

When Americans Refuse To Read: The Task of Study Today

“Socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, i.e., that it be studied.” - Friedrich Engels, “Addendum to the Preface to ‘The Peasant War in Germany’”

[Editor's note: We ask that the reader pay attention to the footnotes. In them you will find direct references, elaborations, and practical definitions for the terms we are using.]

[Introduction]

Election cycles in the US often coincide with an influx of Americans turning to Marxism. As was the case during this past cycle, a considerable number of students and activists, disillusioned by the election or the Gaza protest movement, have embraced Marxism as a potential solution. Meanwhile, as the labor movement continues to develop, a new generation of workers have also begun looking to socialism¹. Revolutionaries can't comprehend this spontaneous development towards class consciousness in isolation. Only by studying the interrelation between the mass movement and Marxism can we develop a communist party in America capable of liberating ourselves from imperialism². With that said, how are we to understand this relationship? By applying Marxist analysis to our present conditions and evaluating the process of party construction historically. However, one must grasp Marxism sufficiently to apply it correctly. Gauging to what extent one needs to understand Marxism is where, unfortunately, many organizations continue to fall short.

America has uniquely struggled with theoretical rigor among its Marxists, often plagued with Empiricism³ and the anti-intellectual philosophy of Pragmatism⁴. Almost every cycle of

¹ For clarity, we mean socialism as in the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e workers power over the state and through that the means of production. Lenin made this clear in *“State and Revolution”* with Mao and his supporters reiterating the essence of socialism in many texts up to the end of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR). See Raymond Lotta's *“And Mao Makes 5”* for many of the essential works on this subject.

² Imperialism refers to the final stage of capitalism dominated by monopolies, finance capital, the export of capital by finance capital, and the division and redivision of the world between conflicting economic and political interests as capitalism struggles to resolve its inherent contradictions. See *“Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism”* by Lenin for a clear elaboration on the subject.

³ Empiricism is a philosophy that treats truth as derived only from direct experience, dismissing theoretical or rational knowledge. As Mao pointed out in *“On Practice”*, *“To think that knowledge can stop at the lower, perceptual stage and that perceptual knowledge alone is reliable while rational knowledge is not, would be to repeat the historical error of ‘empiricism’.* This theory errs in failing to understand that, although the data of perception reflect certain realities in the objective world..., they are merely one-sided and superficial, reflecting things incompletely and not reflecting their essence.”

⁴ As defined in Lenin's *“Materialism and Empirio-Criticism”*: *“The pragmatists consider that the central problem of philosophy is the attainment of true knowledge. However, they completely distort the very concept of truth... As the criterion of the ‘truth’ (usefulness) of knowledge, the pragmatists take experience, understood not as human social practice but as the constant stream of individual experiences, of the subjective phenomena of consciousness; they regard this experience as the solo reality, declaring the concepts of matter and mind ‘obsolete’... In contrast to materialist monism, the pragmatists put forward the standpoint of ‘pluralism’, according to which there is no internal connection, no conformity to law, in the universe; it is like a mosaic which each person builds in his own way, out of his own individual experiences. Hence, starting out from the needs of the given moment, pragmatism considers it possible to give different, even contradictory, explanations of one and the same phenomenon.*

wannabe Marxists have come in thinking that if they just throw themselves into the ‘work’ of political organizing, even if they commit avoidable mistakes, they’ll be able to self-correct and adjust. That is, according to the few introductory Marxist texts they may have read individually or collectively, common-sense activism, or dogma they have gravitated toward. Often this takes the form of short-lived ‘red charities’⁵, shoddily constructed ‘mass’ organizations, or otherwise hopping-on political bandwagons (BLM, elections, healthcare reform, LGBTQ rights, tenant organizations, union drives, abortion rights, etc). However, what typically happens is after several iterations of this, most tire of the Sisyphean work and give up on Marxist organizing entirely (in one form or another). Some keep at it, for decades even (somehow expecting different results), and among them only a few figure out that Marxism is more than a vague guide or inspiration to action. In fact, Marxism is a scientific discipline whose principal contributors spent their whole lives developing theoretically. It is the task of serious revolutionaries to arm themselves with a thorough understanding of Marxism in order to satisfy the goal of developing a Marxist program and a communist party to execute that program. A thorough understanding refers not to the extent of an amateur—or to make an analogue with school, an undergraduate level of understanding—but that of a professional scientist. We must understand the complexities of Capital to independently conduct a class analysis of not just the United States itself, but also its links to the rest of the world on account of its imperialist character. We need to understand not just the position of the labor movement as it is now, but as it developed historically; why it’s one trade and not another that is more or less ripe for revolutionary propaganda. In order to succeed, we must know ourselves and our enemies as deeply as possible.

Failure to thoroughly study all of Marxism's components and neglecting the example of Russian and Chinese Marxists condemns America's revolutionaries into many divided circles that, at best, reinvent the wheel, only to find themselves dissatisfied with its condition, and later fall apart out of helplessness. This is not to mention the serious risk to the personal health of many comrades who naively end up in organizations whose membership often includes abusers and opportunists⁶ who take advantage of their lacking theoretical and practical knowledge. These are the stakes that provide the basis for our emphasis. With that said, let’s see how our historical forerunners attempted to address the theoretical needs of their day.

[A Short History of Study Circles in the Russian Empire, Chinese ‘Republic’, and USA⁷]

Consistency is declared to be unnecessary; if it is to a man's advantage, he can be a determinist or an indeterminist, he can assert or deny the existence of God, and so on". Very much like Postmodernism isn't it?

⁵ As in, charity or ‘mutual-aid’ based organizations with red iconography.

⁶ Lenin defines opportunism best in *“The Collapse of the Second International”*: *“Opportunism means sacrificing the fundamental interests of the masses to the temporary interests of an insignificant minority of the workers or, in other words, an alliance between a section of the workers and the bourgeoisie, directed against the mass of the proletariat.”* It is often distinguished between ‘right’ or ‘left’ opportunism, right referring to opportunism that underestimates the objective situation while left referring to overestimating the objective situation.

⁷ It’s important to note that the brief summaries of Russian, Chinese, and American revolutionary history must be so limited in depth in order to maintain the focus of the article in its main message, that of presenting our thesis for the task of study today. Giving due diligence to each movement would be a task encompassing volumes of work, and frankly none have complete exhaustive histories available in English (excluding maybe the Russian revolutionary movement, though even then there are gaps in analyzing what for us is the most important period, that of the various “Kruzhki” (study circles) of the 1840’s-1890’s). As such, this article by no means intends to be the last word on analyzing these periods, and to the extent possible within our humble means, we aim to eventually return to each movement in order to give it its due diligence in analysis. To that end we encourage our readers to challenge our

[Russia]

Marx rarely organized unions, though he often spoke at their meetings and interviewed workers. He spent most of his life critiquing English political economy, based on intensive critique of German philosophy which he then extended to critiquing French Socialism⁸. Dying before completing the culmination of his life's work in *Capital*, it necessitated Engels, Kautsky, and Lenin to finalize the essential components of it⁹. Before founding the Bolsheviks (and ultimately leading them to state power in the October Revolution), Lenin gained European fame for his class analysis in *"The Development of Capitalism in Russia"*. He didn't complete that work just by reflecting on his direct political organizing under the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class (circa 1895), but from years of compiling and analyzing the sparse economic statistical information on the Russian Empire. For him to even become qualified enough to conduct such an analysis, he spent over a decade in study circles and in correspondence with Russian Marxists debating Marxist Political Economy and Philosophy, translating Marx and Engels' works into Russian and digging for every possible theoretical conclusion they had made.

Lenin wasn't the first to do this either; he depended on the work already done by the Russian study circles (*kruzhki*) that emerged from the intellectual movement of the 1840s, which later culminated into the Narodism¹⁰ of the 1860s. It was the most organized contingent of the Narodniks, Narodnaya Volya (circa 1879), which committed their magnum opus of assassinating the Tsar in 1881. In the aftermath, Plekhanov and his Emancipation of Labor Group split from Narodnaya Volya in 1883, convinced of Marxist dialectical and historical materialism rather than Narodism's utopianism. This initiated the struggle for Russian Marxists to fully distinguish themselves from the Narodniks during the 1880s and 1890s. Most of Lenin's and other Russian Marxist publications from that time reflected the theoretical struggle against Narodism, only later transitioning to the struggle against 'Legal Marxism'.

presentation with sources that possibly contradict our statements, so as to refine our record of events and further substantiate our understanding of international revolutionary history.

