

# Zinovievism and the degeneration of world Communism

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Grigory Zinoviev, an early twentieth-century leader in the Russian Marxist movement, is today an obscure historical figure, who, when mentioned, is usually dismissed as unserious, unstable, opportunistic, and even ridiculed as farcical. On the Left, the term “Zinovievism,” vague and undefined, occasionally surfaces in socialist disputes as an accusation against bureaucratism.

What a massive comedown. In the 1920s Zinoviev, President of the Communist International (Comintern) was, after Lenin and Trotsky, the most well-known, popular revolutionary figure in the world, and most revolutionaries declared themselves his followers and disciples. Zinoviev was also the leader and spokesman of the Leningrad district of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as well as the Soviet, in the city of the world’s most combative, class-conscious workers’ movement. Within a few years he was powerless, expelled by Stalin and Bukharin, isolated, with virtually no supporters. Yet his most ambiguous and harmful legacy survived this defeat as policies that had been incorporated into the communist orthodoxy of the 1920s. The purpose of this essay is to understand the content of Zinoviev’s underexplored legacy. I will argue that Zinovievism was a political current distinct from both Leninism and Stalinism, despite attempts to conflate these three greatly dissimilar political currents.

The mid-1920s were years of transition in Russia, the juncture between the death of Lenin and the triumph of Stalinism. The degeneration of the Russian Revolution and, following it, the international Communist movement, was a long, drawn-out process. The initial years of deterioration were marked by a series of difficult choices on the part of the revolution’s leaders, of groping for solutions—some necessary, none good—while being overwhelmed by unfavorable circumstances. The process culminated, with the consolidation of Stalin’s power in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in a vicious counterrevolutionary assault that destroyed every vestige of workers’ power and took millions of lives. The process of degeneration distorted and impaired the views of even the best fighters defending workers’ power, bewildering participants as well as later generations. Academic historians, social democrats, and anarchists have added to the conceptual confusion surrounding this complex historical process by their puerile equation of Leninism with Stalinism, or their slightly more sophisticated claim that Leninism inevitably led to Stalinism. This amalgamation of the revolution with the counterrevolution mystifies and distorts the real history of struggle, the clash of classes, contentious social forces, and historical agents that make up that history.

The revolutionary Marxist tradition has to fully disentangle itself from the degeneration of the Russian Revolution while holding fast to its liberating content. This study of Zinovievism as part of the degeneration—the interregnum between Leninism and Stalinism, but not yet the counterrevolution—will allow us to better understand the deviations it introduced into the movement and prevent them from distorting future revolutionary theory and practice.

## Zinoviev before Zinovievism

In the crucial years of 1908–17, Zinoviev was, after Lenin, the acknowledged number two figure of Bolshevism. He was Lenin’s assistant and chief collaborator in building the Bolshevik Party during this highly volatile decade between the two revolutions. This was a period which required sharp, bold swings in a rapidly changing world—marked by the meteoric rise of Russian industry and the unfolding global imperialist conflict, with its threat of coming war. During these years the main social democratic parties drifted rightward, prior to their outright capitulation to national patriotism at the outbreak of World War I. It was Zinoviev who was crucial to rebuilding the Bolshevik Party after the almost complete organizational collapse of Russian social democracy after the defeat of the 1905 revolution. He helped restore the influence of the party in the working class and the mass movement, and gave a lead in educating a new layer of worker-Bolshevik cadre. He worked to organize the new, unique Bolshevik organizational form of

factory and workplace-based cells, rather than relying on the system of geographically-based districts common among European social democratic parties. With the revival of the Russian economy after the world economic crisis of 1907–08 a major period of class struggle erupted. The Bolsheviks experienced enormous growth from radicalized young workers, won sway over most trade unions, and emerged as the leading force in the working class by 1912. That year the Bolsheviks declared themselves an independent revolutionary party, excluding all of the moderate sections of the social-democratic movement, a decision without which the Russian Revolution might not have succeeded.

In 1914 a new revolutionary upturn erupted, including barricade fighting in Petrograd. It was quickly cut short, however, by the outbreak of the World War I, which initially aroused an outburst of patriotic enthusiasm. Throughout all of these tumultuous swings in politics, Lenin came to rely on Zinoviev as his most trusted associate. As Bolshevism went through advances and setbacks, Zinoviev was solid when others wavered, able to navigate the rapid, deep political shifts required in these unstable years. Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first Soviet Commissar of Education, described Zinoviev's relation to Lenin of these years "as a man who had a profound understanding of the fundamentals of Bolshevism and who possessed a political intellect of the highest order. . . . [H]e belongs unquestionably to the four or five men who constitute the political brain of the Party."<sup>1</sup> Leon Trotsky, who had enormous contempt for Zinoviev, writes that during the decade leading up to 1917, the Central Committee abroad "had been the spiritual center of the party. Lenin, with Zinoviev as assistant, had conducted the whole work of leadership."<sup>2</sup> Trotsky describes Zinoviev in this period as Lenin's "closest disciple."<sup>3</sup> Lunacharsky writes that Zinoviev always acted as Lenin's "faithful henchman" who "followed Lenin as a thread follows the needle."<sup>4</sup>

### **Zinoviev's own talents**

Zinoviev was one of the world's greatest orators. Even Trotsky, perhaps the greatest orator of the Revolution, writes of Zinoviev:

In the agitation under the walls of the Tauride Palace—as everywhere in the agitational whirlwind of that period—a great place was occupied by Zinoviev, an orator of extraordinary power. His high tenor voice would surprise you at first, but afterward win you with its unique music. Zinoviev was a born agitator. He knew how to infect himself with the mood of the masses, excite himself with their emotions, and find for their thoughts and feelings a somewhat prolix, perhaps, but very gripping expression. Enemies used to call Zinoviev the greatest demagogue among the Bolsheviks. This was their usual way of paying tribute to his strongest trait—his ability to penetrate the heart of the *demos* and play upon its strings.<sup>5</sup>

A few years later, Zinoviev achieved international fame when at the October 1920 Halle Congress of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, after a four-hour speech debating Julius Martov of the Mensheviks, two-thirds of the delegates were won to joining the Communist Party, establishing its mass proletarian character.<sup>6</sup> He was thereafter called the Man of Halle, and was to have extraordinary authority, greater even than that of Lenin and Trotsky, among members and leaders of the German Communist movement.

Zinoviev was a great popularizer of Bolshevik ideas. Trotsky wrote, in an otherwise sharp denunciation of Zinoviev as a demagogue, "He was the ideal mechanism of transmission between Lenin and the masses—sometimes between the masses and Lenin."<sup>7</sup> But for Trotsky and others, Zinoviev was only an agitator, not a theoretician. This judgment, not completely without merit, is not entirely accurate. Zinoviev was the Bolshevik theoretician who examined the prewar bureaucratic degeneration of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) that would culminate in its capitulation to imperialism.<sup>8</sup>

Zinoviev also joined Lenin in World War I in the theoretical work of updating war policy for the imperialist era. They coauthored *Socialism and War*, the major Bolshevik text on the imperialist war. Zinoviev was asked by Lenin to make a study of wars from the French Revolution onward, and the Marxists attitude to them. Titled *Gegen der Strom*, these major theoretical articles on war and Marxism were then published as a collection of essays by Zinoviev and Lenin in 1916. It is difficult to name any others who coauthored theoretical works with Lenin.

Collaboration between Lenin and Zinoviev during this period extended beyond theoretical work. Zinoviev was the Bolshevik point man for antiwar work, its representative to Zimmerwald, the socialist antiwar movement, and the organizer of the Zimmerwald Left. This role solidified his relations with the international leftists who later became the founders of the Third International. His role in Zimmerwald made Zinoviev the logical person, and Lenin's candidate, to head the Communist International.<sup>9</sup> He was, as Victor Serge observes, Lenin's spokesman inside the Comintern.<sup>10</sup>

Zinoviev was the organizer of the first four Comintern Congresses, still the greatest source for modern revolutionary practice. He was the writer and inspirer of many of the resolutions, including its strategy, tactics, and program—which included foundational documents on party and class—of these revolutionary years. He was also responsible for the Comintern's disasters, the worst of which was the German March action of 1921, an attempt to force workers to follow the Communists in a putschist adventure.<sup>11</sup>

This picture presented of Zinoviev's accomplishments, largely lost to history, is not to create a portrait of an unblemished character whose weaknesses only became evident after Lenin's death. Serious criticism of Zinoviev existed at the peak of his political life. Jacob Sverdlov, the organizer of the Bolshevik Party, called him "panic personified," and Lenin remarked, "he copies my faults."<sup>12</sup> But this broader picture of Zinoviev's strengths helps explain his ability to fundamentally transform the world Communist parties in 1924–26, as well as his ambition to be Lenin's successor as head of the Soviet state.

