/humanism and Bourgeois Law?
 - c. how does economism/humanism penetrate the workers movement and what are the results of this penetration?
 - d. Althusser says (p.88) that economism/humanism ignores the relations of production and class struggle. Do you agree? Why?
5. In what aspects of the New Communist movements do we see manifestations of the economist/humanist problematic?

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