⁸ We implore the reader to see for themselves how much theoretical material he spent gathering in order to put it together by reading Engels' prefaces to the 2nd and 3rd Volumes of *Capital*.

⁹ In *"A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy"*, Marx intended *Capital* to be just one part of his analysis of Capitalism. Landed property was elaborated upon in Volume III and Volume IV (all volumes after the first were based on Marx's manuscripts and edited by Engels and Kautsky posthumously), with subsequent analyses of German and American agriculture conducted by Kautsky (and Lenin). Wage-labor was investigated by Marx, and largely comprised the latter portion of his first volume, though not studied on its own. The state was loosely touched upon in Volume III and briefly in other writings, but otherwise was never elaborated upon in full, and was to wait until Engels's and Lenin's writings on the topic (*"Origins of the Family, the State, and Private Property"* and *"The State and Revolution"* respectively). There is a point to be said on an analysis of State Capitalism that Lenin touched upon; however, Mao did it best in his economic writings. Foreign trade was elaborated upon in Volume II to substantiate an explanation on capital exchange; however, it wasn't the focus of the volume and by extension its references to the world market. Future writings like Lenin's *"Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism"* references it, but the scale upon which the world market has developed hasn't matched Marxists' attempts to analyze and understand it, though its broad features are still consistent with how Marx and Lenin have described it.

¹⁰ As Lenin defined in *"The Heritage We Renounce"*, Narodism saw capitalism in Russia as a retrogression in society and instead advocated that the peasant village commune should be the main economic model. Further, they rejected the Marxist understanding of class struggle in general and the role of the intelligentsia and the state in particular. It was an idealist outlook with a petty-bourgeois character (as in, small proprietor). Practically, the Narodniks educated peasants in the countryside while at the same time seeing the only viable political action to be terrorism.

Despite the Narodniks' insistence that Russia was uniquely situated to avoid capitalism, the 1870s coincided with its slow and painful introduction in Russia. With that, the labor movement also had its origin; strikes started in St. Petersburg by the end of the decade, which reached a high water mark in the Morozov Strike of 1885, after which some initial basic labor protections were passed. These protections were coupled with serious reprisals for the remaining strikers and those who were arrested (as is usual with repressive regimes using the velvet glove with one hand and the iron fist with the other). A lull in the movement followed until 1896 when Lenin's League of Struggle led St. Petersburg's workers in a new strike wave. This ephemeral unity between the Social-Democrats [read Marxists]¹¹ and the proletariat (as most of the League was arrested including Lenin) was still a local exception to what broadly was a division between the labor movement and Marxism. It wasn't until 1899 that the strike movement of 1896 had convinced the advanced section of the proletariat that the Marxists were to be their national representatives, and even then not in any proper sense until 1903 after the 2nd Party Congress. To review, the labor movement had developed independently of Marxism from its origin during the late 1870s until the Great Strike of 1896, and wasn't properly 'fused' with the proletarian vanguard until 1903. Russian Marxism, founded as a split from utopian socialism in 1883, spent up to 10 years focusing on theoretical development before prioritizing active political work. Indeed, for Marxists like Plekhanov and Lenin, their priority of theoretical work continued until the foundation of the party where organizational matters took precedence.

What was the content of this theoretical work? Often, it involved thorough critiques of Narodist thought as it was the prevailing revolutionary outlook which continued its dominance in urban centers until the mid-late 1890s and in the countryside as late as 1918! These critiques were necessary because Narodism itself was an intellectual tradition, and included works ranging from utopian fantasies about the propaganda of the deed to some of the first sociological investigations into the Russian countryside in history (an investigative labor Lenin very much depended upon in his early study of Russian political economy). Lenin himself describes this best in one of his more underrated texts *"A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social-Democracy"*, aimed at the 'Legal Marxists' and economists¹² who had been increasing in popularity:

"In the eighties and at the beginning of the nineties, when Social-Democrats initiated their practical work in Russia, they were confronted firstly with the Narodnaya Volya, which charged them with departing from the political struggle that had been inherited from the Russian revolutionary movement, and with which the Social-Democrats carried on a persistent polemic. Secondly, they were confronted with the Russian liberal circles, which were also dissatisfied with the turn taken by the revolutionary movement—from the Narodnaya Volya trend to Social-Democracy. The two fold polemic centred round the question of politics. In their struggle against the narrow conceptions of the Narodnaya Volya adherents, who

¹¹ The tradition of Marxist parties being named 'Social-Democratic' is based on a compromise German socialists made with moderates in their early workers' party. Lenin explains his reasoning to break with the convention in chapter 12 of his draft program leading up to the October Revolution called *"The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution"*, citing Marx's *"Critique of the Gotha Programme"* (1875) and Engel's *"Preface to Internationales aus dem Volkstaat (1871-1875)"* (1894).

¹² As Lenin briefly defined in *"Socialism and War"*: "'Economism' was an opportunist trend in Russian Social-Democracy. Its political essence was summed up in the programme: 'for the workers – the economic struggle; for the liberals – the political struggle.'"

reduced politics to conspiracy-making, the Social-Democrats could be led to, and did at times, declare themselves against politics in general (in view of the then prevailing narrow conception of politics). On the other hand, the Social-Democrats often heard, in the liberal and radical salons of bourgeois 'society,' regrets that the revolutionaries had abandoned terror; people who were mortally afraid for their own skins and at a decisive moment failed to give support to the heroes who struck blows at the autocracy, these people hypocritically accused the Social-Democrats of political indifferentism and yearned for the rebirth of a party that would pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them. Naturally, the Social-Democrats conceived a hatred for such people and their phrases, and they turned to the more mundane but more serious work of propaganda among the factory proletariat. At first it was inevitable that this work should have a narrow character and should be embodied in the narrow declarations of some Social-Democrats. This narrowness, however, did not frighten those Social-Democrats who had not in the least forgotten the broad historical aims of the Russian working-class movement. Why does it matter if the words of the Social-Democrats sometimes have a narrow meaning when their deeds cover a broad field. They do not give themselves up to useless conspiracies, they do not hob-nob with the Balalaikins¹³ of bourgeois liberalism, but they go to that class which alone is the real revolutionary class and assist in the development of its forces! They believed that this narrowness would disappear of its own accord with each step that broadened Social-Democratic propaganda. And this, to a considerable degree, is what has happened. From propaganda they began to go over to widespread agitation. Widespread agitation, naturally, brought to the forefront a growing number of class-conscious advanced workers; revolutionary organisations began to take form (the St. Petersburg, Kiev, and other Leagues of Struggle, the Jewish Workers' Union). These organisations naturally tended to merge and, eventually, they succeeded: they united and laid the foundations of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. It would seem that the old narrowness would then have been left without any basis and that it would be completely cast aside. But things turned out differently: the spread of their agitation brought the Social-Democrats into contact with the lower, less developed strata of the proletariat; to attract these strata it was necessary for the agitator to be able to adapt himself to the lowest level of understanding, he was taught to put the "demands and interests of the given moment" in the foreground and to push back the broad ideals of socialism and the political struggle. The fragmentary, amateur nature of Social-Democratic work, the extremely weak connections between the study circles in the different cities, between the Russian Social-Democrats and their comrades abroad who possessed a profounder knowledge and a richer revolutionary experience, as well as a wider political horizon, naturally led to a gross exaggeration of this (absolutely essential) aspect of Social-Democratic activity, which could bring some individuals to lose sight of the other aspects, especially since with every reverse the most developed workers and intellectuals were wrenched from the ranks of the struggling army, so that sound revolutionary traditions and continuity could not as yet be evolved. It is in this extreme exaggeration of one aspect of Social-Democratic work that we see the chief cause of the sad retreat from the ideals of Russian Social-Democracy. **Add to this enthusiasm over a fashionable book, ignorance of the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, and a childish**

¹³ Balalaikin—a character from Saltykov-Shchedrin's novel "Modern Idyll"; a liberal windbag, adventurer, and liar.

claim to originality, and you have all the elements that go to make up ‘the retrograde trend in Russian Social-Democracy’.”

Here, Lenin clearly describes the process in which early Social Democrats engaged with the working class. First, they started in study circles looking to understand the fundamentals of Marxism. Once qualified in preparing and conducting targeted propaganda in local factories (by the early 1890s), they did so. Once more class-conscious proletarians joined the ranks of Marxism, the range of propaganda broadened up to widespread agitation, leading to the formation of a variety of pre-party organizations across the Russian Empire. So much so, that it led to a trend of new ‘Marxists’ that only understood the demands of Marxism without understanding the basis behind those demands, the principles that Lenin refers to. Hopefully, the Russian experience clears up the role study plays in revolutionary activity, but to show that this process isn’t a fluke conditional to Russia alone, let’s proceed to China.