Of course, the early Comintern wasn't just Zinoviev's achievement. He collaborated with Lenin, Trotsky, Radek, Bukharin, Paul Levi, Clara Zetkin, Alfred Rosmer, and many other Communist leaders. But he was the undisputed leader of the early Comintern, the person most identified with the concept of world revolution. He was the educator and trainer of the whole first generation of Communists internationally, who looked to him for practical leadership and theoretical guidance. John Riddell's recently issued book on the Fourth Congress, *Toward the United Front*, illustrates just how politically strong Zinoviev was, absolutely as well as relatively, compared to almost all other participants.<sup>13</sup>

Within the Comintern, the prestige of the Russian Communists was primarily based on being the only party that had led a successful revolution. Closely related to this, they brought a theoretical firmness, as well as a rich, varied, and flexible political experience to the international movement. Zinoviev's tremendous influence in the Comintern was originally based on his knowledge, experience, and activity, as well as the authority he derived from his close association with Lenin. As the president of the Comintern during its heroic period from 1919–23 as well as during its degeneration during 1924–26, he was accountable for both periods—for his revolutionary accomplishments, for the role he played in facilitating the rise of Stalinism, and finally, for his initiating with Trotsky of the United Left Opposition of 1926–27 against Stalinism. Victor Serge, who recognized Zinoviev's role as the bridge between revolutionary Bolshevism and bureaucratic Stalinism on a world scale, charged that Zinoviev was "Lenin's greatest mistake."<sup>14</sup> However, one cannot make sense of the role that individuals were playing without understanding the context in which it took place: the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

### **The Russian Revolution in isolation**

Lenin's concept of a workers state, of workers power, was that the police, army, courts and bureaucracy, the repressive instruments of class society, would be supplanted by armed workers making and enforcing all laws through the direct democracy of workers councils, factory committees, unions, militias, and workers parties. All officials being elected, recallable, earning average workers wages would eliminate privileged bureaucracy.

The Russian workers state could only survive if revolution spread to advanced countries, particularly Germany, whose aid and cooperation would make possible the development of a socialist economy in Russia. At the end of World War I revolutions occurred in Austria, Hungary, Germany, Finland, and Italy. Workers councils spread throughout Europe. Soviet republics briefly held power in Hungary and Bavaria. But the revolutions were crushed by the alliance between capital and the social democratic parties, isolating socialism in one underdeveloped country, dooming its survival.

The process of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution has been well-documented: civil war; invasion by the armies of fourteen imperialist countries; the collapse of industry by over 80 percent; two-thirds of the industrial proletariat gone by 1921; famine and starvation; the cities, including Petrograd and Moscow, deserted; epidemics of typhus and tuberculosis; forced grain collections leading to peasant revolts, including the Kronstadt mutiny. One political party after another was declared illegal as they supported or collaborated with the counterrevolution. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Party, which during the Civil War enunciated that members “have no privileges over other workers, they have only higher obligations,”<sup>15</sup> was being transformed from within as its factory cadres were incorporated into army command posts and assimilated into state and economic administration.

These conditions were not the ideal school for workers’ democracy, but they were the reality the Bolsheviks faced as the Civil War ended. At the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, the party was bitterly, factionally divided over the results of the economic chaos of “War Communism” and the collapse of the country. The divided party would not be able to hold onto power under these circumstances. The solution reluctantly accepted was the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP), restoring aspects of the capitalist market, including privilege and inequality, which all factions accepted was necessary to restore grain production and industry. All factions eventually voted for Lenin’s proposal at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 to temporarily ban factions as necessary to restore party unity, or the working class, with the Bolsheviks as their political representatives, would lose power.

It is important to understand that factions were banned as a contingent measure. When David Riazanov, head of the Marx-Engels Institute, proposed that factions be banned permanently, Lenin argued that “in the event of disagreement on fundamental issues,” similar to the struggle over the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty, it would be necessary to permit the organization of competing party platforms.<sup>16</sup> Lenin stressed that the ban on factions was a temporary measure only, necessitated by the dire situation in Russia, which could be rescued by the German Revolution that was expected, Lenin declared, in the next months. Nor was the banning of factions an attempt to end political debate or dissent: All major opposition factions—Trotsky’s, Bukharin’s, the Workers’ Opposition, the Democratic Centralists—were elected to and represented in the new Central Committee.

In reality, however, factions were never again legalized; the ban became permanent, and the rising bureaucracy used this opening to impose its stranglehold over party democracy. It took Trotsky, the most astute observer, years to recognize the disastrous turning point marked by the Tenth Party Congress: “It is possible to regard the decision of the Tenth Congress as a grave necessity. But in light of later events, one thing is absolutely clear: the banning of factions brought the heroic history of Bolshevism to an end and made way for its bureaucratic degenerations.”<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, the whole history of 1920s Russia is one of factional struggle by different social classes that penetrated the Bolshevik Party, the only legal political party. But since factions were not recognized as legitimate, their democratic rights were severely limited whenever they challenged the growing bureaucracy.

In 1917–18 there was hardly a party “apparatus.” Sverdlov, the party organizer, had a staff of fifteen. In 1919, at the height of the Civil War, the Bolshevik Party had eighty full-timers that grew to 150 in 1920. By 1921, that number had swelled to six hundred, and in 1922 the party apparatus emerged, with 15,325 full timers to control the party membership and party elections.<sup>18</sup> Zinoviev defended the growth of the party apparatus as a necessary tool in disciplining the state apparatus.<sup>19</sup> What an illusion! Stalin, who was elected general secretary in 1922, moved rapidly to centralize the party apparatus, then used the central party apparatus to make party, state, and economic appointments, the first steps in developing the *nomenklatura*, the important positions controlled by the bureaucracy as the new ruling class.<sup>20</sup>

In banning factions, the Bolsheviks extended the substitutionist practices that arose initially as necessary during civil war. The first step, banning parties that supported or conciliated counterrevolution, was unavoidable because of the actions of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries directed against the revolution. The unforeseen consequence of a single legal party, initially celebrated as a virtue, proved

disastrous. Decline of political life in the soviets meant that the only legal party substituted for the representative bodies of the working class. This process was inadvertently expanded by the banning of factions—substituting the leadership for the working-class ranks of the party, quickly followed by the party apparatus substituting for the party leadership. And as we will see, Zinoviev then extended this to banning factions in the Comintern, so that other CPs could not provide support to Trotsky and the Russian opposition.

The Bolsheviks were not conscious of the process in which they were involved. They thought of counterrevolution as arising from capitalist sources, not from an internally developing bureaucratic class. They were attempting to hang onto power until the European revolution could rescue them from the catastrophic situation forced upon them. This road, Lenin declared, represented a retreat from democracy, a retreat from socialism—a temporary albeit necessary one. If the Bolsheviks lost power, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, parties of the petty-bourgeoisie, would not be able to hold onto power. The only other social force capable of taking power was the counterrevolutionary White Guards, which the Bolsheviks had just defeated. Bolshevik responsibility could not ignore the consequences of opening the road for the counterrevolution to come to power. In Hungary and Finland, the White Terror had carried out mass murder of working-class militants and their families. In the Ukraine during the Civil War, for example, the Whites had engaged in the pre-Holocaust murder of 100,000 Jews, indiscriminately killing men, women, the elderly, and children.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of hanging onto power in less-than-democratic conditions, with the hope that the German Revolution would bail them out, seemed a much better option than exposing the Russian population to White terror and massacre. Nonetheless, the measures required to retain power, with their unintended consequences, aided the rise of the bureaucratic apparatus over the Bolshevik Party. That apparatus would eventually destroy both the Bolshevik Party and revolutionary possibilities throughout the world.

Zinovievism as a distinct political tendency came into existence in this context between degeneration and bureaucratic counterrevolution. It represented the workers' bureaucracy, based in the Leningrad party, allied with similar social forces, like the Moscow party bureaucracy under the control of Bolshevik leader Kamenev, and other local and regional party "baronies." It was the bureaucracy of an already degenerating workers' party and state, one that was still loosely attached to a working-class base, and in distorted, bureaucratic form, still committed to many of the goals of the Russian Revolution. These elements helped the rise of Stalinism, but they could not be incorporated into the Stalinist bureaucratic counterrevolution. Nevertheless, it was Zinoviev, not Stalin, who defeated Trotsky at the end of 1923. A few years later he and his allies joined with Trotsky and the remaining other oppositions to form the United Left Opposition of 1926–27, only to be defeated by the merged party-state bureaucracy that had created Stalin and was now under his control.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the role of the 1920s Russian struggle, or important Comintern actions, such as Bulgaria, the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee or the Chinese Revolution of 1925–27. This essay is confined to showing how the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution transformed the Comintern parties from revolutionary working-class instruments to passive tools of the Russian bureaucracy.

Zinovievism existed for only a few years, from 1924–27, and as a loose underground network for a few more years. Three forces shaped it: the bureaucratic apparatus that emerged from the degeneration of the Russian Revolution; the defeat of the German Revolution in 1923 (undermining both the perspectives of world revolution, and the substitutionist policies they justified); and the death of Lenin. The last opened up the succession struggle of the "Troika" (triumvirate) of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin against Trotsky—representing the class drive of the bureaucracy against the remaining control by the working class over Soviet institutions and life. Zinoviev and Stalin collaborated in inventing an official state "Cult of Lenin," as well as the term "Trotskyism," and introduced the use of selective quotes dragged out of context to discredit and defeat the opposition.

