

Introduction

We are proud to publish what appears to be the only complete and accurate English translation of the final text of “Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work,” and “Resolution on the Organization of the Communist International,” both Resolutions adopted by the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921. In addition we publish as appendices, also for the first time to our knowledge, English translations of the German stenographic record of the reports on and discussion of these Resolutions at the 22nd and 24th sessions of the Congress.

“Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work” is one of the great documents of the international communist movement, standing as the codification of communist organizational practice as it was forged by the Bolsheviks and tested in the light of the world’s first successful proletarian revolution. The Third Congress of the Communist International systematized the Russian Bolshevik experience for the fledgling international communist movement, producing both the Organizational Resolution and the “Theses on Tactics” and serving, in the words of Leon Trotsky, as “the highest school of revolutionary strategy.”¹

The Third Congress met in Moscow from 22 June to 12 July 1921 when the revolutionary wave which had swept Europe in the wake of World War I had nearly receded. The lack of steeled and tested communist parties had proved decisive to the defeat of proletarian revolutions in Germany, Hungary and in part in Italy. The international Social Democracy, reorganized as the Amsterdam-based Second International and still claiming the allegiance of substantial proletarian forces, had shown itself to be for the time an indispensable tool of bourgeois rule. By 1921 a certain temporary stability had been reimposed on the capitalist world: the ruling classes of Europe had learned some lessons from the Russian Bolshevik victory.

The young and untested communist parties still had to learn *their* lessons from the victory of the Bolsheviks. The left wing of world Social Democracy, as well as a significant section of the revolutionary syndicalist movement, had been won to the communist banner under the impact of the October Revolution. By 1921 large communist parties existed in many countries, but many were “communist” in little more than name, harboring

centrist leaders who had followed their membership into the new International only reluctantly. The “Conditions of Admission to the Communist International” (more popularly known as the Twenty-One Conditions) were adopted by the Comintern’s Second Congress in an attempt to separate out this centrist chaff and make the new parties break both programmatically and organizationally with the reformists. The Twenty-One Conditions established *democratic centralism* as the organizational basis for the Communist International. Yet democratic-centralist organizational norms were only lightly sketched by the Second Congress, which met in July 1920 in the midst of immense revolutionary ferment. Earlier that year the Red Army had turned back the invading Polish Army of Marshal Pilsudski, and as the Congress opened Soviet troops stood at the gates of Warsaw. It was the hope and expectation of the Soviet government and of the Congress delegates (who closely followed the Red Army’s progress on a map in the Congress hall) that the Red Army’s advance would spark a proletarian revolution in Poland. This would have moved the proletarian revolution west to the borders of Germany, with its still unfinished revolutionary developments. Unfortunately this hope proved unfounded and the Third Congress had to take stock of a more somber world situation.

In “Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work” the Third Congress expanded upon the organizational norms laid out by the Second Congress. V.I. Lenin explained the purpose and importance of this Organizational Resolution in a letter to the German Communists written shortly after the Third Congress completed its work:

In my opinion, the tactical and organisational resolutions of the Third Congress of the Communist International mark a great step forward. Every effort must be exerted to really put both resolutions into effect. This is a difficult matter, but it can and should be done.

First, the Communists had to proclaim their principles to the world. That was done at the First Congress. It was the first step.

The second step was to give the Communist International organisational form and to draw up conditions for affiliation to it—conditions making for real separation from the Centrists, from the direct and indirect agents of the bourgeoisie

within the working-class movement. That was done at the Second Congress.

At the Third Congress it was necessary to start practical, constructive work, to determine concretely, taking account of the practical experience of the communist struggle already begun, *exactly what* the line of further activity should be in respect of tactics and of organisation. We have taken this third step. We have an army of Communists all over the world. It is still poorly trained and poorly organised. It would be extremely harmful to forget this truth or be afraid of admitting it. Submitting ourselves to a most careful and rigorous test, and studying the experience of our own movement, we must train this army efficiently; we must organise it properly, and test it in all sorts of manoeuvres, all sorts of battles, in attack and in retreat. We cannot win without this long and hard schooling....