[China]

The Communist Party of China (CPC) was founded in 1921 after the failure of the first Chinese Democratic Revolution¹⁴. In this period, there were two critical events leading to the founding of the CPC: the October Revolution of 1917 and the May 4th Student Movement of 1919. The October Revolution was key to capturing the imagination and attention of the emerging Chinese radicals and intelligentsia. It showed the way toward a society which could address and solve China's multitude of problems. It was this event more than any other that brought Marxism to China by both acting as a beacon to attract the best revolutionaries of China and as a base from which to teach and assist the Chinese. The second great historical event, the May 4th movement, was an occasion of mass struggle that gave the radicals and intellectuals a practical demonstration of the capacity of the Chinese working class to fight politically. The struggle brought many intellectuals, radicals, and workers together to provide fertile ground for the spread of Marxism. It is from this period, influenced by these two great historic events, that the founders of the CPC emerged.

What were the founders of the CPC doing between 1917 to 1921? For the first two years, they were primarily intellectuals involved in the New Culture Movement¹⁵. Leading up to the May 4th Movement and especially after, they formed various groups to study Marxist theory. At Peking University in 1919, Li Dazhao, with Chen Duxiu's involvement, established the Society for the Study of Marxism, a group dedicated to the understanding and discussion of Marxism. A year later, Chen founded Communist circles in Shanghai and Guangzhou. In both cases, they were aided in their study through contact with the Bolshevik delegations and guidance by the Comintern representative Gregory Voitinsky. For Mao Zedong's part, in 1918 he formed a socialist youth organization called the New People's Study Society and helped transform it into

¹⁴ Rather than rehash the many details of that period here, we recommend the podcast “A People's History of Ideas” by Matthew Rothwell episodes 2-5, and 7-14 <https://peopleshistoryofideas.com/>

¹⁵ The New Culture Movement was a progressive, and especially democratic, movement of students and intellectuals to adopt a new and modern culture in China. It criticized many traditions and aspects of China's old feudal and imperial culture. It directed a lot of its attacks against Confucianism; its participants included anarchists, socialists, reformists, pragmatists, and other modern philosophical movements.

an explicitly Marxist study organization¹⁶. Some other leading and important comrades in the early CPC that were members of the study society were Cai Hesen and Li Li San. From this they proceeded to party-building, as explained in *A People's History of Ideas* podcast:

“In August, [members of the Shanghai study group] formed a cell of about ten members who saw their task as preparing for the foundation of the Party.”

“Members of the Shanghai nucleus and from the Soviet delegation helped to start communist cells in Wuhan and Jinan, and Mao Zedong met with both the Beijing and Shanghai groups before going back to Changsha in Hunan Province to start a group there. In every case, the new communist nuclei were based on pre-existing groups of activists who had been involved in the May 4th Movement.”

In China, the existing activists and intellectuals that founded and formed the backbone of the Comintern sponsored CPC went through a period of discussion and study of Marxism. This was imperative, as without an understanding of Marxism, they would continue on the path of democratic struggles or utopian/populist schemes like those that appeared in Russia. Essentially, as Mao pointed out in *“On New Democracy”*¹⁷, both the fusion of the democratic and working class movements, and the introduction of Marxism in China, changed the nature of the revolution. As Li Rui put it in *“The Early Revolutionary Activities of Mao Tsetung”*, **“to disseminate Marxism-Leninism, to struggle for the establishment of a proletarian party—Communist Party—that was the most essential aspect of the revolutionary activities of comrade Mao Tsetung before the formal founding of the Chinese communist party.”**

However, the founding of the Communist Party in China was not without its defects. From its very inception, its relationship with and especially reliance upon the Soviet Union and the Comintern was a double-edged sword. Without Soviet support, the founding of the party would likely have been delayed, and the sustainability of the party in the early years depended on Comintern funding and expertise. But this subordination to the Comintern had a tendency to stifle the native communist movement and encourage dogmatic application of Soviet practices without a proper study and analysis of Chinese conditions.

When founding the Communist Party, one of the critical elements the founders lacked was an advanced understanding of Marxism; although they possessed the rudiments, the prevailing belief was that the Comintern could more or less implant advanced Marxist thought without a strong local foundation. This is part of why many Comintern-founded parties struggled tremendously in their early years. In China, no one had conducted a thorough analysis of Chinese society. This led to the various blunders which inspired Mao to write his famous *“Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society”* five years after the party's founding. During this

¹⁶ *Report on the Affairs of the New People's Study Society (1 and 2)* in *“Mao's Road to Power: Volume 2”* by Stuart Schram

¹⁷ *“After the May 4th Movement, the political leader of China's bourgeois-democratic revolution was no longer the bourgeoisie but the proletariat...The Chinese proletariat rapidly became an awakened and independent political force as a result of its maturing and of the influence of the Russian Revolution.”*

early period, communists groped through practice, resulting in great confusion and heavy losses. These are historical mistakes we do not need to repeat.

[USA]

Speaking of historical mistakes, the American left has long struggled with Anti-Intellectualism, Empiricism, and especially the most popular expression of the two, American Pragmatism. Today, sentiments like ‘I don’t need to read a book by some dead white cis-man to be a revolutionary’ remain overwhelmingly popular among most leftists. Even among Marxists, what theoretical interest remains is often one-sided and superficial. This bankruptcy of ideology is as old as American socialism itself, a tradition older than Marx. It finds its roots in American Puritanism (a key social institution of American society), which was principally a product of the English Revolution, and remnants from various European revolutionary trends ranging roughly between 1600-1900. This is best expressed by the various utopian communes that dotted the colonies as they developed. These range from the radical Quaker communes of the 1650s and 60s (reflecting the English Diggers/Levellers¹⁸) to the Amish settlements from 1693 (reflecting the Utopian Socialism of the earlier German Peasant Wars¹⁹) to the Owenites and Fourierists who used cheap American land to deliver their proof of concept of successful communism. These communes were rarely secular, and even those that were secular included members mostly driven by religious inclinations. Secular leaders tolerated this on account of their own pragmatism, simply seeing any motivation being viable where it attracts members.

Meanwhile, Marxism finds its origin in America at the conclusion of the 1848 revolutions, when German Marxist political refugees came there to continue their work. Between the language barrier and eclectic character of early Marxists at the time (often warranting many criticisms from Marx), the German-American Marxists struggled to build a foundation among the working class, with Joseph Weydemeyer playing a large role. He founded the first Marxist organization by the name of the American Workers League in 1852. Consisting of a few hundred German workers, it faded in relevance within a couple of years, motivating him to leave and later join the New York Communist Club, or NYCC (circa 1857). Although they grew enough for additional chapters in Cincinnati and Chicago, their political work between 1857-67 mostly focused on developing nation-wide trade union associations and struggling against slavery. Indeed, only after the Civil War did the labor movement (as Marx predicted in his contemporary writings) truly come into the forefront with some of the largest strike movements in history up to that point.

Unfortunately, beyond translating some of Marx's writings into English (none of which became popular among American workers at the time), there is little evidence of ideological

¹⁸ The Quakers were one of the radical factions within the Levellers. The Levellers were seen by Marx and Engels as one of the first manifestations of a “*truly active Communist Party [that] is contained in the bourgeois revolution,*” from “*Moralizing Criticism and Critical Morality,*” in this case, the English Revolution. Large sections of the Quakers, especially among those who migrated to America, organized utopian communes as part of the Digger movement (a radical subset of the Leveller movement).

¹⁹ The Amish were a radical splinter from the Mennonites, themselves a radical faction of Anabaptists which can be seen as the political equivalent to the Levellers for the German Reformation and Peasant Wars of the 16th-17th centuries (which historically included the Benelux region, Austria, Czechia, and Switzerland).

consolidation among the NYCC's membership, outside of the Germans. The 1st International later absorbed the NYCC, coinciding with the struggle between Marxism and Lassalleanism²⁰. This struggle concluded with the victory of Lassalleanism (led particularly by Friedrich Sorge) during the Unity Congress, founding the Socialist Labor Party of America (circa 1876). Riding on the high of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, they gained their largest ever electoral following, consisting of a few elected officials to state legislatures (particularly in Illinois). However, shortly after the economic crisis of 1878, the Party lost nearly all of its English-speaking support, once more becoming an effectively sectarian German-American party. The leading Marxists of the party soon left to focus mostly on trade union work. By the 1890s, Daniel De Leon (who would go on to found American syndicalism²¹ in the International Workers of the World or IWW), attempted to bring Marxism back as the main trend of the party and reestablish a presence among English speakers. De Leon's success was mixed, as a split in 1899 with the reformist/trade unionist membership (which joined the newly founded Socialist Party of America (SPA)) and broader sectarianism led to him growing increasingly isolated from the broader labor movement.