## **The Fifth Comintern Congress**

### **The bridge between Lenin and Stalin**

The Fifth Comintern Congress, held in June–July 1924, formed the bridge between the four revolutionary congresses of 1919–1922 and the Sixth Congress of 1928, which consolidated Stalin's unchallenged sway. The early Comintern Congresses, whatever their weaknesses, were open, democratic, and often contentious conferences that remain a storehouse of lessons for revolutionaries. By the Sixth Congress all that was gone.

At this congress, Zinoviev was at the height of his power. In E. H. Carr's words, this was Zinoviev's Congress. In the discussion of the "World Economic and Political System," involving forty-nine speakers and thirteen sessions over eight days, Zinoviev's speeches constitute sixty-five of the 120 pages of minutes.<sup>22</sup> But this was not a Stalinist congress. There was opposition from sections of the German, Swedish, Italian, and other parties, and from important leaders like Karl Radek, Heinrich Brandler, Amadeo Bordiga, and Clara Zetkin. August Thalheimer, despite being held responsible for the 1923 German defeat, continued as coauthor of the Program and cochairman, with Bukharin, of the Program Committee. Bordiga presented a counter resolution to Zinoviev's report that received the support of eight delegates,<sup>23</sup> and five Italian delegates refused to uphold Boris Souvarine's expulsion (for "Trotskyism," whatever the exact formal charge was.)<sup>24</sup>

But the level of discussion, range, and tolerance of differences had declined greatly from the Fourth Congress. Throughout the Congress, Zinoviev led the attack against the "right danger" and "the petty-bourgeoisie," the charges leveled against Trotsky and his supporters, even as ignorant adaptation was given to Kautskyian opportunism. Eugen Varga, the International's chief economist, for example, endorsed the thesis that ultra-imperialism could do away with imperialist war: "It is possible that the contradictions between the various imperialist powers can end," he remarked. "A single imperialist power or a united Anglo-American imperialism can so hold the rest of the world under it that future wars would be impossible." This repudiation of Lenin's strongly argued views went unopposed.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Bolshevization and anti-Trotsky campaigns**

The purpose of the Congress—which has gone down in history as the "Bolshevization Congress"—was to change the policies and internal structures of the other parties to make them subservient to the Russian party. The primary idea, unanimously accepted, was that the Russian party was the only truly Bolshevik (that is, revolutionary) party and therefore all other parties had to be loyal and subordinate to it. The prestige of the Russian Revolution, particularly after the failure of other revolutions, made this easier for leading Communists to accept. Until then, though the Russian leaders had great authority, it was based on political persuasion and the confidence its own ideas and experience inspired in others. Now its authority could not be questioned. In the future every party was expected to carry out instructions from the Russian party, in reality from its Politburo.

One party after another testified at the Congress that they really weren't Communist, but still carried remnants of social democracy. Bohimír Šmeral, head of the Czech party declared: "Our Party is not really a Bolshevik party and that applies to all the parties in the International with the exception of the Russian party."<sup>26</sup> Ernst Thaelmann of the German party declared, "At the end of October, we realized that our party was not a true Communist Party."<sup>27</sup> Another German delegate confessed: "From the standpoint of organization, our party is more of a Social Democratic machine than a Bolshevik organization."<sup>28</sup> Sen Katayama from Japan announced: "I am against the leadership of the world revolution by any other party in the Comintern besides the Russian party."<sup>29</sup> And so it went throughout the congress.

This subordination to the Russian party was to ensure that no foreign party would oppose the policies of the Troika. The first aim of the Bolshevization campaign was to wipe out support for Trotsky, after the Polish, French, and German parties had protested the vicious attacks on Trotsky at the end of 1923 in response to his publication of *The New Course*, a booklet signaling his clear opposition to the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution. The delegates at the Fifth Congress attacked Trotsky and the Russian Opposition as right wing, opportunist, and petty-bourgeois. Kamenev and Zinoviev later confessed to

Trotsky that they had invented Trotskyism to bolster their succession struggle, and Zinoviev added that “the trick was to string together old disagreements [with Lenin] with new issues.”<sup>30</sup>

Also invented and attacked was Luxemburgism, which I will take up when looking at the German party. The “Theses on Bolshevization” lumped Trotskyism and Luxemburgism together and declared that “the closer these political leaders stand to Leninism, the more dangerous are their views in those respects in which they do not coincide with Leninism.”<sup>31</sup>

The delegates of the German, French, British, and American parties introduced a resolution, accepted by general approval, which declared:

We wholeheartedly support the central committee of the Russian Communist Party. The actions of the Opposition are directed not only against the Central Committee of the RCP but are objectively against the interests of the entire Communist International. By imperiling the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Union of Soviet Republics and by weakening the Russian Communist Party which alone is capable of maintaining this dictatorship, it attacked the legacy of Lenin. The Comintern must insist upon the unequivocal rejection by all members of the International and by all of its sections of such un-Leninist conceptions, which are contrary to the world revolution and bring into contempt the authority of the Bolshevik old guard which is not only the leader of the Soviet state but also the leader of the Comintern. The 5th Congress of the Comintern must endorse the decision of the 13th Congress of the Russian Communist Party and must state very emphatically that the views of the Russian Opposition are petty-bourgeois, opportunistic digressions.<sup>32</sup>

Zinoviev drew the conclusion: “The Comintern must be monolithic . . . There can be no question that the right wingers will continue to act as before and actually become a faction. The Communist International will not allow this . . . Bolshevization means the formation of a strongly cemented, monolithic, centralized organization which in a friendly and brotherly manner, eradicates all differences in its ranks.” There was no opposition whatsoever to Zinoviev’s redefinition of the Comintern as a monolithic international. It is an indication of how quickly and deeply the degeneration of the Comintern was from its Fourth Congress in 1922 to its Fifth in 1924.

Within months the Russian CP and the Executive Committee of the Comintern extended the Congress decisions. At the end of 1924 they argued that world capitalism had stabilized itself and that world revolution was no longer on the immediate agenda. In place of world revolution, they adopted the theory of “socialism in one country,” a concept first used by Stalin. In an argument that flatly contradicted the internationalism that had been at the heart of the movement, it was now argued that socialism could be developed in isolated, backward Russia. Coexistence with world capitalism could be achieved by avoiding threats to capitalism and making alliances with capitalist countries, with the support of foreign communist parties. The argument had shifted from one that the Russian Revolution was holding on until the success of revolution elsewhere, to the argument that Russia no longer needed revolution in Europe in order to build socialism. The role of the CPs was no longer to organize a revolution in their own countries, but to defend the Soviet Union, its foreign policies, and its bureaucratic leadership.

### **Fascism and “social-fascism”**

The second important discussion of the Congress was on the defeat of the German Revolution. The aim was not to understand this disaster, but to protect Zinoviev and the Comintern leadership by shifting blame to the German leaders Brandler and Thalheimer, but also to Radek, Trotsky’s ally, and by implication, to Trotsky himself. Trotsky was doubly rebuked as “the source of the right-wing opportunism in the Comintern,” and for his attitude that the German party leaders should not be made scapegoats for implementing policies that had been made by the Comintern leadership.

In the course of this discussion, Zinoviev formulated an analysis of fascism and of social democracy that was, in essence, the forerunner of the theory of “social fascism” later fleshed out by Bukharin and Stalin at the Sixth Comintern Congress. The theory, which posited that social democracy and fascism are

“twins,” precluded a united front between communists and social democrats against Hitler on the grounds that the former were no better than the latter. With no vocal opposition, Zinoviev claimed something similar in 1924: “The Social Democratic party has been converted into a wing of Fascism.”<sup>33</sup>

Amadeo Bordiga, who delivered the official report on fascism, added: “Fascism has merely adopted in a new form the old platform of left-Bourgeois parties and of the Social Democrats,” and that “Mussolini’s triumph in Italy was a change in the leadership of the bourgeois class but this change does not represent a change in the program of the Italian bourgeoisie.”<sup>34</sup> This was to be later repeated by the German CP, that the Weimar regimes were already fascist and that Hitler would not represent any change.