In the overwhelming majority of countries, our parties are still very far from being what real Communist Parties should be; they are far from being real vanguards of the genuinely revolutionary and only revolutionary class, with every single member taking part in the struggle, in the movement, in the everyday life of the masses. But we are aware of this defect, we brought it out most strikingly in the Third Congress resolution on the work of the Party.²

In fact Lenin played a major role in the drafting of the Organizational Resolution and can rightly be called its ideological author: the Finnish Communist Otto W. Kuusinen wrote the text under Lenin's direction, sending him the first draft on 6 June 1921. Lenin made detailed suggestions for reworking this draft and all Lenin's suggested additions, itemized in a letter to Kuusinen written on 10 June, were subsequently incorporated into the Resolution's final text. According to the editors of the *Collected Works*, Lenin also read a second draft of the Resolution sent to him in mid-June, before approving yet another draft on 9 July, the day before the Resolution was first discussed by the Congress.³

At that point Lenin suggested two additions to the draft Resolution and these number among the revisions made by the Commission on Organization and finally adopted by the Congress on 12 July. Yet the Commission on Organization made a number of other changes to the text approved by Lenin—in particular a whole new

section, "On the Organization of Political Struggles," was added. To understand the reason for this addition one has to understand the major political disputes that took place at the Third Congress. In the first instance these revolved around the recent tactics of the United Communist Party of Germany (VKPD)—the infamous "March Action."

By 1921 the VKPD had won a following among the coal miners of Mansfeld in central Germany, which was then the country's center of labor militancy. Strikes and plant occupations swept the region; on 16 March the government deliberately provoked the workers by sending in troops and police. The VKPD responded with a call for armed resistance—a quasi-insurrectionary call. While the workers of Mansfeld fought heroically, if sporadically, in the rest of Germany the VKPD's call was for the most part unheeded. Yet instead of seeking to retreat in good order, the VKPD made matters worse by calling for a general strike. Isolated strikes by VKPD supporters ensued, and they were easy targets for bourgeois repression. The casualties were very high and a number of VKPD leaders were arrested. Within three months, the VKPD membership dropped by half.

The Comintern had sent the Hungarian Communist Béla Kun (leader of the failed 1919 Revolution in Hungary) to Germany early in March and Kun's insistence that a communist party always be on the offensive against the bourgeoisie (the so-called "theory of the offensive") played no small role in inspiring the 1921 "March Action." Given the disastrous events in Germany, both Lenin and Trotsky saw in Kun's false "left" current a mortal danger to the future of the Communist International and they resolved to wage a fight against this adventurist current at the Third Congress. According to Clara Zetkin, the leading opponent of the leftists in the German party, before the opening of the Third Congress Lenin spoke to her on the "theory of the offensive" in the following terms:

Is it a theory anyway? Not at all, it is an illusion, it is romanticism, sheer romanticism. That is why it was manufactured in the "land of poets and thinkers," with the help of my dear Bela, who also belongs to a poetically gifted nation and feels himself obliged to be always more left than the left. We must not versify and dream. We must observe the world economic and political situation soberly, quite soberly, if we wish to take up the struggle against the bourgeoisie and to triumph.⁴

However in the Political Bureau (PB) of the Russian party Grigori Zinoviev and Nikolai Bukharin (the latter a candidate member) originally supported Kun and failed to see the danger that the adventurist theory posed to the young Communist International. While full documentation of the Political Bureau dispute on this question awaits the opening of the archives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, we do have Trotsky's account:⁵ Lenin obtained Lev Kamenev's support for his and Trotsky's position, thus securing a majority against the "left" on the five-man PB. However, in the Russian delegation to the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) Karl Radek, along with Zinoviev and Bukharin, generally supported the "left." Trotsky and Lenin drew Kamenev into meetings of the Russian ECCI delegation, though Kamenev was not formally an ECCI member. Trotsky reports that, for a period of time, the two opposing sides met in *separate* caucuses, indicating a pre-factional situation. The seriousness with which Lenin viewed the situation is clear from his remarks to a meeting of the ECCI which preceded the Third Congress: "But if the Left succeeded in making Béla Kun's views prevail, that would destroy Communism."⁶

In the end, however, the members of the Russian delegation apparently came to some agreement among themselves, compromising on the "Theses on Tactics" and for the most part presenting a united face to the Congress. Clara Zetkin says that, prior to the Congress, Lenin lectured her on the necessity of being lenient with the "left."⁷ While Lenin spoke against the "theory of the offensive" on the floor of the Congress, for the most part the battle took place in the various Commissions which met in conjunction with the Congress.⁸ The compromise formulations adopted in the various resolutions allowed the "left" to save face.