The SPA²² on its face had relatively shallow origins, consisting of a merger from 3 broad trends, reflecting the eclectic composition of the party from the beginning. The first and largest group was composed of militant trade unionists from the American Railway Union (ARU). The state's violent response to their 1894 strike had radicalized this group, with Eugene Debs as their representative. A motley assortment of radicals, populists, and utopians, all with various eclectic ideas, made up the second group. Their goal was generally to create Owenite-style communes, represented by utopian intellectuals and pastors. The third and smallest group consisted of the aforementioned semi-Lassalleian splinter from the SLP. Their most prominent theoretician was Victor Berger, a former member of the SLP who won over Debs and consequently the ARU to socialism, and motivated the anti-DeLeonists to split at the founding of the SPA. His views were akin to that of the centrist Austrian Social-Democrats who Lenin criticized on a variety of issues (including on their social-pacifism, defined as socialist in words, pacifist in practice) and who Stalin famously criticized on the national question. He was also a racist who disapproved of Asian immigrants and included discriminatory anti-immigration demands into the SPA's political platform (in opposition to Debs who struggled with him on this). He was truly a 'model theoretician'. All this reflected in the party which, like most western Social-Democratic parties at the time, focused entirely on the legal parliamentary struggle and developing trade unions. Of

²⁰ A utopian socialist ideology which had many ideas akin to later Revisionism and Reformism in particular. By Revisionism we mean revision of the key principles of Marxism. This originates from Eduard Bernstein, the founder of Reformism and leader of the right wing of the German Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Lenin's time. Reformism seeks to reform capitalism through peaceful and gradual means. Its essence can be summarized in Bernstein's own words *"For me the **movement is everything** and the final goal of socialism is nothing"*. Lenin clearly elaborated the practical consequences of Lassalleism in *"August Bebel"*: *"Lassale and his followers, in view of the poor chances for the proletarian and democratic way, pursued unstable tactics and adapted themselves to the leadership of the [aristocrat] Bismarck [(contemporary leader of Germany and antagonist to the working class movement there)]. Their mistake lay in diverting the workers' party on to the Bonapartist-state-socialist path."*

²¹ A petty-bourgeois semi-Anarchist trend: *"The syndicalists saw no need for the working class to engage in political struggle, they repudiated the leading role of the Party and the dictatorship of the proletariat. They believed that by organising a general strike of the workers the trade unions... could, without a revolution, overthrow capitalism and take over control of production."* From Lenin's *"Marxism and Revisionism"*.

²² In this article we are only speaking of their successes and theoretical deficiencies. This is not meant as an overall evaluation of their policies, program, nor their poor handling of the national question, chauvinism, and oppressed peoples generally.

course, with the added particularity of trying to create communes and workers cooperatives in its early years due to the insistence of the utopian faction.

It is our position that these three trends uniting into one party in the way they did best encapsulates the bankruptcy of classical American socialism, as all of them never properly broke with American anti-intellectual pragmatism. Nor did any spend any serious effort to study Marxist fundamentals and develop a proper class analysis of American political economy. The trade unionists basically saw their narrow struggle as the only struggle to care about, leaving the hashing out of principles and the political struggle to the party leaders financing election campaigns. This was textbook economism. The utopians at this stage were nothing but a remnant of old American Diggerism, eclectically justifying their ideas with both Owen's and Fourier's writings on the one hand and the King James Bible on the other, not unlike the Narodniks if it wasn't for their social pacifism. The Lassalleans/pseudo-Marxists, meanwhile, were essentially reformists, the unfortunate consequence of lacking ideological consolidation among the militants, leaving the reformists to dominate party politics. Except for De Leon, who himself represented a dogmatic and sectarian trend which amounts to a revision of Marxism, not a single trend bothered to struggle against the others or develop their theories past the stage of vulgar impulses. The SPA merged the advanced sections of the American labor movement with socialism, but it did so poorly, and its leadership was just as ill prepared to lead the working class in any direction, let alone towards state power.

This is the legacy of American socialism that the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) inherited, itself a split from the SPA following the October Revolution, which provides the context necessary to explain why it became so dependent on the Comintern in general and the Soviet Union in particular throughout its existence. Many of the leaders in the early years were former anarchists and members of the syndicalist IWW, and what theoreticians existed were often mediocre (at best) and foreign, meaning they had little experience or time to study conditions in the United States. There was also a key difference from both Russian and Chinese experiences here. Namely, there was no period of theoretical development by the membership after the split took place in 1919. Rather, two concurrent crises took precedence over everything else. The first crisis was the international revolutionary crisis sparked by the October Revolution itself, which gave the American communists the incredible tasks of preventing the US government from intervening in the Russian civil war, and the grander responsibility of securing revolutionary power themselves (which as you may imagine made them a direct target of white terror, adding to the chaos²³). The working class spontaneously accomplished the former despite the chaos among the communists, with allied forces in the IWW and others happy to coordinate around Soviet sovereignty. As far as the latter, well, right out the gate they were short-stopped by the chaotic nature of the split from the SPA in the first place, which brings us to our second crisis. In 1919 two oppositionary 'Communist Parties' split from the SPA²⁴ due to their

²³ See the first Red Scare between 1917-1920. We recommend Theodore Draper's *"The Roots of American Communism"* to get an idea of how these issues affected the nascent party's development.

²⁴ It's important to note that this was years in the making as the SPA's left-wing continued to gain influence among the rank and file in spite of efforts by the reformists, up to when they won over a majority of the party's membership in months leading up to the split. A lot of the preparatory work for this was done by Kollontai and Trotsky at first, publishing and translating key articles by the Bolsheviks and other internationalists to English. (The internationalists were those opposed to the social-chauvinist or nationalist positions of the opportunist Social-Democrats during WW1.

unpopular stance on World War I and towards the Bolsheviks: the mostly native-born Communist Labor Party of America represented by Alfred Wagenknecht and the mostly foreign-born Communist Party of America represented by Charles Ruthenburg. It wasn't until 1922 that a single united CPUSA was formed, something forced by the Comintern and with more mergers and splits in between, by which point the revolutionary crisis was already over and the Soviet's sovereignty secure.

As can be expected, the following years remained chaotic and lacked serious theoretical study. Inner-party feuding mired the 1920s and 30s, often involving struggles where both sides committed right (and less often left) opportunist errors. These usually culminated in a Comintern directive criticizing both sides and expelling the "more" wrong faction from leadership. Although they established a party school in 1923, attracting up to 1,000 students annually, poor curriculum preparation resulted from directly imitating the Soviet Smolny Institute, and instructors possessed only a couple of years of education on their subject matter. While some party cadres were privileged to study in the Soviet Union—with a few, like Harry Haywood, even emerging as key party theoreticians—most struggled to keep pace with the rigorous demands of class analysis alongside the political work of the day. In fact, most cadres prioritized agitation and propaganda, neglecting theoretical work, reflecting Pragmatist philosophy. Of course, all the intrigue only complicated things. It therefore wasn't a surprise when rightist Browderism became dominant in the party between 1934-45 and Foster's continued capitulation to right opportunism set the stage for the CPUSA simply being a revisionist party that today just caucuses for the Democrats and plays a counter-revolutionary role in the mass movements²⁵.

The Anti-revisionist movement in the US was born²⁶ out of the CPUSA's struggle against Browderism²⁷ which was initiated by the May 1945 letter from Jacques Duclos of the French Communist Party criticizing Earl Browder, and ultimately leading to Browder's expulsion in 1946. This process really began in 1944 with the dissolution of the CPUSA and its transformation into the Communist Political Association (CPA); however, there was also a prolonged period of attrition where genuine communists had left or otherwise been removed from the party in the preceding years. As Paul Costello observed in *“Anti-Revisionist*

The social chauvinists support socialism in words, and support chauvinism (the superiority of one's group, such as gender, race, nation, etc) in deeds). They also struggled to lead the left wing of the Second International (what was left of it that is) against both the social chauvinists and their enablers in the form of the social pacifists between 1912-1917. This work was soon taken up domestically by John Reed and Louis Fraina, who popularized the internationalist position. A key thing to extract from this is that the split was on very practical grounds based on the strategic tasks of the day rather than as a result of a protracted ideological struggle as had taken place between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks between 1903-1912.