#### **“The united front from below”**

The new definition of social democracy negated the policy on united fronts—won by Lenin and Trotsky at the Third and Fourth Congresses to overcome the infantile leftism of the newly formed Communist parties. Karl Radek and Clara Zetkin, supported by a few other delegates, vigorously defended the united front policy of joint struggle with reformist workers parties, only to have Zinoviev respond thus: “If these workers parties were really workers parties, we could form a coalition with them and we would become unconquerable in Europe. But these parties are workers parties only in name. It is therefore . . . counterrevolutionary utopianism, it is opportunism to talk of a coalition.”<sup>35</sup>

Zinoviev then redefined the united front not as an agreement with other parties, but as the unity of all forces “from below,” under communist leadership. As the adopted thesis asserted, “The tactics of the united front from below are the most important, that is, a united front under communist party leadership. . . they should in no circumstances be degraded to the tactics of lowering our ideals to the level of understanding reached by these [social democratic and non-party] workers.”<sup>36</sup>

This idea was elaborated by Ruth Fischer, Zinoviev’s newly installed leader of the German CP, who attacked the defense of the united front policy as “an attempt to represent Fascism and the November Republic (the Weimar democratic republic) as two opposing forces and not as different forms of the same force of capitalist dictatorship.”<sup>37</sup> She held the position adopted by the Third and Fourth Congresses to be the cause of the defeat of the German Revolution in 1923: “The failure of the German October was due to opportunism that grows from the United Front policy with Social Democrats, of years of opportunism which weakened the Communist Party by allying it with Social Democracy.”<sup>38</sup>

Radek correctly declared that “Comrade Zinoviev’s speech, which in my opinion represents the annulment of the resolution of the Fourth Congress, of the United Front. A number of comrades considered the open letter [the first united front proposal] to be opportunist but Lenin intervened at the Third Congress to defend it.”<sup>39</sup> Both Zinoviev and Bukharin, who had opposed the united front policy of the Third and Fourth Congresses, then said that Lenin had made a mistake in endorsing a policy that had been first developed by Paul Levi, and Lenin had come to realize that they were correct in their original views against it, for which no evidence was given.

The summation speech on fascism by Bordiga said that the response of the different forces of opposition to the assassination of Matteotti (a socialist opponent of Mussolini) meant that “The party must adopt the slogan of the liquidation of all antifascist oppositions and must replace them by an open and direct action of the Communist movement.”<sup>40</sup> This ultraleft fantasy, not to unite with but to oppose all other antifascist forces as insufficiently revolutionary, was the prelude to the disastrous tragedy of the German CP’s failure to resist Hitler’s accession to power.

Given the Zinovievist Comintern’s adoption of policies that were the prelude to those adopted under Stalin’s Comintern a few years later, why consider Zinovievism a distinct political tendency, but not yet Stalinism? The Fifth Congress, unlike Stalinism, still had open opposition, which challenged the new line, defended the united front, and argued against Zinoviev and Bukharin’s attempt to undo the work of the Third and Fourth Congresses. Opposition existed, but it was severely contained by the demoralization arising from the defeat of the German Revolution and the acceptance of Russian bureaucratic policies as necessary for victory. The balance of forces convinced doubters that it was futile to engage in open



opposition at this point. Trotsky, who attended as a member of the Presidium of the Congress and wrote its manifesto, refused to speak at the Congress, despite being asked to give his views on the Russian question. He indicated it was a closed question, fearful it would lead to measures against him in the Russian party.

The Fifth Congress, however debased, retained its communist character, as indicated by three political debates and decisions that were in keeping with the spirit of the previous congresses. The first decision was the one attractive feature of “Bolshevization,” the healthy aspect used to sell the rest of the otherwise lethal package. This was the move to reorganize the CPs into factory cells—the factory branch model. One of the few cogent conclusions drawn from the defeat of the German Revolution was that the KPD made major errors because its decisions were not closely aligned with changing consciousness in the factory councils, able to judge on a daily basis the level of agreement, or dissent, with its political proposals. The factory cell structure of the Bolshevik Party had enabled it to merge its ideas with the sentiments arising from below, to evaluate mass response to Bolshevik proposals and tactics, and flexibly alter its approach in the rapidly shifting events in 1917. The Fifth Congress proposed in its “Basic Conditions for the Formation of Mass Communist Parties,” that the CPs be reorganized using this successful Bolshevik model, to prepare for the next revolutionary upsurge.<sup>41</sup>

Second, the Congress advanced the anti-imperialism of the communist movement by stressing that all CPs, particularly those in countries with colonies, had to engage in practical anti-imperialist work. They had to support colonial revolts spreading by dynamics unleashed in the collapse of empires in World War I and the Russian Revolution. The French Communists began for the first time anti-imperialist work in support of the revolts in North Africa, and antimilitarist work in the French army. Similarly, the Americans began work around the occupation of the Philippines, and then in defense of Augusto Sandino and the Nicaraguan revolution.

Finally, the Congress inaugurated Communist work among the peasantry, declaring that for revolution to succeed it had to win over the peasantry.<sup>42</sup> This has been dismissed in some left histories as a rightward drift, bringing the Russian CP’s NEP peasant policy into the Comintern. While there is merit to that argument, the chief issue was that the CPers were beginning the necessary work that social democracy, including its radical wing, had previously rejected. The Second International “orthodox Marxist” view was that the peasantry were small capitalists doomed to extinction and shouldn’t be defended, as large farms were more efficient. Lenin and the Bolsheviks broke with this fatalistic determinism as a sectarian substitute for politics. They supported the peasants taking over the great estates and dividing the land. That policy won the peasantry to the revolution, and to the Red Army in the Civil War. The defeat of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Zinoviev argued, was its failure to give land to the peasants.

These three advances in theory and practice do not excuse the destruction of the Comintern’s politics and norms of democracy that were spread by Zinovievism, but they are indications that despite its deep degeneration, the Communist movement was still alive with revolutionary potential.

### **Zinovievist organization**

Zinovievism initiated the process of subordinating the foreign CPs, their policies and leaderships, to Moscow’s bureaucratic interests. To accomplish this the internal structures and political life of the foreign Communist parties had to be totally revamped, in some cases through the expulsion of the bulk of their memberships.

### **The monolithic party**

Until 1924, the Communist International and its affiliated parties were full of robust, democratic debates. The organizational conclusions of Zinoviev’s Bolshevization campaign were the start to ending this lively independence and turning the Communist parties from being vehicles of revolution into pawns of the Russian CP, from vanguards of revolution into Russia’s border guards. The organizational methods to accomplish this goal, which would take another three to five years to finally complete, began the process

of stamping out workers' democracy in the various affiliate parties. The measures themselves were the opposite of the norms of Leninism that had existed until then.

Prior to 1924, the concept of a monolithic party, a party without differences, did not exist. "The first appearance of the epithet 'monolithic' as applied to the party was in the resolution of the thirteenth party conference of January 1924 which condemned Trotsky" and opposed his views of the party to Bolshevism as "a monolithic whole."<sup>43</sup> The fact of this being raised and accepted was a reflection of how far the degeneration had proceeded. It was a leap toward the ideas of a monolithic society, of the future totalitarian Stalinist state.

A living revolutionary organization that does not have disagreements is impossible—total agreement exists only because of repression, or unthinking passivity. Monolithism is the political life of the graveyard. It ruined the Communist parties, making them incapable of leading working-class revolutions from below. Bolshevik ideological cohesion based on shared acceptance of the principles and program of the party was replaced by ideological unanimity, with dissent defined as heretical deviation and betrayal, effectively banning the right of the membership to think.

### Factions

Before 1924, factions existed in all Communist parties. The whole history of Bolshevism included internal struggles between different trends, currents, factions, and shades of opinion. This was true before the revolution, during it, and after victory, although in attenuated form after 1921. Internal struggles were carried out publicly, including factional organizing.<sup>44</sup> It was not Leninism, with its activist, combative membership contending for leadership, but the social democratic parties that cultivated a passive membership, that banned factions, most notably the SPD prior to World War I. Rosa Luxemburg and German revolutionaries were restricted from factional organization and activity by the discipline of the SPD, which would have isolated or expelled them. This inability of the German Left to organize beyond a loose network is what retarded the development of German revolutionary organization prior to the war.

The banning of factions was the logical extension of the Russian model now applied to the Comintern. As Trotsky wrote, "The epigones extended the banning from the ruling party of the USSR to the young sections of the Comintern, thus dooming them to degeneration before they had time to grow and develop."<sup>45</sup> It was part of the subordination to the Russian party, as the Comintern resolution stated that to be a "homogenous Bolshevik world party," each member party "must be a centralized party, permitting no factions, tendencies, or group."<sup>46</sup> The ban on organizing applied to the membership, which could only accept and not oppose the views and policies presented by the existing leadership, which was never banned from organizing for its point of view.

Before this period, the leadership was viewed as the concentration of a communist party's highest political consciousness; charged with struggling to raise the rest of the organization to that level. Its role was to initiate policies to strengthen the organization, and to carry those policies in struggle in the outside world. Bureaucratic leadership which couldn't be challenged, replaced revolutionary leadership in the communist movement. A revolutionary leadership must prove under democratic control from below that its policies, initiatives, actions, propaganda, and practice are the best alternatives for the organization. This is rendered impossible by the creation of a pliant, docile, passive membership incapable of challenging the policies or changing the leadership.

The right to form factions was and is a basic democratic right in any socialist organization. Without it, the membership is denied the right to think, to dissent, and to come up with alternative policies; it is precluded from presenting new ideas or new leaders; it is denied the ability to correct errors; and it cannot bring the living experience of the rank and file with their connection to the non-party working class and social movements into creating, developing, extending, and correcting party policy. If workers cannot control their own party, they cannot become fit to rule, to run society. It is in a revolutionary party that working-class consciousness is developed so that workers can control society. Without workers' democracy there is no revolutionary workers party, no matter what it calls itself.