While combatting a real danger on the left, Lenin and Trotsky also had to wage battles against the centrist elements which were still influential in many parties: the sorting-out process initiated by the Twenty-One Conditions had only just begun. The Congress confirmed the expulsion of VKPD leader Paul Levi, who had publicly and slanderously denounced the party's course in March as a "Bakuninist putsch" (point 51 of the Organizational Resolution, on party discipline, was obviously written—and amended by the Congress—with Levi in mind). On the "March Action" there was a compromise. While condemning the tactical errors of the VKPD, the "Theses on Tactics" also described the "March Action"

as a step forward insofar as it represented the heroic response of a section of the German working class, fighting under communist leadership, to an overt provocation by the bourgeois state. Yet Lenin also insisted that the "Theses on Tactics" firmly endorse Levi's attempt to apply united-front tactics to Germany—the "Open Letter," which Levi had authored (with help from Radek) before his expulsion and which had been widely denounced as "opportunist" in the German party.⁹ The Open Letter, printed in *Die Rote Fahne* on 8 January 1921, had proposed joint actions of all German working-class organizations (including the Social Democrats) against the bourgeoisie's attacks on the pitiful living standards of the German proletariat.

With Germany still very unstable and the German party one of the largest in the Comintern, the perspective of world revolution reduced itself in the first instance to the perspective of a German revolution. Lenin was especially concerned that the German party overcome Kun's adventurist pseudo-leftism: the "March Action" fiasco had clearly demonstrated that the party had very little idea of how to win leadership of the majority of the working class away from the defenders of the bourgeois order in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the International Federation of Trade Unions (the "Amsterdam" International).

The party had to find the road to the masses. And the VKPD wasn't the only party in the International in need of guidance on this question. Most parties had to overcome the paralyzing effects of the social-democratic organizational forms that they had inherited with their membership. Thus the Organizational Resolution explains in extensive, sometimes painful, detail the means for forging the reciprocal ties between the party leadership and the membership, and between the membership and the class, which would allow the communists to involve all their members in ongoing work and prove themselves the best leaders of the proletariat in action. As Lenin wrote in his 10 June letter to Kuusinen:

There is no *everyday* work (*revolutionary* work) by every member of the Party.

This is the chief drawback.

To change this is the most difficult job of all.

*But this is the most important.*¹⁰

In this letter Lenin urged Kuusinen to find a "real German" comrade to improve the German text of the Resolution and read Kuusinen's report to the Con-

gress. On 11 June Lenin wrote urgently to Zinoviev to make the same point:

I have just read Kuusinen's theses and one-half of the article (the report)....

I do insist that he *and* he *alone* ((i.e., not Béla Kun)) should be allowed to give a report at this congress without fail.

This is necessary.

He knows and **thinks** (*was sehr selten ist unter den Revolutionären* [which is a great rarity among revolutionaries]).

What needs to be done right away is to find *one* German, a real one, and give him strict instructions to make stylistic corrections at once, and dictate the corrected text to a typist.

And at the congress read out for Kuusinen his article-report....

The German will read it out well. The benefit will be enormous.¹¹

Thus it was that at the last moment Wilhelm Koenen of the VKPD was drawn into the redrafting of the Resolution. It was Koenen who gave the reports on the Organizational Resolution to the 22nd and 24th sessions of the Third Congress. Koenen had recently come over to the Communists with the Left Wing of the Independent Socialist Party of Germany (USPD) and had given the organizational report at the founding conference of the VKPD in December 1920. Arriving in Moscow in early 1921, Koenen had been co-opted onto the "Smaller Bureau" (Presidium) of the ECCI.¹²

Koenen was certainly a "real German"—and also a supporter of the "theory of the offensive." In the Report he delivered to the Congress on 10 July (see Appendix A, "Report on the Organization Question") Koenen quotes Béla Kun favorably at least six times and never even mentions Otto Kuusinen or Lenin, the actual authors of the Resolution. Koenen's opening remarks repeat many of the points that he made in his report to the founding conference of the VKPD.¹³ Thus it would appear that the report delivered by Koenen to the Third Congress was not precisely the one prepared by Kuusinen and endorsed by Lenin in his letter to Zinoviev.

Koenen spends the bulk of his Report detailing a number of changes made to the draft Resolution and he explicates some of the Resolution's points, stressing, for example, the importance of building ties with the revolutionary syndicalist shop stewards movements which then existed in a number of European countries (Koenen had been active in the shop stewards move-

ment in Germany while a leader of the USPD). Yet over half of Koenen's Report is spent explaining the new section of the Resolution. While Koenen gives lip service to Levi's "Open Letter," it is clear from his Report that he viewed this new section, which was incorporated into the final text of the Resolution in a slightly modified form (Section V—"On the Organization of Political Struggles"), as a partial justification of Kun's "offensive" tactics. Indeed Section V—a highly organizational and hence confused rendition of points better made in the "Theses on Tactics"—is written more turgidly and with much less political depth than the rest of the Organizational Resolution. This section does not appear in the published draft of the Resolution and it is doubtful that it was distributed to the delegates before being introduced to the Congress; we have found no evidence that it was seen by Lenin.¹⁴

In his 10 July Report Koenen also introduced a Resolution on the Organization of the Communist International. This Resolution, which calls for the strengthening of the Comintern's Executive Committee, was written at the suggestion of the VKPD delegation. The Congress referred both the draft Organizational Resolution and this new Resolution on the Communist International to a Commission on Organization, which was to meet in two subcommittees the following day.