²⁵ For example, *“the wholesale destruction of the trade union left, and the CPUSA's inability to mount an effective fightback were identified as the fruits of the CP's long standing policy of making deals with bureaucrats, rather than building a base in the rank and file.”* (Paul Costello, *“Anti-Revisionist Communism in the United States, 1945-1950”*).

²⁶ We recommend Paul Costello's *“Anti-Revisionist Communism in the United States, 1945-1950”* for a more detailed overview of this process.

²⁷ While we cannot give an exhaustive treatment of Browderism here, we highlight some of its prominent features: *“a contempt for theory, class collaborationist practice, and the liquidation of the party's vanguard role,”* American exceptionalism (the belief that America is special, unique, or superior to the point that it negates established truths), social chauvinism, social-imperialism (support for socialism in words, but support for imperialism in deeds), economism, and reformism.

Communism in the United States, 1945-1950,” unfortunately, “many individuals were expelled who did not join an expelled group, while a number of expelled groups kept in touch with left oppositionists who remained Party members.” In this period those who were expelled failed to unite as they spent most of their time “polemicising against each other than in any other kind of activity” and “the lack of advanced theory and a correct general political line prevented these groups from working together and establishing any kind of principled unity”. Despite efforts between 1947-48, these groups were unable to reconcile their differences. The sectarianism, paranoia, cop-jacketing²⁸, and a regular inability to work with the left opposition within the CPUSA doomed their efforts to failure. There were 3 main approaches to party-building in this period: immediately forming a new party, rectifying the old party, or forming a new party after a prolonged struggle for unity among CPUSA members and the new expelled forces. Unfortunately, the approach of most was to try to rectify the old party, and in this they were hampered by their refusal to conduct factional work, ideological limitations, and deference to the International Communist Movement (read: reliance on foreign parties). In summary, the trend suffered from its own theoretical deficiencies, inability to critically reassess the whole of party history (instead mostly focusing on Browderism), near exclusively focusing on criticism from without, sectarianism, and having no real understanding of how to build a new party²⁹. Due to their failures, the only facade of continuity through the successive waves of anti-revisionism leading to the New Communist Movement was through the CPUSA.

We will give a short overview of the second wave of anti-revisionism, as it is the least significant of them. Between 1949-1957 revisionism was in full swing as peaceful transition was the party’s de facto stance on revolution. Because of the 20th congress of the CPSU (1956), and specifically Khrushchev’s infamous “Secret Speech,” where he denounced Stalin and outlined the new revisionist turn the USSR was to take under his leadership, the CPUSA was again thrown into crisis (over how to appraise the approach towards peaceful transition, not over whether to stand by it). In 1958, as the crisis developed, the left-wing defenders of the Soviet Union under Stalin’s leadership split and formed the Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party in the United States (POC). As stated in the Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line introduction to this period, “unfortunately, soon after its founding the POC underwent a number of debilitating splits and, by 1962, it was a shell of its former self. In 1968, what remained of the POC renamed itself the American Workers’ Communist Party (AWCP)”³⁰. It is, however, worth noting that individual members of the POC such as Harry Haywood, Theodore Allen, Nelson Peery, and Noel Ignatin, would take part or have influence in the succeeding anti-revisionist movements.

²⁸ The practice of baselessly or carelessly accusing others of being police agents or informants. A form of bad-jacketing or character assassination that is especially dangerous.

²⁹ Burt Sutta, despite his other errors made the following astute observation about the ‘actionists’ (the group who believed the general line of the CPUSA and ICM was correct, but CPUSA’s practice was deficient) vs. the ‘theoreticians’: “[The theoreticians] contend that this current bankrupt policy has its roots in the policy of the ‘good old days.’ In the eyes of this group, it is necessary to reexamine the whole theory on which the activities of the Communist Party are based. This means going back to the classics of Marxism and testing them with real life to prove their validity. The position taken by the theoreticians is that without this, no amount of real struggle is worth anything. You cannot take a trip if you do not know where you are going and you cannot organize struggles correctly unless there is a correct line.”

³⁰ <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1956-1960/index.htm>

The third wave of the Anti-revisionist movement was once again kicked off by a split from the CPUSA. In 1962, the Progressive Labor Movement (PLM), later Progressive Labor Party (PLP), formed from a group that left the CPUSA and brought with it much of the Fosterite baggage of the old party combined with an affinity for the ideology of the Communist Party of China (CPC). However, it stood out only by virtue of the depravity of its contemporaries. As Paul Costello notes, “*organizationally it was extremely sectarian and bureaucratic. Theoretically its cadre were not well trained in creative Marxism, but rather in a vulgar and dogmatic cult of Lenin, Stalin, and Mao*”³¹.

A parallel development to third wave anti-revisionism was the various national revolutionary parties, such as the Young Lords and the Black Panther Party. As attributed in Borimarxist’s instagram post about the last birthday of Cha-Cha Jimenez, chairman of the Young Lords, “*Cha-Cha told minister of education that it was important that all members carried Mao’s Little Red Book. He also mentioned that we should all read What is to be Done by Lenin*”³². The founders of the Black Panther Party, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale both took part in a political study group called the Afro-American Association at Merritt Junior College; their intellectual training in this study circle, combined with their participation in the struggles of their community, formed the basis for the formation of the Black Panther Party³³. These organizations, whilst not founding communist parties, were guided by their aspirations for liberation, socialism, and self-determination. We note that their study of revolutionary thought and especially scientific socialism was critical to their early development and successes, but in that same vain their lack of theoretical rigor contributed to their failures once COINTELPRO came out in full force³⁴.

The decline of PLP and their expulsion from SDS in 1969 marked the beginning of the fourth wave of anti-revisionism, known as the New Communist Movement (NCM). Earnest students and workers felt the absence of a communist nucleus and set out to build it³⁵. However, throughout this movement, the would-be revolutionaries were plagued with what Marx famously remarks in “*18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*”³⁶. The same issues that plagued the

³¹ As quoted in Paul Costello’s, “A Critical History of the New Communist Movement, 1969-1979.”

<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/19791301.htm>

For more on this, we recommend “The Anti-Marxist-Leninist Line of PL” (1972) by John Ericsson and Charles Loren.

<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/loren-pl/index.htm>

³² <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-b4aX5ukeH>

³³ Attributed to Alondra Nelson’s “Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination” referenced in “The Black Panther Party and Study Groups.”

<https://www.culturalfront.org/2011/12/black-panther-party-and-study-groups.html>

³⁴ We recommend consulting “The Revolution Has Come” by Robyn C. Spencer for more on COINTELPRO in the BPP. (For those needing access, it can be found on Library Genesis.)

³⁵ Many participants in the NCM had learned through their experiences in the mass struggles of the 60’s the limitations of mass action without party leadership.

³⁶ “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. Thus Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789-1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793-95. In like manner, the beginner who

prior history of the US NCM would continue to crop up in increasingly contradictory forms: Opportunism, Subjectivism³⁷, and Nationalism³⁸. There is an interesting observation in the history of many organizations where they or their preceding formations would criticize themselves or another organization in the most vitriolic fashion, only to repeat or later adopt those same practices and positions. As Costello explains, *“the history of the new communist movement is not a chronology of its progressive elaboration of Marxist theory and its integration with the workers’ movement; that would have required the practice of Marxism as a living science, and its production in accordance with American reality and the political requirements of the workers’ movement.”*³⁹

Consistently, the groups with the most correct (on paper) approaches to party building adopted outdated and revisionist ideologies, or succumbed to liquidation either through confusion or as the conclusion of their revisionism. There are too many of these groups to name, but unfortunately, none amounted to anything exemplary⁴⁰. In contrast, the groups who remained (for a time) anti-revisionist often had serious problems with organization, and an inconsistent application of their ideology; most significant of this tendency was the Revolutionary Communist Party USA (RCP). The RCP consistently defended Maoism and socialist China against groups that took the side of the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet Split and against those who proclaimed that China remained socialist after the end of the GPCR. However, the question of Chinese revisionism led to a split in the party where those that supported Chinese revisionism created the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters, which would merge with other organizations to become the Freedom Road Socialist Organization⁴¹ in 1985. After this point, Bob Avakian consolidated his position as the chief leader in the party, and the ensuing decline of the party was borne out through his writings from that point forward. The RCP-USA

has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses himself freely in it only when he moves in it without recalling the old and when he forgets his native tongue.”