Upholding the right to form factions did not mean that Bolshevism encouraged factions, faction fights, or a factional culture—any more than supporting the right to self-determination meant a call for the separation and breakup of existing countries. The contradiction between the right to form factions and factionalism was overcome, as with the right to self-determination, not by banning these basic democratic rights, but by a policy designed to overcome the necessity for their exercise. Bolshevism and the communist movement at its best avoided developing a factional culture and divisive faction fights by creating an internal culture that prized democratic control from below, respected differences, and protected minority rights.

In healthy Leninist practice, factions were expected to be temporary, ad hoc formations for the purposes of clearly debating out specific questions. They normally dissolved when the question was decided (although new information or new conditions could reopen the question for further discussion, including, if necessary, factional organization).

Permanent factions, “in itself a disturbing symptom,”<sup>47</sup> Trotsky writes, cannot be solved by simply banning them without violating the democratic rights of the membership to dissent. But permanence indicates that loyalty is to the faction, not the organization. There is no rationale for maintaining a permanent faction except for lack of confidence in the organization, its politics, principles, democracy, or leadership; and unwillingness to accept responsibility and discipline for the entire organization. The divisiveness of permanent factions leads to a political culture lacking in trust, loyalty, and comradely relations, and political paralysis that raises the ongoing threat of possible splits.

Zinoviev’s response to factional activity was expulsions and splits. Splits are sometimes the only way the movement can advance or remain true to its principles. Under “Bolshevization” splits were frequent and destructive, way stations to Stalinist conformity.

### **Public discussion and debate**

In the 1920s prior to “Bolshevization,” discussion within organizations—including minority views—were often presented in the public press. Naturally the Communist Parties drew a distinction between public political debates and sensitive, private discussions over personnel, internal problems, security, and organizing for external combat. At times in the Russian CP, minorities even had the right to their own newspapers.<sup>48</sup> This sort of open debate could only occur in a party that had strong political cohesion based on mutual agreement on firm principles, and the acceptance of trust and loyal, disciplined cooperation. In the Russian party, this ended not with the 1921 banning of factions, but with the anti-Trotsky campaign. According to E. H. Carr, “The party crisis of November–December 1923 was the last occasion on which *Pravda* provided a forum for the controversial pronouncements of conflicting views within the party. Thereafter it spoke exclusively with the official voice of the central committee or of the Politburo.”<sup>49</sup>

The majority had the right to set priorities and to structure activity, including when, where, and what was open to debate. When it was democratic and sensitive to minority rights, these majority rights were not questioned. But the Fifth Congress introduced a new policy that was adopted unanimously: “The organization commission . . . declares emphatically . . . that the decisions of Party organs must be carried out by all Party members, and that questions may be discussed only prior to the decisions of the Party organs concerned.”<sup>50</sup>

Once a decision was taken, no discussion was to be allowed thereafter. As the right to dissent was attacked, so of course was the right to public debate over differences. These rights were so ingrained in the Communist movement that it took years for them to be curtailed. But this Zinovievist practice is today accepted as Leninist operating practice by many sincere revolutionary groups unaware of its origins at the Fifth Comintern Congress.

## **Democratic centralism**

Confusing Zinoviev with Lenin has left lingering distrust about Leninist democratic centralism, which is centralized, disciplined action democratically decided upon despite tactical or political disagreements. There is no need for discipline if there are no disagreements, or for democracy if it is restricted to discussion that does not come to conclusions or engage in collective action. Leninist democratic centralism was organized to give combat for revolutionary politics against other political tendencies, and to meet the centralized, disciplined power of the state and the employers with an effectively strong, disciplined opposing force capable of achieving victory. Democratic centralism is not rigid, but changes with circumstances: tight discipline, even command, in unified combat; totally free discussion in the absence of immediate action.

At its best, the discipline of Leninist parties prioritize collaboration for the overcoming of differences, personalism, moralism, and individualism. There is an emphasis on education and training to raise the political level of all members and to develop their potential for leadership in the working class. The high level of disciplined functioning, of cadre creation, can only exist by commitment to the basic traditions, theory, and program of the movement, and by loyalty to comrades and the organization.

The hallmark of Zinovievism's bureaucratic centralism was to replace the deeply unruly revolutionary communist culture of an activist, anti-elitist democracy from below, with a pliant membership ready to obey commands from above without question. Leninism places tremendous emphasis on the subjective factor. Under specific historical circumstances, when objective conditions for revolution are mature and a prerevolutionary situation opens, the subjective factor is decisive. The history of the revolutionary movement had confirmed that the key to success is a politically experienced revolutionary party with mature leadership and a disciplined, educated cadre capable of becoming the leadership.

Zinoviev made and replaced party leaderships at will, basing his decision not on competency, but on considerations of personal loyalty. Purges and expulsions for dissent created a submissive membership trained to accept the changing twists of CP politics, no matter how bizarre. Effective revolutionary leadership requires a collaborative collective with a division of labor, drawing upon different individual strengths and talents, but taking collective responsibility for the organization and the leadership team. Until the Thirteenth Party Conference in January of 1924, "it had been the practice to elect delegates . . . proportionally to the votes cast." This casualty of the Russian anti-Trotsky campaign was to spread slowly throughout the Comintern, as minorities were excluded from elected positions and leadership.<sup>51</sup>

By suppressing dissent and replacing democratic centralism—the vibrant centralism based on free debate and discussion that had been the hallmark of Comintern practice—with bureaucratic centralism or rule by fiat, Zinoviev's Bolshevization campaign was a wrecking operation on the subjective factor in the new, promising, but far from mature Communist parties of the 1920s. Leninist norms of leadership and cadre were lost in the crackup of the Comintern, preserved only in small groups on the margins of the radical movement. A process should never be confused with a conclusion; its internal contradictions do not lead to one inevitable outcome. While Zinoviev in 1924 initiated a process of strangling the still revolutionary, democratic culture of the Communist parties, its completion took the rest of the decade. Stalinism could only triumph by physically destroying the Bolshevik Party, eliminating and eventually murdering all those Communists, including the original members of the Stalin faction, who had taken part in the workers' revolution, defended or in any way attached to working-class interests and power.

## **Zinovievism in practice: The metamorphosis of foreign Communist Parties**

This section will look at the impact of Zinoviev's Bolshevization campaign on three parties: the French and German, the most important of the Communist Parties, and the American, the forerunner of our own movement.

## The French party

The French Communist Party (PCF) was the first to carry out the anti-Trotsky campaign and to be transformed through “Bolshevization.” The existing French leadership of Albert Treint, general secretary of the PCF, and Suzanne Girault, head of the Paris organization, had a history of incompetence that led to a rapid decline of CP support in the French working class. But when they became completely subservient to Zinoviev, entirely reliant on Moscow, they were propped up by the Comintern. A leading historian of the PCF notes, “The degree to which the PCF had evolved since December 1922 (Fourth Congress) may be measured by the fact that eighteen months later (Fifth Congress), the designation of leadership by Moscow no longer seemed a strange procedure.”<sup>52</sup>

In 1923, Zinoviev called the PCF “our most important section.”<sup>53</sup> Germany was central in framing Comintern policy, but France was crucial for Zinoviev’s ambition to sideline Trotsky in the struggle to succeed Lenin. The PCF was the party that Trotsky was most identified with, where he had the most personal prestige and authority. If support for Trotsky could be eliminated in the PCF, it could become a model to be repeated throughout the Comintern.<sup>54</sup>

Trotsky pioneered the Third International effort to bridge the historic gap between left-socialists and syndicalists. He overcame the political distrust of these antagonistic traditions by building common revolutionary program and activity in opposition to imperialism and war. The authoritative French revolutionary syndicalists influenced by Trotsky—Alfred Rosmer, Pierre Monatte, Albert Bourderon, and Alphonse Merrheim—were central in gathering international support from syndicalists and anarchists in forming the Third International.