The Commission on Organization met on 11 July under considerable pressure—they had only one day to make revisions before reporting back to the 24th and final session of the Congress. They made many minor additions and changes to the Resolution, but it is unlikely that by the opening of the 24th session they were able to produce a new printed version incorporating all their changes—even a text in German, which was the language of the draft Resolution and the main language used on the floor of the Congress. Koenen's report to the 24th session implies that only the change in the section on democratic centralism was available to the delegates. In any event the Congress adopted the Organizational Resolution in this last session as it had been amended by the Commission, including the new section proposed by Koenen. With the Congress now over, the Comintern's production apparatus must have been under considerable strain to produce the various language texts of the final Resolution before the delegates left Moscow.

It is thus not surprising that there exist discrepancies between the various language versions of the Or-

ganizational Resolution and of the Resolution on the Communist International. The stenographic record of the Congress provides the only guide as to the definitive text of these Resolutions, which is why we have appended a translation of the relevant portions of the German-language stenographic report of the Congress.

One provision of the Resolution on the Organization of the Communist International engendered a heated debate at the 24th session, resulting in the only roll-call vote at the Third Congress (see Appendix B, “Report of the Commission on Organization”). The dispute arose over the composition of the Presidium (at the time called the Smaller Bureau) of the Comintern’s Executive Committee. Point 5 of the draft Resolution allowed the ECCI to co-opt non-ECCI members to its Smaller Bureau. Boris Souvarine, a French delegate speaking in the name of the French, Spanish, Swiss, Yugoslav, Austrian and Australian delegations, opposed this co-option provision. He proposed an amendment limiting Smaller Bureau membership to elected members of the ECCI. Souvarine’s amendment may have been a maneuver against the supporters of the “theory of the offensive”: the only non-ECCI members of the Smaller Bureau at the time were Béla Kun and Koenen himself.¹⁵ Radek, speaking in the name of the entire Russian delegation, vehemently opposed Souvarine’s amendment on the grounds that it did not give the ECCI adequate flexibility. The amendment failed. At that point Zinoviev stepped in with a proposal for a “compromise” which allowed the ECCI to co-opt non-ECCI members to the Smaller Bureau only as an “exception.” Zinoviev’s compromise formulation was adopted overwhelmingly.

We have translated the Resolutions from the German text of the Third Congress Theses published in Hamburg in 1921, the only version which contains Zinoviev’s compromise formulation in the Resolution on the Organization of the CI (see “A Note on the Translation”).

There appears to be one other issue of major controversy relating to the Organizational Resolution at the Third Congress. In Koenen’s Report to the 22nd session (see Appendix A, “Report on the Organization Question”), he mentions “certain differences—which, I believe, still cannot be definitively resolved at this Congress—over whether from now on the organizations can finally be built on cells in the factories, as the basis of the organizations.” Koenen goes on to imply that trade-union “cells” would be preferable to “working groups” based on district, or territorial, forms of party organization. Since the bureaucratizing Zinoviev-Stalin faction,

and then later the anti-revolutionary Stalin faction, distorted this concept in the direction implied by Koenen, it is worth quoting in full the key provisions of the 1921 Organizational Resolution:

11. In order to carry out daily party work, every party member should as a rule always be part of a *smaller working group*—a group, a committee, a commission, a board or a collegium, a fraction or cell. Only in this way can party work be properly allocated, directed and carried out.

Participation in the general membership meetings of the local organizations also goes without saying. Under conditions of legality it is not wise to choose to substitute meetings of local delegates for these periodic membership meetings; on the contrary, all members must be *required* to attend these meetings *regularly*....

12. Communist *nuclei* are to be formed for day-to-day work in different areas of party activity: for door-to-door agitation, for party studies, for press work, for literature distribution, for intelligence-gathering, communications, etc.

Communist *cells* are nuclei for daily communist work in plants and workshops, in trade unions, in workers cooperatives, in military units, etc.—wherever there are at least a few members or candidate members of the Communist Party. If there are several party members in the same plant or trade union, etc., then the cell is expanded into a fraction whose work is directed by the nucleus.