³⁷ Subjectivism is another word for one-sided thinking, it is the opposite of dialectical (many-sided) thinking. One makes a subjectivist error when they fail to pay attention to critical information or a critical step in the process of struggle. For example, drawing conclusions based on superficial analysis, or refusing to analyze a situation at all and resting content on one’s preconceived ideas.

³⁸ Nationalism is broadly the deference to the interest of one’s nation above others. Whereas internationalism opposes the prioritization of national interests and instead emphasizes the common class interests that go beyond national borders. Where the nationalist prioritizes their own nation’s interest, the internationalist prioritizes the interests of the whole class. At times, such as in a national liberation struggle of an oppressed people, these national and international interests coincide, and are one and the same.

³⁹ As quoted in Paul Costello’s, *“A Critical History of the New Communist Movement, 1969-1979.”*

<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/19791301.htm>

⁴⁰ A few examples are the Bay Area Socialist Organizing Committee, the Tucson Marxist Leninist Collective, and The New Voice.

⁴¹ An organization that in its 40 years of existence has failed to produce anything of significance for the working class, has failed to get any closer to ‘a party’ rather than a pre-party formation, and has held to the eclectic revisionist positions of Chinese and Soviet revisionism since its founding.

never could right the ship and marched itself and the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM)⁴² into irrelevance.

It's clear from this that even the most comparatively successful anti-revisionist movement, the NCM, still could not succeed precisely due to the failure to combine theory and practice. No group from this period truly had a serious ideological basis and correct approach toward its application. By mastering Marxist fundamentals, its most active representatives were able to critique the dominant revisionist trends of their time, leading to their greatest successes. It is also clear that the hodgepodge of revolutionary trends fell apart precisely because of their lack of ideological consolidation leading to failure in accounting for the changes in the political situation as they garnered more popular support and consequently greater state repression. Indeed, because they lacked the base the SPA/CPUSA cultivated, it can be argued that the RCP never truly fused with the working-class movement, thus disqualifying it as a de facto vanguard. It is unfortunate they lacked the years of theoretical rigor cultivated by the Russian Marxists or the material Soviet support and multiple periods of theoretical reflection/study that enabled the Chinese Marxists to rectify their errors (if at substantial cost). We must take these negative lessons from the last generation of American revolutionaries to heart if we're to surpass them.

[American Maoism Today and its Approach to Study⁴³]

As history shows, the mass movement in general and labor movement in particular developed independently of Marxism. This will continue to be the case, despite whatever limited efforts are undertaken by Marxist sympathizers who are unprepared to approach their historic roles properly. Unfortunately, nearly the entire body of Maoist organizations that have emerged since 2008 have fallen into the error of dismissing theory and just trying to learn 'Marxist principles' from scratch. To demonstrate, while refraining from going too in depth with the organizations that emerged and collapsed between the years 2008-2016, we can say with confidence that the splinters from the largest trend at the time, the New Communist Party-Organizing Committee (NCP-OC) and its mass contingent of the Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee (RSCC), continued the practice of ideological eclecticism and theoretical ignorance. Broadly speaking, there arose three different 'Maoist' trends: a rightist trend (which we will portray with Maoist Communist Party-Organizing Committee [MCP-OC] and its successors as representative); a 'leftist' trend (represented by the Red Guards movement

⁴²The RIM was an international organization of communist parties formed in the 80's. Many of the world's Maoist parties coalesced in this organization and it played a historic role in the popularization of Maoism. See the founding statement here <https://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/Docs/RIM-Declaration-1984-A.pdf>

While the RCP initiated and worked to found the RIM in 1984, it also played a critical role in destroying the RIM from within with its revisionism. See the "Second resolution passed by the Special Meeting of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Parties and Organizations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement for an International Conference of the MLM Parties and Organization of the world – May First 2012."

<https://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/Resurrection/2012/Reso2-120501.pdf>

We also recommend "Against Avakianism" by Ajith for a fairly accurate, if somewhat incomplete treatment of Avakianism. <https://foreignlanguages.press/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/S09-Against-Avakianism-5th-Printing.pdf>

⁴³ This section includes some basic criticisms of various contemporary Maoist trends. Unfortunately, a thorough critique of them all deserve multiple articles in their own right, as does a broader critique of contemporary American Maoism as a whole. However, so as to not digress too far from the focus of this article, we'll limit our criticisms to the most relevant errors with respect to the question of study.

and its successors in the Committee to Reconstitute the CPUSA [CR-CPUSA] and Revolutionary Study Group [RSG] trend that emerged from its collapse); and a centrist trend (represented by the Maoist Communist Union [MCU]).

Among the rightists, those that arose from the Winstonite⁴⁴ splinter of the developing RG movement who created MCP-OC (and their For the People [FTP] “intermediate organizations”⁴⁵), were much more honest in their economism and clumsy practice. They didn’t act as if they knew theory, but believed it was all the better that they didn’t and prided themselves in being “*connected with the masses*”. Their various red charity projects fell through, and soon enough, the MCP-OC itself collapsed, being unable to follow through on any of their projects. In their public statement declaring their dissolution⁴⁶, they present little of any reflection of their past work, with the statement amounting to a reiteration of vulgarized ideological beats on the one hand while doubling down on vague organizational tasks on the other (with no mention on any matter of principle **aside** from the emphasis of practice). There's also a strange prophylactic denial of liquidationism (even though that is literally what they’ve done) while placing all organizational responsibility of party construction (though they themselves were the organizing committee to facilitate precisely that process) upon the FTP pre-party formations/mass organizations (i.e. red charities).

In the FTP's last joint statement from 2021⁴⁷, they have shown to not have learned much of anything with a superficial assessment of the current situation and redoubled emphasis of practice through 'mutual aid'. Here, we at least see some pleasantries extended in the need to familiarize oneself with Maoists principles as those contained in the “*MLM Basic Course*” (2016) and the 150 year history of class struggle⁴⁸. As the Basic Course is the only theoretical text they cite, it is quite revealing with regards to their understanding of Maoist principles! Of course, this is only in passing, the emphasis as they see it remains to be ‘mass work’ with the caveat of avoiding ‘right opportunism’ in the form of getting “*bogged down in the logistics of these programs*” (!?). This apparently was controversial enough to warrant a criticism from among their own with FTP-Boston’s response to the joint statement shortly afterwards⁴⁹. In that statement, we see a frustration with precisely that lack of reflection by the FTP signatories and

⁴⁴ Winstonite refers to Chris Winston, an online personality and current member of DSA. He initiated this trend and the formation of the MCP-OC. While he currently is closer to MUG politically than his MCP-OC days, his progression has been one of continuing on the opportunist path that we characterize here. However, he is no longer trying to lead a trend in the way he was in the MCP; we see this as a positive thing. He was also known as a guest on Dr. Phil.

⁴⁵ An intermediate organization is a group theorized to be between a pre-party formation and a mass organization; essentially it takes on tasks and characteristics of both organizations without committing to either. The idea is that usually through developing both aspects, down the line a proper demarcation will be made where pre-party and mass organizations will spring from it. This is a flawed theory that basically hampers both organizational efforts and usually ends up abortive. In this case, many FTPs went on to make their own mass organizations, putting an even less theoretically consolidated activist leadership between the masses and the already not very theoretical MCP-OC.

⁴⁶ <https://peoples-voice.org/2021/01/02/>

⁴⁷ <https://peoples-voice.org/2021/05/01/>

⁴⁸ Their words, not ours. “*All recorded history hitherto has been a history of class struggle, of the succession of the rule and victory of certain social classes over others*” - Lenin in “*Frederick Engels*”. And if they’re specifically referring to the class struggle of the proletariat: “*In 1831 [194 years ago], the first working-class rising took place in Lyons; between 1838 and 1842, the first national working-class movement, that of the English Chartists, reached its height. The class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie came to the front in the history of the most advanced countries in Europe, in proportion to the development, upon the one hand, of modern industry, upon the other, of the newly-acquired political supremacy of the bourgeoisie.*” From “*Anti-Duhring*” by Engels.