At the January 1924 PCF Congress at Lyon, where Treint had been demoted due to his incompetence, there was no discussion of the conflict in the Russian party, and no Trotskyist faction. In the next month, Treint learned to use the Russian conflict for his own career. He condemned the Russian opposition as petty-bourgeois Mensheviks, and claimed that Trotsky and Radek were an “opportunist right” who had sabotaged the German revolution. All of these ideas mimicked the onslaught from Zinoviev and Stalin at the recent Russian Thirteenth Party Conference. Treint, now firmly restored to leadership, “whose position depended mainly on support of Moscow, was the earliest and most enthusiastic advocate in any foreign party of Bolshevization.”<sup>55</sup> The first appearance of the word “Bolshevization” appeared in an article by Treint in March 1924.<sup>56</sup>

When the theory of social-fascism was adopted, Treint was overeager to prove himself to Zinoviev. He muddled the Comintern’s theory by adding anarchism to the mix, speaking of the “fundamental identity” of fascism, social democracy, and anarchism. Treint invented the term “anarcho-fascism,” which he classified as a wing of bourgeois counterrevolution and an enemy of the PCF. As a leading historian of the PCF says, “Treint misread the purpose of the anti-Trotskyite campaign. Unlike Zinoviev he believed his own ideological inventions.”<sup>57</sup> Since bourgeois democracy and fascism were fundamentally similar, Treint declared, “We are not moving towards Fascism, it is already here.”<sup>58</sup>

Until 1924, “the party itself lived on its own income . . . because of the relatively high membership of the PCF during the first two years and the enthusiastic response it met from the working class, in part because the apparatus was kept small.”<sup>59</sup> L.O. Frossard, secretary general of the party until January 1923, wrote in his memoir that, “not one ruble went into the treasuries of the organization or the paper. . . . We felt subsidies from Moscow would not only deprive us of our independence, they would lead the party to forget the importance of individual effort by its members.”<sup>60</sup> All these elements were to change with Bolshevization. Membership and support declined dramatically, while the bureaucratic apparatus expanded rapidly. “As in so many other matters, the great change in the party’s finances came between March and October 1924.”<sup>61</sup> The apparatus, now dependent for its livelihood on its Moscow paymaster, was the force for destroying rank and file control.

The Bolshevization of the PCF was a disaster in every respect. The founding leadership of the party, Souvarine, Rosmer, Monatte, and others were expelled for supporting the Trotskyist opposition in Russia as Treint thundered “homogenous ideology, homogenous policies, homogenous structure, homogenous

leadership.”<sup>62</sup> In the eighteen months of reorganization, almost three quarters of the members had left, to be replaced by new people who had not gone through the struggles against the war, the struggle against social democracy and centrism that had created the party in 1920, and the unification with the syndicalists. The loss of public support was registered in the precipitous decline of the party’s vote from the parliamentary election in 1924 to the local elections in 1925.<sup>63</sup> Treint was later expelled with the other Zinovievists of the United Left Opposition in 1927. But by the party Congress in June 1926, “the great majority of Oppositionists had already been either hounded from the party or reduced to silence. When Treint and Girault went they yielded their places . . . to Thorez, Doriot, and Marty. A new Communist Party, the Communist Party of Stalin, had been born.”<sup>64</sup>

Zinoviev’s use of the PCF as the model for “Bolshevization” was a success, a disaster, and a tragedy. It had succeeded in turning the party into the monolith Zinoviev desired, and it did so faster than anywhere else. It was a disaster in that it drove out militant, independent thinking, revolutionary workers, and reduced the specific weight of Communism in the French working class. It was a tragedy in that its success opened the door to Stalinization and set the French working class back for generations.

### The German party

Outside of Russia the most important Communist Party was that of Germany, whose working class was the best organized, the most militant and disciplined, with the strongest revolutionary tradition and potential. Confirming Bolshevik perspective, revolution broke out in Germany in November 1918, with workers councils larger, stronger, more radical and widespread than in 1917 Russia. What the Bolsheviks had not anticipated was the difficulty of building a revolutionary party and leadership in the midst of revolution itself, and that social democracy would ally with the army high command to be the chief organizer of the counterrevolution. This action of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in 1918–19, which deployed *Freikorps*, armed counterrevolutionary detachments, to crush the Communists, divided the working class with a line of blood. Under the direction of SPD leader and defense minister Gustav Noske, the Freikorps killed thousands of workers and murdered key Communist leaders, including Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches, Eugen Levine, and others.

Despite this, in the years up to 1923, the German workers engaged in one courageous battle after another in an ongoing revolutionary process, and built the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) into a mass party. The most complete, objectively revolutionary situation developed in 1923 out of the wild inflation that reduced the living standards of the working class and petty bourgeoisie to misery and starvation. In this context France invaded and occupied the Ruhr region. A dense network of factory councils emerged in the spring and early summer of 1923, led by the KPD, which now had a majority of the working class behind it. The party leadership, including Brandler and Thalheimer, were paralyzed by these rapid developments and asked the Russian party to send Trotsky to Germany to help lead the revolution. The Russians turned the request down for factional reasons. If Trotsky had succeeded as the head of the German Revolution, he would have been solidified as Lenin’s successor. But the Russian leadership, already conservative and bureaucratic, procrastinated, temporized, and could provide no revolutionary lead of their own, letting the greatest opportunity for revolution and the salvation of the Russian workers state pass away.<sup>65</sup>

The final defeat of the German Revolution was catastrophic, ending the period of world revolutionary upheaval that had begun in 1917. The wreckage of the European revolution demoralized the international working class, making it susceptible to the great lie of twentieth century socialism: that Stalinism was the continuation of the Russian Revolution, and retained some facsimile, however disfigured, of socialism. In Russia, rationales that had justified substitutionism, and holding out until the German Revolution bailed them out, were over. The Russian Revolution was for the foreseeable future isolated in one backward country. The bureaucracy used this opening to further weaken remaining control that workers had over Soviet economy, politics, and life.

Zinoviev’s immediate concern, as discussed earlier, was to escape responsibility for the German disaster, to shift blame to Radek, Brandler, and Thalheimer, and to make Trotsky the scapegoat. Radek was

associated with Trotsky, while Brandler and Thalheimer supported the Troika, but since Trotsky had objected to the scapegoating of local leaders who were only carrying out Comintern policy, saddling Brandler with responsibility for defeat could also be used to tie Trotsky to the failure. Zinoviev's German Bolshevization campaign was designed to line up the KPD against Trotsky and to exonerate Zinoviev, the executive committee of the Comintern, and the Russian politburo. The fate of the German party and revolution were now subordinated to the factional needs of the Russian bureaucracy.

The Comintern dismissed Brandler and his closest associates, and installed a leadership allied with Zinoviev. The new leadership had their own native, ultraleft politics. They had at the Third and Fourth Congresses opposed both Trotsky and Lenin as right-wing opportunists for their opposition to the March Action, and their support for joint struggles with Social Democrats. The new leaders—Ruth Fischer, Arkadi Maslow, Arthur Rosenberg, Werner Scholem, and Hugo Urbans—maintained that united front activity had distorted the revolutionary politics of the party, undermining its Bolshevism and causing its defeat.<sup>66</sup> The Comintern agreed, adding that Brandler, Thalheimer, and Radek “bore the greatest responsibility for the social democratic distortions of the KPD policy which had been so harmful in 1923.”<sup>67</sup> For the KPD to become “a real Bolshevik Party” it had to reject the united front policies of the Third and Fourth Comintern Congresses, originally introduced into the Comintern by the KPD.

“These lefts hunted down the least sympathy for ‘Trotskyism’ in the party” in accordance with Zinoviev's needs. It was “Ruth Fischer, the most extreme of the international Zinovievist faction, who moved a resolution in the working class quarter of Wedding in Berlin calling for the expulsion of Trotsky.”<sup>68</sup> But for the new leadership a greater problem than the few local Trotskyists was the heritage of Luxemburg and the Spartacus League, a membership that was the most politically independent, open-minded, and self-confident of any Communist Party. To solve their dilemma they had the Comintern invent “Luxemburgism” as a heresy to be wiped out. The Comintern Theses on Bolshevization stated that, “Among the most important mistakes of the Luxemburgists of practical significance today are: the un-Bolshevik treatment of the questions of ‘spontaneity’ and ‘consciousness’ of ‘organization’ and the ‘the masses’. Their false ideas on this question . . . prevented them from appraising correctly the role of the party in the revolution.”<sup>69</sup> This was charged against Luxemburg, the founder of the KPD and, with Lenin and Liebknecht, one of the three founders of the Comintern. Lenin respected her more than any other socialist and referred to her as “the eagle.” He polemicized with her on disagreements on self-determination, peasant policy, the accumulation of capital, and on organizational differences in the Russian party (to which she also belonged), but never on the role of the party, spontaneity, and consciousness.

Zinoviev in 1924 invented three myths: the cult of Lenin, Trotskyism, and Luxemburgism. Prior to these myths there is no hint in anything written by Lenin, or the Comintern, of any criticism of Luxemburg as a “spontaneist” who did not understand the leading role of the party in the revolution. Her “spontaneity” was not opposition to party leadership, but her recognition of the conservative, bureaucratic nature of the SPD leadership. Her organizational weakness was that the German SPD banned factions, and had she organized one she faced expulsion. The Luxemburg myths, created for the purging of the KPD of its democratic culture and cadres educated and trained by Luxemburg and her disciples, are still repeated by anti-Stalinists miseducated by histories that accepted these Zinovievist fables as Leninist gospel.