This concept of a disciplined communist working group, variously called a fraction, cell or nucleus—the link between the party and the broad working masses—is key to the Organizational Resolution. In its advocacy of disciplined communist working groups functioning in conjunction with party branches organized on a territorial basis, the Third Congress Resolution follows the organizational norms evolved by the Bolsheviks for work in prerevolutionary Russia:

2. it is desirable that Social Democratic cells in trade unions, which are organized along *occupational* lines, should function wherever local conditions permit in conjunction with party branches organized on a *territorial* basis....¹⁶

In contrast to the resolutions of the later Stalinized Comintern, the Third Congress Organizational Resolution does *not* require that communist parties abolish

all territorial forms of organization and base themselves *solely* on “cells” in the plants, factories and enterprises. We should note that, given Lenin’s role in the drafting of the Resolution, this could hardly have been an accidental oversight or a misformulation.

The exclusive “occupational cell” form of organization was adopted by the Russian party only in December 1919, i.e., only when it had become the ruling party of the Soviet state, struggling to maintain its proletarian character under Civil War conditions in a largely peasant country. In contrast to the Russian party’s 1919 usage the Third Congress Organizational Resolution, like the Second Congress resolution “Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution” and the Twenty-One Conditions, uses the term “cell” to mean a specific kind of working group—a communist nucleus working in any non-party workers organization.

Only in January 1924, the month Lenin died, did the ECCI issue its first instructions that all parties organize themselves solely on the basis of factory “cells.” At first these instructions remained a dead letter in most parties. However, in the summer of 1924 the Fifth Comintern Congress declared “Bolshevization” of the various national parties to be the most important task of the coming period. After the Fifth Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI in March-April 1925 the “Bolshevization” campaign began in earnest, and it became synonymous with the Comintern’s insistence that all parties divide up their membership, at least on paper, into “cells”—small, easily controlled units. Large territorial membership meetings became rare occurrences—when they were held these meetings became rubber stamps for the expulsion of oppositionists rather than forums for open political debate. Three oppositionists expelled from the French Communist Party in May 1928 described the chaotic reorganization process and the bureaucratization which resulted:

The “Bolshevization” of the party...consisted of officially suppressing the locals and replacing them by artificially creating—on paper only—factory cells, district cells and regional cells. The immediate result of this substitution was to drive thousands of militants away from the party, leaving most of the rest in a state of disarray and totally paralyzing the others by imposing a regime of centralism that was not democratic but bureaucratic, and which wiped out any control by the base of the party over its leadership—resulting in the creation

of a veritable caste of functionaries at every level in the party, which gradually substituted for the party itself.¹⁷

“Bolshevization” proved a very useful organizational device for the Stalinist bureaucratic caste as it obtained its precarious (but still maintained) victory. First the maneuverist Comintern leadership of Zinoviev-Stalin, and then the right-wing faction of Bukharin-Stalin, removed and installed leaderships in the various national parties. In the end all parties had “leaders” whose principal recommendation was slavish loyalty to Stalin’s dictates. Ruth Fischer, an ultra-leftist who was installed as the Zinovievite leader of the German party in 1924 (and then expelled from the party in 1926, after Zinoviev had broken with Stalin and formed the Leningrad Opposition), described the process by which the “cell” structure was used to eliminate democratic norms in the German party:

Under the slogan, “Concentrate party work in the factories,” the old stratification of the party into regional assemblies, with town groups and factory cells within the framework of the regional groups, was liquidated. The System Pieck was introduced; party units larger than one single factory cell were formally prohibited, and even large factory cells were split into smaller units of no more than ten to fifteen members. The party was atomized; every coherent group of militants was disintegrated. Convention delegates were thrice screened: first small cell groups elected representatives; these representatives elected delegates to a regional party convention; and only this regional convention had the right finally to elect delegates to the Reich congress.¹⁸

With the imposition of the exclusive “cell” organization the Stalinized Comintern in fact revived the old social-democratic dichotomy between passive members and active leaders—an evil that the Organizational Resolution had been written to overcome.

* * *

At the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in November-December 1922, Lenin repeatedly stressed the significance of the Organizational Resolution adopted by the Third Congress. According to the editors of Lenin’s *Collected Works*, throughout November Lenin had “a series of talks with delegates to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International

on the organisational pattern of Communist Parties and on the methods and content of their work.”¹⁹ In his only public speech to the Congress, on 13 November, Lenin again spoke about the Organizational Resolution. This was almost the last public speech of his life—he spoke publicly only once more, to the Moscow Soviet on 20 November. It was a major physical effort for Lenin to make his last intervention into the political life of the Communist International: in the words of one Congress delegate Lenin appeared “deeply marked by paralysis.”²⁰ His speech was by no means an off-the-cuff presentation. Lenin had prepared notes and he stuck to his outline, correcting the German transcript of his remarks at a later date. If Lenin’s December 1922 “Letter to the Congress” is rightly regarded as his last “Testament” to the Russian Bolsheviks, so his last words to the Fourth Congress of the Communist International can be taken with equal seriousness to be his last testament to the international communist movement.²¹