⁴⁹ <https://forthepeopleboston.wordpress.com/2021/05/17/>

the complete bankruptcy of that whole faction in being able to do anything aside from their red charity work. Though they could point out the problems that arise from their approach to work, their solutions are not a break from their revisionism, but a reiteration of them in another form. Concretely, they called for continuing to emphasize practice through engaging in “*concrete struggle with concrete stakes*”; summing those experiences and the history of their work thus far⁵⁰, lacking any call for study at all. The apple really doesn’t fall far from the tree, with Engels’s description of Americans seeming to be quite apt as he calls our forerunners “*so conceited about [their] ‘practice’ and so frightfully dense theoretically*”⁵¹.

Since the dissolution of MCP-OC and the steady process of the various FTP’s going defunct, most successors that have reorganized into groups like the Revolutionary Maoist Coalition (RMC) appear not to have learned from their mistakes. Occasionally they study individual texts, but most organizing is around the usual mutual aid work or political rallies. The successor of FTP-Boston, Red Star Communist Organization (RSCO), appears to have held true to their critical stance of FTP where they appear to recognize the greater importance of theory and consequently the task of study in rectifying their past errors. We hope to see a more explicit position from them on this in the future. So long as these groups do not undertake serious theoretical work, it is very likely that their cycle of theoretical confusion, practical tailism⁵², stagnation, and collapse will continue as it would for any other contemporary group.

The rightists also include the disorganized and spontaneous mass of individuals and groups who mostly are only known for their online presence (e.g. Winston) or activity in the spiritual successor to the opportunist SPA, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). The DSA suits this trend well, as its disorganized, ‘big tent’, and unprincipled character attracts them with the aesthetic of organization and an outlet for political work without the seriousness that comes with it. As per its eclectic character, we see many confused ideas by muddling postmodern, classical revisionist, and even anarcho-syndicalist positions. Granted, some factions within DSA have a political education track. One of the more robust ones is Marxist Unity Group’s (MUG), but as expected of an SPA successor, it is little more than a means to propagandize a Neo-Kautskyite program. As the various Maoist trends over the years have struggled to solve their internal problems, many of its members attrition as these former organizers end up settling for less. This will continue as long as Maoism in the US fails to resolve its theoretical crisis.

The ultra-leftist Gonzaloite cult⁵³ of the CR-CPUSA and its successors in the RSG’s clearly express in their many articles how they must ascertain truth only through the ‘mass

⁵⁰ Also, whatever “*the generalization of the confrontation between generated mass organs and the bourgeois class state into open partisan struggle wherever possible*” means. Even we can’t parse through this level of jargon.

⁵¹ The full quote is even better: “*A nation — a young nation — so conceited about its “practice” and so frightfully dense theoretically as the Americans are, gets thoroughly rid of so deep-rooted a fixed idea only through its own sufferings*”. Letter from Engels to Sorge circa March 18th, 1893. [1893/letters/93_03_18.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/engels/letters/93_03_18.htm)

⁵² Lenin coined this term in “*What is to be Done?*”, referring to organizers who follow the ‘tail’ of the masses rather than trying to raise their level and lead them by the front as any vanguard should do.

⁵³ By Gonzaloite we specifically refer to the left-opportunist trend that dogmatically applies Gonzalo Thought, what they call the “Contributions of Universal Validity of Chairman Gonzalo”, and its appraisal of Maoism. We will present a thorough critique of this revisionist trend, as with the rest of those mentioned here, in future articles. By a political cult we mean a high control political organization that engages in ‘communal abuse’ of its members, and led by a charismatic absolute authority.

line⁵⁴ and vulgarized interpretations of Mao's quotations. What they mean by the 'mass line' is best expressed by the chief representative of the RG movement, Red Guards-Austin. In one of their most significant declaratory pieces "*Condemned to Win*"⁵⁵, they clearly show their stance that truth is derived solely from mass work, and assert that mass work alone defines someone as a Communist⁵⁶. Assuming that cadres already possess the "*most advanced revolutionary concepts*" it is their responsibility to guide the masses with it, and spontaneously generate correct politics through their commandist⁵⁷ leadership. There is lip service to study, as a vague study of "*Maoism and the history of class struggle*" is in the same breath tied to the concrete analysis of each collective's local conditions (and local revolutionary history), and then organizational work more broadly. For them this amounted to simply using study circles as a recruiting tool for their political cult (as shown in their 1 year summation⁵⁸).

The Red Guards movement quickly gained support from other collectives across the country, and these collectives' independent study efforts began to mirror the RGA's position. This was because, as independent collectives formed (mostly spontaneously after the 2016 election or otherwise splitting from various revisionist trends) this necessitated an attempt at studying some Maoist classics; however, as best shown by RG-Charlotte in their summation of their early RSG project⁵⁹, this soon shifted. It's a great example of how prior to unity with RGA they directly struggled against the tailist pragmatism of their contemporaries, but in doing so exposed their own ignorance of theory and a lack of understanding on how to approach theoretical study in particular. Their scattered studies lacked a serious approach to understanding the fundamentals of Marxism (By their own admission, they hadn't studied a single text on Marxist philosophy or political economy!⁶⁰), and for several subjective and petty reasons, they justified their liquidation of the study circle to focus on practical work. So rather than reassessing the mistaken approach towards study, they rejected any structured process towards it entirely, leaving individuals to take responsibility for studying themselves. As such, by

⁵⁴ "In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily "from the masses, to the masses". This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses and once again go to the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge." From Mao in "*Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership*". We take this to refer to the application of Marxist analysis to political work which then informs and develops that work. The key thing though, and this is where Gonzaloites and other Marxist amateurs fall through, is that one needs to grasp the Marxist method of analysis. Further, concentrating and systematizing the ideas of the masses is a skill that's necessary insofar as you have a political strategy (i.e a program upon a firm theoretical basis) to organize the masses towards in the first place.

⁵⁵ <https://redguardsaustin.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/>

⁵⁶ In 2020, this position was updated to declare that a communist is one who is, "among and gaining leadership in the mass struggles" and further, "inside of Communist organizations."

<https://tribuneofthepeoplenews.wordpress.com/2020/04/10/where-are-the-communists/>

⁵⁷ In "*Quotations From Mao Zedong*" (Little Red Book), Ch. 11: "Commandism is wrong in any type of work, because in overstepping the level of political consciousness of the masses and violating the principle of voluntary mass action it reflects the disease of impetuosity. Our comrades must not assume that everything they themselves understand is understood by the masses. Whether the masses understand it and are ready to take action can be discovered only by going into their midst and making investigations. If we do so, we can avoid commandism."

⁵⁸ <https://redguardsaustin.wordpress.com/2016/02/17/>

⁵⁹ <https://redguardscharlotte.wordpress.com/2018/09/12/>

⁶⁰ Further, it appears that about half of the texts they studied were just articles by the various Gonzaloite blogs that were current at the time, especially during their theoretical debates on the nature of postmodernism.

stopping an organized effort towards study before it even really began, they effectively capitulated to the very thing they were so adamant in struggling against, i.e. the pragmatist tailism as expressed in their red charity organizing through Serve The People⁶¹.

Over the subsequent years, the erroneous practice developed into an outlook in which only local and central leadership (those responsible for the various Gonzaloite blogs) would regularly study theory, while the broader membership would just listen to orders or read their articles. Whenever both studied theory, they did so dogmatically; they merely memorized ideas from texts and moved on, lacking a critical understanding of Marxist analysis and a holistic approach to learning⁶². This reflected in many of their articles lacking any theoretical substance, amounting to declaratory phrase mongering to hide their ignorance. However, the popularity of their militant aesthetic and overwhelming activity⁶³ was enough to garner a lot of interest, particularly after 2020. By this point they have formed the CR-CPUSA⁶⁴, formalizing the left-opportunist line into a proper nationwide political cult. Their ambitious but hollow conception of party building prevented any real class analysis; instead, they directly agitated workers to participate in their front organizations or contribute to their blogs⁶⁵ without a clear understanding of propaganda and agitation.

In the end, it was precisely because of their lack of care in studying Marxism that their practice amounted to superficially applying slogans and insisting on their applicability in every context. The trend collapsed under its own weight, from which various RSGs emerged, often with eclectic assessments of the cult itself, let alone how they should approach study after such a failure. These organizations seem to still uphold the same outlook, though in word they vacillate between emphasizing the importance of theory and study in our context while they continue to repeat the same errors of dismissing it and approaching it haphazardly in practice⁶⁶. This

⁶¹ The name of the Red Guards' main red charity and later general front organization, as explicitly noted in "*Condemned to Win*".