The anti-Luxemburg campaign in the Comintern was as destructive to its political future as the anti-Trotsky campaign. According to Herman Weber, historian of the KPD, the transformation was to change the “radical Marxist party founded by Rosa Luxemburg . . . into a party of the Stalinist apparatus.” Stalinism, Weber notes, was “imported through the channel of the Comintern, [and] completely ruined the party's political character and its capacity for intellectual leadership.”<sup>70</sup> To get to the sort of Stalinist party that facilitated Hitler's triumph, it was necessary to first destroy the KPD. The process was begun by Zinoviev and his allies, but in the German party, it took years to accomplish. “Even after the October 1923 defeat,” Weber observes, “democracy within the party was reflected in factional arguments . . . with their own speakers and platforms at all delegate conferences . . . the active members of the party were able to express their views. After 1924, the ‘left’ aimed to liquidate all factions by means of ‘Bolshevization.’ But it did not succeed.”<sup>71</sup>

In 1926, 30 percent of the active membership supported the Left Opposition. In 1927, there were still ten factions in the party. But by then, fewer than 40,000 of the 360,000 members of 1920 remained, and of these, many were to be expelled in the next two years. The KPD of 1923, despite its weaknesses, was the greatest revolutionary party since the Bolsheviks. Five years later, its transformation made it unable to effectively stop the rise of the Nazis; this dual tragedy, of Stalinism and Nazism, was the greatest blow the international movement suffered, and is yet to be overcome. The Zinovievist leaders, no matter how sincere their intentions, historically played the role of useful idiots for Stalin's and Hitler's victories.

### **The American party**

The Communist Party USA (CPUSA) arose out of the explosive industrial and political upsurge of the American working class during and immediately after World War I. Running in opposition to the war, the Socialist Party of America (SPA) in 1917 got its highest vote, averaging 25 percent in the northeastern cities. Following the war, a major strike wave swept the country; the high point was 1919, marked by the Great Steel Strike and the Seattle General Strike, and followed by the formation of local labor parties across the country. The CPUSA arose out of this ferment and the reshaping of the radical movement resulting from the war and the Russian Revolution. Diverse currents of socialists, syndicalists, and anarchists regrouped in the process of forming a revolutionary party. As with other CP's, it was highly factionalized in its early years as its different tendencies struggled over what the character of the party was going to be.

But the CPUSA was more factionalized than any other party because it also arose out of a large number of foreign-language federations. Less than 10 percent of the membership belonged to English-speaking branches. Most were ghettoized in ethnic enclaves, far removed from American life, culture, politics, and the labor movement. As a result the party went through a series of debilitating splits and could not cohere as a unified organization. It was only the pressure of the Comintern that forced the party to unify, to operate above ground as a legal organization, to be English speaking, to support reform struggles, and to work in the trade unions.

From the beginning, long before Zinovievism, the American party was the dependent, troubled child of the Comintern. It was never capable, prior to Stalinism, of creating a coherent collaborative leadership. The party accepted the "Bolshevization drive" without opposition because of its dependence on the Comintern, but also out of the desire to overcome its own debilitating factionalism.

Unlike the other parties that had their own independent lives prior to "Bolshevization," the American party was almost a ward of the Comintern. In the French, German, and other parties, Zinoviev had to intervene to install a loyalist leadership. In the American party, all of the leaders claimed loyalty to him. Nonetheless, there was an American "Bolshevization" campaign carried through by one of the leaders of the party most attached to the Comintern, James P. Cannon.

Cannon was called the "Captain of Bolshevization." He was the main proponent and fighter for the implementation of the decisions of the Fifth Congress. He was not an agent of Zinoviev in the way that Trient, Fischer, and Maslow were. He was, in his words, "a loyalist to the Comintern and its decisions," and he accepted its decisions without question. In 1924, Cannon wrote, "The word of the Communist International is decisive in all party questions."<sup>72</sup> Cannon emphasized the importance of banning factions: It [a Bolshevik party] must be a centralized party prohibiting factions, tendencies, and groups. It must be a monolithic party . . . our party has been plagued with factions, tendencies and groups. At least one-half of the energy of the party has been expended in factional struggles, one after another. We have even grown into the habit of accepting this state of affairs as a normal condition. We have gone to the extent of putting a premium upon factionalism by giving factional representation in the important committees of the party.<sup>73</sup>

The Bolshevization campaign was started in 1924, and while "it was the overall slogan of the second half of the decade," it "took six years for the American CP to go from Bolshevization in theory to Bolshevization in practice."<sup>74</sup> Factions and faction fights, while being formally denounced, became more intense after 1924, on the basis of leadership cliques as they tried to align with different personalities in



the Comintern. This quickly degenerated into a kind of gang warfare that would dominate the American Communist movement from 1925–1928.

In 1925 the Comintern demanded that Ludwig Lore be expelled for Trotskyism. Lore was one of the founders of the CPUSA, and an editor of *The Class Struggle*, the theoretical magazine that led to the formation of the party. He was the editor of the *Volkszeitung*, the German language daily newspaper that was the party's oldest and most theoretically developed publication. The votes of Lore's faction were crucial to the 1923 election of the leadership of William Z. Foster and James Cannon. Lore declared their victory "a victory for Trotskyism."<sup>75</sup> When in late 1924 he ran in the *Volkszeitung* parts of Trotsky's *The Lessons of October*, the Comintern demanded he cease publishing Trotsky and run a *Pravda* attack on Trotsky. Cannon and Browder immediately banned publication of Trotsky's articles in the *Workers Monthly*, the CPUSA's theoretical journal.<sup>76</sup> After his 1925 expulsion, Lore was one of five people, in early 1928, who unsuccessfully attempted to form a Trotskyist nucleus.<sup>77</sup>

The Comintern dealt an enormous blow to internal democracy in the American party at the party's Fourth Convention in August 1925. In the factional struggle, the Foster-Cannon group had been leading the party since 1923. The party was completely divided; some of the branches were even split into two. In that atmosphere, on the basis of proportional representation, the Foster-Cannon group won forty convention delegates to the twenty-one of the faction led by Jay Lovestone and Charles Ruthenberg. The convention decisions were overturned when it received a cable from Moscow that began: "The Ruthenberg Group is more loyal to decisions of the Communist International." This led to a joke among rank-and-file Communists: How is the party like the Brooklyn Bridge? Answer: Both of them are suspended by cables!

This cable signified the Comintern's desire to take leadership from the Foster-Cannon majority and hand over control to the totally compliant Lovestone-Ruthenberg minority. The Comintern calculated correctly that the Foster-Cannon group could be split, because Cannon would support them. When the telegram came, Foster said he wanted to fight it. Cannon then split the Foster-Cannon caucus and formed his own group in order to accept the decision from Moscow. The Cannon caucus debated what the cable meant by "Ruthenberg is more loyal." They decided that the Comintern was right because Foster had an independent base of support inside the trade unions. Ruthenberg had no base of support outside the party and therefore by necessity had to be more subservient or "loyal." Cannon then led a fight not to have the Comintern intervention debated by the party membership because that would "discredit the Communist International before the party comrades, to break down faith in the Communist International decisions."<sup>78</sup>

Theodore Draper called the Fourth Convention of 1925 "the political and organizational dividing line."<sup>79</sup> The outcome of Bolshevization was that the party moved from dependency on the Comintern for advice to no longer being able to democratically decide its own policies or leadership. As in the KPD and the PCF, the people in the CPUSA who would eventually go over to Trotskyism had previously been agents of the "Bolshevization" campaign that was gutting the Communist movement.

### **Conclusion: Liquidate Zinovievism**

The defeat of the German Revolution and the degeneration of the Russian Revolution were carried over into the Comintern by Zinoviev's "Bolshevization" campaign of 1924. It did massive damage to communist theory and practice. Zinoviev finally recoiled from his own creation, as the emergence of Stalin's power over the apparatus blocked Zinoviev's leadership of the Troika and the Comintern. Zinoviev also responded to the rising unrest of Leningrad workers to the NEP, growing inequality, and the ongoing loss of workers power. Zinoviev formed the 1925 Opposition, also referred to as the Leningrad Opposition. Trotsky had at first ignored the split in the Troika between Stalin and Zinoviev with Kamenev. But the split was the first opportunity for him to engage in political activity since his crushing defeat at the end of 1923. When Kamenev, Trotsky's brother-in-law, proposed a bloc of opposition forces, many Trotskyists were hostile, based on their experience of the Zinovievists as the main suppressors of party democracy. Radek proposed forming a bloc with Stalin against Zinoviev. Trotsky eventually concluded that a bloc with Zinoviev was an alliance with the Leningrad workers and their resulting pressure on the Zinovievist bureaucracy. All the remaining oppositions, including the Workers Opposition and the Democratic

Centralists, eventually agreed to ally in the United Left Opposition of 1926. Despite a heroic struggle, including appealing to workers outside of the party to rebuild a rank-and-file working-class political force, the opposition was defeated by the overwhelming strength of the now-merged party and state bureaucratic apparatus.