Lenin’s Fourth Congress remarks on the Organizational Resolution are often misrepresented—E.H. Carr, for example, states that Lenin “attacked” the Resolution.²² On the contrary, Lenin spoke to the urgent necessity of the parties understanding and *implementing* the Resolution, and his remarks remain today the best testimony as to the crucial significance of “Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of the Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work” for the international communist movement:

At the Third Congress, in 1921, we adopted a resolution on the organisational structure of the Communist Parties and on the methods and content of their activities. The resolution is an excellent one, but it is almost entirely Russian, that is to say, everything in it is based on Russian conditions. This is its good point, but it is also its failing. It is its failing because I am sure that no foreigner can read it. I have read it again before saying this. In the first place, it is too long, containing fifty or more points. Foreigners are not usually able to read such things. Secondly, even if they read it, they will not understand it because it is too Russian. Not because it is written in Russian—it has been excellently translated into all languages—but because it is thoroughly imbued with the Russian spirit. And thirdly, if by way of exception some foreigner does understand it, he cannot carry it out. This is its third defect. I have talked with a few of

the foreign delegates and hope to discuss matters in detail with a large number of delegates from different countries during the Congress, although I shall not take part in its proceedings, for unfortunately it is impossible for me to do that. I have the impression that we made a big mistake with this resolution, namely, that we blocked our own road to further success. As I have said already, the resolution is excellently drafted; I am prepared to subscribe to every one of its fifty or more points. But we have not learnt how to present our Russian experience to foreigners. All that was said in the resolution has remained a dead letter. If we do not realise this, we shall be unable to move ahead. I think that after five years of the Russian revolution the most important thing for all of us, Russian and foreign comrades alike, is to sit down and study. We have only now obtained the opportunity to do so. I do not know how long this opportunity will last. I do not know for how long the capitalist powers will give us the opportunity to study in peace. But we must take advantage of every moment of respite from fighting, from war, to study, and to study from scratch....

That resolution must be carried out. It cannot be carried out overnight; that is absolutely impossible. The resolution is too Russian, it reflects Russian experience. That is why it is quite unintelligible to foreigners, and they cannot be content with hanging it in a corner like an icon and praying to it. Nothing will be achieved that way. They must assimilate part of the Russian experience. Just how that will be done, I do not know. The fascists in Italy may, for example, render us a great service by showing the Italians that they are not yet sufficiently enlightened and that their country is not yet ensured against the Black Hundreds. Perhaps this will be very useful. We Russians must also find ways and means of explaining the principles of this resolution to the foreigners. Unless we do that, it will be absolutely impossible for them to carry it out. I am sure that in this connection we must tell not only the Russians, but the foreign comrades as well, that the most important thing in the period we are now entering is to study. We are studying in the general sense. They, however, must study in the special sense, in order that they may really understand the organisation, structure, method and

content of revolutionary work. If they do that, I am sure the prospects of the world revolution will be not only good, but excellent.²³

The Organizational Resolution fully embodied Lenin's final understanding of the means and ways to shape a "communist party" into an authentic revolutionary workers vanguard. Lenin dealt centrally with the case of mass "communist parties" that were still partially digested former social-democratic parties or large components of such parties. In particular he centered on the mass German party—the VKPD—which had resulted after a large majority of the Independent Socialists (USPD) voted to fuse with the Communists at the Halle Congress in October 1920.

"Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work" cannot be seen in any way as separate from the working *political* program of the Communist International in the time of Lenin and Trotsky. Hence the Resolution must be taken together with such defining political documents as Lenin's 1920 "*Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*" and Trotsky's *Lessons of October* (1924). Behind both of these works stands Lenin's profound and illuminating *The State and Revolution* written in 1917 (the balance of material from that interrupted work was used somewhat differently in Lenin's 1918 *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*).

Few declared Marxists, aside from those with an anarcho-syndicalist bent, have taken issue with Lenin's "*Left-Wing Communism*". However, many of those who reject the Comintern founders' vision of world revolution take issue with Trotsky's *Lessons of October*. These revisionists see a revolutionary outcome of the German crisis of 1923 as—at best—improbable. They also dismiss or ignore the revolutionary potential in Bulgaria in 1923, Estonia in 1924, Poland in 1926 (the Pilsudski coup), England in 1926, and the profound revolutionary developments in China in 1925-27. Trotsky's "lessons" were meant as a warning and a guide for precisely such revolutionary, or pre-revolutionary, situations. Revisionists of Leninism-Trotskyism are always quick to note that none of these situations was brought to a revolutionary conclusion. Such skeptics are at one with the post-Leninist Comintern which only postured and *mechanically* played at revolution, ensuring the outcome not of mere failure, but of defeat.

