

Lots of awkward sentences, page 1.
Your English needs work,
Book Review

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Hulse, James W. The Forming of the Communist International.
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964. 275 pp.

In his Preface, Hulse terms his book on the first fifteen months of the Communist International (Comintern) a study of the "most daring organizational venture Moscow ever undertook." (p. v) It is important to study this attempt because, in his words, the struggle for the world is not only an ideological contest but also a test of organizational talent. Furthermore, one cannot judge the activities of the Comintern in light only of its record under Stalin, when it became a pawn of Soviet foreign policy. Hulse aims to show that the period prior to the Second Congress, July 1920, "was far more important than has been recognized" in the history of the international communist movement because "the aims of the Comintern underwent a substantial change in the very first fifteen months of its existence." (p. vi)

In fact, when the Comintern was founded in the spring of 1919, the Bolsheviks still believed in the imminence of communist revolutions in Europe. So propaganda, directed at the working class, was to be the primary task of the Comintern. When those revolutions did not occur, or were suppressed, the Comintern, already dominated by Bolshevik leaders, shifted its emphasis from propaganda to organizational activities with the resulting emergence of a semiconspiratorial operation and

tighter centralized control. This early tactical shift was itself an indirect admission of the Comintern's failure to promote revolution and, thus, already established the future course of Comintern policy in its first months of existence, even before it became an effective mass organization.

The Soviet government broadcast an invitation to revolutionary groups throughout the world on 24 January 1919 to send representatives to a conference for the discussion of the formation of a new revolutionary international, long a desire of Lenin. The conference opened in the Kremlin on 2 March 1919 with fifty-two participants, only twelve of whom were legitimate spokesmen for active communist or socialist groups and eight of whom were Russian. Though faced with innumerable difficulties, ~~one of which was the allied blockade of Russia~~, a very small skeleton staff, headed by Grigorii Zinoviev, was set up in Petrograd with the main purpose of propaganda, i.e. to put the Bolshevik example before the world. A journal, Kommunisticheskii Internatsional, soon appeared and was translated into German, French, and English, though it remained extremely difficult to get accurate reports both to and from the West. In contradiction to what the Comintern would later become, Hulse points out that at this early date Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders saw the Comintern "as a future league of soviet republics" (p. 34) and also envisioned the early transfer of its headquarters to the West. More importantly, "the Bolsheviks created the Comintern for propaganda purposes [alone]: to spread the message of their own revolution and to

Confusing, what does the blockade have to do with a staff?

Eight of the 12?

Bad sentence

alone?

keep the proletariat of the capitalist states from being duped by reformist views." (p. 35) In fact, their intentions in founding the Comintern were as naive as the hopes ~~that~~ they had ~~placed~~ in issuing the "Decree on Peace" over a year ~~ago~~ *before*,

Hulse then proceeds to examine how Comintern policies or appeals were received in the countries of Europe and clearly indicates the widely held impression, then current, of an advancing "red tide." Hungary quickly became the first important test of Comintern policies. Bela Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed just two weeks after the close of the First Congress. It was a critical test and a resounding defeat for international communism, and the most important result was how the Comintern rationalized the overthrow of the Kun regime. Ignoring the fact that it was the Hungarian workers' lack of support for Kun which led to the Hungarian collapse, the Comintern concluded that it had been a tactical error for communists to have affiliated so closely with social-democrats. The Bolshevik leaders "tactitly overlooked the extent to which they had endorsed the merger" and their enthusiasm for the regime. (p. 46) The Hungarian disaster provided the Comintern with one of its standard policy lines--no collaboration with social-democrats, a lesson that was reinforced by the fact that many of the Hungarian communists later came to play important roles in the Comintern.

There were other important lessons to be learned that year by the Comintern, especially in light of its high expectations. Hulse does an excellent job of examining the confused and

highly chaotic conditions existing that year in Europe and the Comintern's attempts to reach Western Europe with its propaganda and to win the allegiance of the various socialist and communist parties, ~~to the Comintern~~. Given the tenuous communication links between Moscow and the West, what occurred was almost a fiasco. Germany provides a good example of the difficulties that the Comintern faced. There an official communist party, the KPD, ^{which} had been established at the end of 1918, but after the abortive Kapp Putsch ~~Putsch~~ of 13 March 1920, a more radical splinter group, the KAPD, was formed. The Comintern, however, achieved little as it was supporting an increasingly overcautious KPD while simultaneously courting the support of the KAPD and also ^{the} independent socialists, the USPD, who were more eager for action. ^{then} The Comintern found itself in the unenviable position of trying to effect a compromise and unify the disorganized ^{German} left.

~~Thus~~, by the end of 1919 the Comintern was faced with a somewhat paradoxical situation. There had appeared small, extremely radical leftist groups in France, Great Britain, and Germany who were acting under the impression that they were correctly following Bolshevik tactics. The Amsterdam Bureau had been set up in November 1919 to coordinate the activities of European parties who were affiliating with the Comintern; however, within three months, Moscow broadcast the Comintern's decision to abolish the Bureau because of its "sectarian policy" of opposing parliamentary participation, insisting on purges, and supporting the KAPD. As a result, Lenin in April

1920 wrote his famous pamphlet, Left-wing Communism. an Infantile Disorder. It was a milestone in the development of the Comintern as for the first time the Bolsheviks tried to impose their views and experience, both ideological and organizational, on foreign parties. The Bolshevik example became infallible.

The Second Congress of the Comintern opened amidst much fanfare in July 1920. Present were over two hundred delegates representing thirty-five countries. The Soviet delegation dominated the proceedings at which the famous "Twenty-One Conditions" for membership in the Comintern were adopted. Those conditions represented the conclusions that the Soviet leadership had drawn after the first months of the Comintern's existence. The Comintern's policies had moved from left to right, from revolutionary zeal to organization, from an emphasis on immediate action and propaganda to a measurement of success determined by the degree of institutional growth. Already, "it was becoming a rigid, disciplinarian institution, led by a few Russians who planned to create revolutionary situations by manipulating small, well-controlled groups." (p. 222)

Strangely enough, since this book appeared in 1964 Hulse has specialized in the history of Nevada, as he teaches at the University of Nevada. The book remains a good, brief overview of the complicated chain of events which occurred in Europe in the immediate aftermath of the Great War when the communist movement was just being established. Hulse is also successful

in his task of emphasizing the importance of the the changing aims of the Comintern in its first year of existence. At the same time, the very cursory nature of the attempt to examine Comintern policy in every European country makes it important for the reader to consult individual country studies for more detail.

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