The United Left Opposition was expelled from the Russian party in 1927, and then throughout the Comintern. Zinoviev and his closest associates immediately capitulated to Stalin, recanted their views, publicly embraced the Stalinist line, and were readmitted to the party. Trotsky and his supporters refused to capitulate, continuing the fight for workers democracy and world revolution. With the opposition defeated, the bureaucracy qualitatively accelerated the process by which it consolidated itself as an independent bureaucratic ruling class. In doing so it had to destroy every remaining aspect of workers control and democracy, particularly its last bastion, the Bolshevik Party—not the Bolshevik party of the revolution and civil war, but the already bureaucratized party. Stalin's regime murdered more Communists than any other formation. It killed off almost everyone (including the original Stalinist faction) who had any ties to the revolution, trying to wipe out of collective memory what socialism—what workers power—had meant in a really existing workers state.

It was Trotsky and his followers who continued this fight, who were the surviving remnants of communism. Throughout the world, members of the Left Opposition who had almost entirely originated as part of the Zinoviev opposition had to decide whether to continue on as oppositionists, now under the leadership of Trotsky. Those who did—Fisher, Urbans, Scholem, Trient, Cannon, Bordiga, and a few thousand others—were pioneer Communists who kept alive the continuity of the revolutionary Marxist movement.

Whatever mistakes they had made, and many were horrendous, they were a result of their original acceptance of the process of degeneration of the Russian workers state and the defeat of the European revolution, not comprehending the future outcome of the gross violations of workers democracy and Leninism in which they were engaging. But to their eternal credit they refused to accept the full implications of this process and they joined the socialist battle against the further rise of Stalinism. When Zinoviev was placed before a show trial and executed by Stalin in 1936, thousands of Trotskyists and other oppositionists in the Russian concentration camps held strikes, demonstrations, and protests in honor of their fallen comrade.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless, Serge was right in saying that Zinoviev was Lenin's "greatest mistake."

The former Zinovievists—leading figures, cadres, and rank and filers of mass workers parties—accepted, at least for a period of time, to be in the wilderness, in order to overcome the wreckage and start anew as small, often isolated groups. They carried within themselves the collective memory of the revolutionary workers movement, without which the movement might have been destroyed; but many also brought the mindsets and practices of the Communist parties in 1924–26. This is not to pillory them for past errors or sins, but neither should we uncritically accept, because of their authority, the views of our ancestors. Some changed as the Trotskyist movement developed its critique and understanding of the bureaucracy. Trotsky himself had championed the banning of factions and a one-party state. He then repudiated factional bans in the early 1930s, but it took until *The Revolution Betrayed* in 1936 for him to renounce the one-party state. Some of the practices of Zinovievism were abandoned, some modified. Some were never reexamined, but were continued, passed on to unsuspecting succeeding generations as genuine Leninism. It is long past time that they be reexamined from the vantage point of workers democracy, and those that are found wanting discarded.

We are partisans of the Russian Revolution, the greatest act of working class self-emancipation and human liberation in history. We understand and sympathize with the heavy and tragic decisions the revolutionary movement had to make during the Civil War, decisions based on a commitment to keeping workers power alive while waiting for relief from the European revolution. Zinovievism was both product and ideology of the degeneration of the Revolution, prior to its final defeat by the Stalinist counterrevolution. There is no reason today to present temporary measures brought on by impossible circumstances as timeless revolutionary methods. We stand for the most democratic revolution possible,

the revolution “of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority.”<sup>81</sup> We want to reassert Leninism as the guide to that revolution and organizational practice. To do so, the international revolutionary movement will have to liquidate Zinovievism and any lingering remnants from the period of “Bolshevization,” and return to genuine Leninism.

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1. Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Revolutionary Silhouettes* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin, 1967), 77.
  2. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1960), 292.
  3. *Ibid.*, 300.
  4. Lunacharsky, *Revolutionary Silhouettes*, 77.
  5. Trotsky, *History*, vol. 2, 45–46.
  6. Ben Lewis, Lars T. Lih, Grigory Yevseyevich Zinoviev, and L. Martov, “World Revolution and the Third International (The Four-hour Speech),” *Martov and Zinoviev: Head to Head in Halle* (London: November Publications, 2011), 117–58.
  7. Trotsky, *History*, vol. 2, 46.
  8. Gregory Zinoviev, “The Social Roots of Opportunism,” *New International* vol. 8, no. 2–5 (1942): available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/zinoviev...>
  9. E. H. Carr, *Socialism In One Country*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Penguin, 1970), 169.
  10. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (New York: Writers and Readers, 1984), 141.
  11. Alternately, while not concentrating on the Comintern, Lars Lih declares that he has found “a striking and demonstrable consistency in Zinoviev’s outlook in the period 1918-1925.” Ben Lewis, Lars T. Lih, Grigory Yevseyevich Zinovyev, and L. Martov. “Zinoviev: Populist Leninist,” *Martov and Zinoviev: Head to Head in Halle*. 39-59.
  12. Boris Souvarine, *Stalin, A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, (New York: Alliance Books, 1939), 249 & 505.
  13. John Riddell. *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*. (Chicago: Haymarket, 2012).
  14. Serge, 177.
  15. E. H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 2, 195.
  16. Lenin’s various speeches and remarks at the Tenth Party Congress can be found at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/w...>
  17. Leon Trotsky, “Factions and the Fourth International, *Writings 1935–36* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 186.
  18. Pierre Broué, “Remarks on the History of the Bolshevik Party,” *Revolutionary History* vol. 9, no. 4 (2008): 100; available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/broue/1...>
  19. Lewis, Lih, Yevseyevich Zinovyev, and Martov, “Zinoviev: Populist Leninist,” *Martov and Zinoviev: Head to Head in Halle*, 50.
  20. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 2, 201–14.
  21. Oleg V. Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites: 1917-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011), 274.
  22. *Fifth Congress of the Communist International, Abridged Report of Meetings Held at Moscow June 17th to July 8th, 1924* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1924), 10–130.
  23. *Ibid.*, 160.
  24. *Ibid.*, 286.
  25. *Ibid.*, 97.
  26. *Ibid.*, 50.
  27. *Ibid.*, 70.
  28. *Ibid.*, 48.
  29. *Ibid.*, 89.
  30. Leon Trotsky, *The Stalin School of Falsification*, (New York: Pioneer, 1937), 92. See the section “Some Documents Relating to the Question of the Origin of the Legend of ‘Trotskyism’ 89–99.
  31. Jane Degras, *The Communist International, 1919–43: Documents*, vol. 2, 1923–43 (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1971), 191.
  32. *Fifth Congress of the Communist International*, 154.

33. Ibid., 22.
34. Ibid., 213.
35. Ibid., 30.
36. Jane Degras, *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents*, vol. 2, 1923–1928 (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1971), 152.
37. *Fifth Congress of the Communist International*, 60.
38. Ibid., 59.
39. Ibid., 52.
40. Ibid., 214.
41. Degras, 148.
42. Ibid., 149, 200–205.
43. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 2, 222.
44. Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935–36* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 184–189.
45. Ibid., 186.
46. Degras, 154.
47. Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935–36* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977), 187.
48. Pierre Broué, “Remarks on the History of the Bolshevik Party,” 98.
49. E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum* (London: Macmillan, 1954), 323.
50. *Fifth Congress of the Communist International*, 266.
51. Carr, *Interregnum*, 333.
52. Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making: 1914–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 393.
53. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3., 141.
54. Trotsky’s relation to French Communism went back to the socialist and syndicalist opponents of World War I, the two tendencies whose unity formed the PCF. Trotsky was in exile in Paris in 1914–16, edited the daily newspaper *Nashe Slovo*, which united revolutionary opposition to the war. Trotsky was active in the anti-militarist group of syndicalists, where “he inspired their policy and brought them into the Zimmerwald movement. He thus acted as godfather to the French Communist Party.” For details see, Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879–1921* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 227.
55. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3, 151. For more on the PCF of 1924–26, see Wohl, *French Communism in the Making*, 351–432, Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 3, 140–60, 360–79 and Alfred Rosmer, Boris Souvarine, Emile Fabrol, and Antoine Clavez, *Trotsky and the Origins of Trotskyism* (London: Francis Boutle, 2001), 13–14.
56. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3, 94.
57. Wohl, 386, 416.
58. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3, 156.
59. Wohl, 404.
60. Ibid., 404.
61. Ibid., 405.
62. Ibid., 417.
63. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3, 363.
64. Wohl, 426.
65. Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution, 1917–1923* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2006).
66. For the years of Bolshevization in Germany, see Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3, 96–118, 321–51.
67. Degras, 207.
68. Pierre Broué, “The German Left and the Russian Opposition (1926–28).” *Revolutionary History*, 1.1 (1989), available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/broue/19....>
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70. Hermann Weber “The Stalinization of the KPD: Old and New Views (Hermann Weber),” in Norman Laporte, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley, *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–23* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 22.
71. Ibid., 37.
72. James P. Cannon, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920–1928* (New York City: Prometheus Research Library, 1992), 232.

73. Ibid., 237.
74. Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York City: Viking, 1960), 153–154.
75. Ibid., 106.
76. Bryan Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left: 1890–1928* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 232.
77. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 368.
78. Cannon, 353.
79. Draper, 153.
80. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929–1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 416.
81. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, chapter 1, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/wo...>