With the benefit of almost 70 years of hindsight we can say that "Guidelines on the Organizational Struc-

ture of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work" has stood the test of time. We might note certain omissions—the Resolution lacks, for example, any mention of the necessity for communists in many parts of the world to compete with nationalists for leadership of the struggle for social liberation (the Comintern was already grappling with the issue of nationalism in the colonial East at the Second Congress). But the Resolution was written for Western Europe, particularly Germany, and here nationalism played a reactionary, more or less fascist, role.

One can hardly fault the Resolution for failing to insist on one of the touchstones of pre-Civil War Bolshevik organizational practice—the right of communists to debate, and run for leadership on the basis of, counterposed political platforms (factional rights). The delegates to the Third Congress could not have anticipated the rise of the bureaucratic caste which would usurp political power in the Soviet Union, using for its own purposes the temporary banning of factions which had been adopted as an emergency measure by the 10th Congress of the Bolshevik Party in March 1921. This bureaucratic caste, led by Stalin, strangled the revolutionary Communist International, abandoning the struggle for world proletarian revolution in favor of the reactionary/utopian program of building "socialism in one country."

It was the Trotskyists who retained the revolutionary program which had armed the Communist International under Lenin. Thus it was left to them to fight the rise of Stalinism. Leopold Trepper, Polish Jewish Communist and heroic leader of the Red Orchestra Soviet spy network in Nazi-occupied West Europe, paid tribute to the Trotskyists, who fought Stalin because they continued to fight for world proletarian revolution:

Who rose up to voice his outrage?

The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honor. Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice-axe, they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra.

Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves.

Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not “confess,” for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party nor socialism.²⁴

At the end of World War II numerous countries faced revolutionary opportunities, but these were either still-born or bureaucratically deformed. Since the Spanish Civil War, desperate international imperialism no longer had to rely simply on the decrepit Social Democracy of the Second International.²⁵ Counterrevolution had a powerful new ally in the thoroughly Stalinized parties who used the enormous prestige of the Red Army’s victory over Nazism and their own role in the anti-Nazi resistance in Western Europe to derail the revolutionary upsurge through their universal strategy of building “popular fronts” with sections of the bourgeoisie. By the time the Comintern itself was officially dissolved in 1943 the Stalinist parties were thoroughly reformist—social democrats of the second mobilization.

The programmatic material, both political and organizational, of the Communist International of Lenin’s time is the concentrated expression of that leadership which did see the Russian Revolution through its many vicissitudes to victory. This material ought, therefore, to be powerfully educative for those in later generations who aspire through necessary social struggle to win socialism on this planet. The highest embodiment of the systematic formulation of the structure and work of Leninist communist parties is found in the Third Congress Resolution here presented, and this formulation stands on the same plane of importance as any of the main political aims of the Communist International. Without the systematic discipline and implementation Lenin called for, the great goals of the movement remain abstract and unobtainable in practice.

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August 1988

¹ Leon Trotsky, “The School of Revolutionary Strategy” (Speech at a General Party Membership Meeting of the Moscow Organization, July 1921), in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. II (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1953), 8.

² V.I. Lenin, “A Letter to the German Communists,”

Collected Works (CW), 4th ed. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1960-1970), vol. 32, 519-523.

³ See V.I. Lenin, “Letter to O.W. Kuusinen” and “Letter to O.W. Kuusinen and W. Koenen,” *CW* vol. 42, 316-318 and 318-319; see also note 368, pp. 567-568.

⁴ Clara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1934), 23.

⁵ Leon Trotsky, “Letter to the Bureau of Party History,” dated 21 October 1927 and circulated by hand in the Soviet Union. This letter was first published in English in *The Real Situation in Russia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928); the section on the Third Congress appears on pp. 246-250. Trotsky’s letter was also published in a selection of his works entitled *The Stalin School of Falsification* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1937). Trotsky makes no mention of Stalin’s position on the “theory of the offensive,” though Stalin was of course the other full member of the Russian PB at the time.

⁶ Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making, 1914-1924* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1966), 227, citing *Rapport du Secrétariat International* (1921?), 3-4. Lenin’s speech to this Plenum is not included in the English-language 4th edition of the *Collected Works* or in the Russian-language 5th edition.

⁷ Zetkin, op. cit., 24-25. For evidence of the agreement in the Russian delegation see Jan M. Meijer, ed., *The Trotsky Papers 1917-1922*, vol. II (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), Documents 700, 701, 703-705, pp. 467-479. Werner T. Angress refers to the evident Russian agreement in *Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921-1923* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 176-177.

⁸ V.I. Lenin, “Speech in Defence of the Tactics of the Communist International,” *CW* vol. 32, 468-477.

⁹ V.I. Lenin, “Remarks on the Draft Theses on Tactics for the Third Congress of the Communist International,” *CW* vol. 42, 319-323. In this letter to Zinoviev, Lenin says: “All those who have failed to grasp the necessity of the Open Letter tactic should be *expelled* from the Communist International within a month after its Third Congress.”

¹⁰ V.I. Lenin, “Letter to O.W. Kuusinen,” *CW* vol. 42, 317.

¹¹ V.I. Lenin, “To G.Y. Zinoviev,” *CW* vol. 45, 185-186.

¹² Koenen was not appointed to the ECCI or re-elected to the VKPD's *Zentralausschuß* following the Congress. However, he remained a real leader of the German Party through its Stalinist degeneration, serving on and off on the party's leading committee until 1953 when he was censured and removed as head of the party organization in Saxony. He died, an East German "elder statesman," in 1963. See Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, rev. ed. (Stanford, Cal.: The Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 222.

¹³ *Bericht über die Verhandlungen des Vereinigungsparteitages der U.S.P.D. (Linke) und der KPD (Spartakusbund)* (Berlin: Frankes Verlag, G.m.b.H., 1921), 108-121.

¹⁴ A copy of the draft Resolution exists in French translation in the Library of the Institute Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in Milan: O.W. Kuusinen and W. Koenen, *Thèses sur la structure et l'organisation des partis communistes* (Moscow: Section de la Presse de l'Internationale Communiste, 1921).

¹⁵ For a list of the membership of the ECCI and the Smaller Bureau, see Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents*, vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 453-454.

¹⁶ "On the Character and Organizational Forms of Party Work," resolution adopted by the 1912 Prague Conference of the RSDLP, in *The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party 1898-October 1917*, ed. Ralph Carter Elwood, vol. I of *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, general ed. Robert H. McNeal (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1974), 149.

¹⁷ Marcel Fourrier, Francis Gérard and Pierre Naville, "Sur l'organisation du parti," theses appended to "Lettre au 6e Congrès mondial de l'Internationale communiste," dated 1 July 1928 and published in Pierre Naville, *L'Entre-deux guerres: La lutte des classes en France 1927-1939* (Paris: Etudes et Documentation Internationales, 1975), 62. Translation by PRL.

Pierre Naville and Francis Gérard (better known as Gérard Rosenthal) were from the time of their expulsion from the Communist Party until WWII leading figures in the Trotskyist movement in France.

¹⁸ Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 503. After their ex-

pulsion Fischer and her compatriot Arkadi Maslow formed the German Leninbund, maintaining a sort of pseudo-leftist, maneuverist brand of politics into the early 1930s. They took refuge in Paris after Hitler came to power, and Fischer passed briefly through the Trotskyist movement in the mid-1930s. She spent most of WWII in the United States and died in Paris in 1961.

¹⁹ "The Life and Work of V.I. Lenin, Outstanding Dates (August 1921-January 1924)," in *CW* vol. 33, 555.

²⁰ Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow* (London: Pluto Press, 1971), 169.

²¹ Lenin's "Letter to the Congress" is printed in *CW* vol. 36, 593-597. The notes for Lenin's speech to the Fourth Congress can be found in the same volume, 585-587.

²² E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, vol. 3 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), 393. In the same vein see also Rosmer, op. cit., 170 and to a lesser extent Degras, op. cit., 257.

²³ V.I. Lenin, "Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution," *CW* vol. 33, 430-432.

²⁴ Leopold Trepper, *The Great Game: Memoirs of the Spy Hitler Couldn't Silence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 55-56. Trepper was won to Communism in Poland (in his words) "in the glow of October." He attended Comintern school in Moscow, eventually joining Soviet Intelligence. As he wrote, "Between the hammer of Hitler and the anvil of Stalin, the path was a narrow one for those of us who still believed in the Revolution."

After his heroic service in WWII, Trepper arrived in Moscow only to be imprisoned for ten years in Lubyanka. Freed after Stalin's death, Trepper returned to Poland where, in the early 1970s, he was the victim of an anti-Semitic campaign by the Stalinists. He was allowed to leave Poland in 1973 only after an international campaign of protest. He died in 1982.

²⁵ On the Stalinists in Spain see, e.g., the material in *Revolutionary History* (London) vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1988).