⁶² To be clear, even though each locale where the CR-CPUSA was active had differences, and varying degrees of spontaneous autonomy, what we're describing here is a general tendency. As such, keep in mind that in the fewer than a dozen or so cities they were active in, there's some variability. Some groups studied more independently, some less, some not at all, though all struggled with dogmatic adherence to the texts they were studying without any critical evaluation.

⁶³ We mean this literally in that it was sustained by members ignoring their basic needs and being chronically overworked and abused. This unhealthy behavior is not only anti-human, but anti-Marxist as well. See this well documented history at "*The Hub*." While we don't agree with the politics or all the opinions on The Hub, we acknowledge it as a unique resource for understanding the CR-CPUSA and its offshoots that is full of primary source documents. <https://maoistcultexposed.wordpress.com/timeline-basic-history/#2021>

⁶⁴ Unfortunately, on account of their opportunistically secretive approach toward political positions, which were only spelled out in internal exchanges, very little is public about their approach to study at this period, and most of what is written here is based on personal testimonies reflecting after the fact and public pronouncements in the "*Tribune of the People*." See, "*The Hub*," for specifics.

⁶⁵ <https://tribuneofthepeoplenews.com/2022/01/28/>

⁶⁶ To be clear, the RSGs generally unite around Eugene's approach towards study which reiterates the priority of mass organizations and scattered dogmatic study of various Gonzaloite or auxiliary Marxist texts. As this is a decentralized trend, it appears that while most recognize Eugene's representative line, there are RSGs like Oakland-Berkeley and Columbus that are more akin to MCU's and RMC's approaches respectively. This is evident specifically in the first Newsletter where Eugene's political line (*Draft political line originally from Cmd Hunter in Eugene*) is presented; this being generally united around by the trend; the 5th one which includes Columbus's Rightist move (*SUMMARY OF A LINE STRUGGLE*) and Oakland's Centrist move (Documents From An Organizational Line Struggle on OBRSG); and the 7th one which confirmed Oakland's trajectory (*Internal Ideological Development Campaign*). For any readers interested in these documents, we warn that the only thing you'll learn is the sheer scale of the trend's ignorance of Marxist analysis and theory. <https://maoistcultexposed.com/2024/11/13/>

dismissal and half-hearted approach toward study, while dogmatically insisting on the applicability of this or that text, reflects in the incredibly confused understanding of even the basics of Marxist thought. As such, this too fails to address the theoretical shortcomings of the American left, reflective of Gonzaloism's failure to do this in particular, serving as one more negative example.

Finally, among the 'centre', it is best represented by the Mass Proletariat ->MCU continuity formed from the split with the Maoist Communist Group (MCG)/New Communist Party-Liaison Committee (NCP-LC) around the same time the RG movement started coming around; their writings indicate that at least some of their members have studied, but they appear to be impatient and apply their limited knowledge incorrectly. The amateur character of MCU was evident in their 2020 launch, which emphasized coalition building as expressed in the unsubstantiated claim that the revolutionary movement has been objectively improved just by their formation, completely disregarding any theoretical groundwork.⁶⁷ By 2023, they had reflected to some extent on their erroneous work⁶⁸. They summarized past work, criticized their overemphasis on practice without a coherent plan, and presented a plan for the future. They emphasized the role of theory, seeing it as principal. But then they undermined that role with one position to the next, elevating practice without theory once more. Particularly, emphasizing union organizing (among the industrial proletariat) inspired by work conducted by the CPUSA (though it appears they don't see the inherited labor outlook from the SPA that it reflected). This amounts to a muddle of their priorities and contributed to them struggling to accomplish their ambitious goals.

After yet another year, they appear to have reflected on their errors and thoroughly criticized them (again). In fact, they make points that we ourselves attempt to do here⁶⁹. They point out how their vague and broad directives had resulted in many organizational mistakes, while their membership's organizational **and theoretical weaknesses** limited their theoretical work. We suspect this is because of their lack of rigor in studying MLM internally, and their external 'short courses' in MLM show how narrow the leadership views the need for such rigor. Though seemingly a significant improvement, they still need to clarify their priorities as they try to do tasks historically reflective of Marxist study circles, pre-party formations, **and parties themselves simultaneously!** As observed from their digital footprint and attendance at their open studies, these amount to the same level of rigor and superficial understanding that can be observed among most of the RSGs. Their attempts to establish an oppositional left union movement are, by their own admission, significantly hindered by organizational constraints and competing priorities in theoretical work. Trying to do everything all at once in a haphazard fashion, with an insufficient grasp of the fundamentals, is a recipe for

⁶⁷ <https://mcu.com/red-pages/issue-1/founding-statement-of-the-mcu/>

⁶⁸ <https://mcu.com/2023/12/mcu-and-the-working-class-movement-2.pdf>

⁶⁹ <https://mcu.com/2024/11/growing-as-a-pre-party-organization-and-the-development-of-mcus-political-line.pdf>

On that note, one of their 'corrections' to the 2023 article made here, we can tie directly to an exchange they had with one of our facilitators criticizing their document at the time. The relevant passage is, "*the distinction we drew in the document [MCUWCM] between theoretical/ideological work and practical work is imprecise. Within what could be called ideological work, there is a theoretical and a practical component. On the one hand there is the work of study, research, synthesizing knowledge, etc. On the other hand there are the various practical-organizational tasks associated with actually bringing this theory to the proletarian masses at various levels.*" We suspect this to be after reflecting on our criticism. We can share the criticisms we raised from the exchange upon request.

repeated failures and repetitive summations of those failures. With that said, we want to be clear in that out of the new generation of the ‘Maoist’ milieu (in exclusion of the RCP continuity and its splinters including OCR, they have their own serious issues that are outside the scope of this presentation), they’re the most theoretically developed of all the aforementioned trends (though this isn’t saying much). Because of this, we hope they clarify their priorities and take more seriously studying Marxism rigorously, with special attention to the fundamentals (especially in the realm of political economy, as their confused ideas on neomercantilism and the industrial proletariat show their weakness).

These cases prove that refraining from sufficient theoretical training among aspiring Marxists results in political liquidation and failure to play any decisive role in the mass movement they covet so highly. Meaning, where we are members of the broader social mass, we can and should contribute to these mass movements without sacrificing our revolutionary priorities and neglecting the principal tasks at hand. Marx and Lenin themselves were very clear on the importance of taking part in spontaneous movements given the examples of the 1905 Revolution and Paris Commune⁷⁰. However, if we intend to be Marxists, only after we understand **how to act** as organized Marxists can we take the first steps of engaging with the mass movement **as Marxist Revolutionaries**. This necessitates that we initially limit engagement to narrow propaganda; the scope will broaden to reflect the work of Marxists within the mass movement, soon encompassing widespread agitation. Finally, this corresponds with higher levels of organization seen developing both spontaneously as the mass movement disseminates class consciousness and organized under the influence of Marxists. To quote Lenin *“It is thus, and only thus—by studying the history of the movement, by pondering over the ideological significance of definite theories, and by putting phrases to the test of facts—that serious people should appraise present-day trends and groups. Only simpletons put faith in words”⁷¹.*

[Study & Party Construction]

[Stage One: Self Study]

No one is born a Marxist. For anyone aiming to inform themselves about anything, including such a rich discipline as Marxism, they should first begin by engaging with the primary sources directly⁷². Once you begin, you’ll come to a difficulty everyone arrives at with

⁷⁰ “Preface to the Russian Translation of Karl Marx’s Letters to Dr. Kugelmann” and “Lessons of the Commune” by Lenin.

⁷¹ This is to contrast ourselves from the pragmatists and subjectivists who interpret this quote as a justification to undermine the positions of anyone who’s less active than themselves. The emphasis Lenin places in his text “Adventurism” is on the need for struggling over **definite theories** to elaborate the basis for a revolutionary strategy, and it is precisely those who ignore this, or otherwise expose their vulgar outlook, who end up being the simpletons here.

⁷² However, secondary sources can be useful supplements, and possibly give direction for further study. Texts such as “Why Communism?” by MJ Olgin or “Marxism Versus Liberalism” by Joseph Stalin are ‘popular’ introductions to Marxism that are intended for an audience with little familiarity. Although, it is our opinion that many contemporary popularizations and analyses often vulgarize key Marxist principles, smuggle in revisionism, and leave readers more confused than when they began. Therefore, our recommendation for contemporary works summarizing Marxist fundamentals is that they should be considered with caution. It is difficult enough to clarify misconceptions caused by anti-communism taught from bourgeois education and media, let alone the inventions of those who repeat their own

personal study; not knowing what you don't know and struggling to know if you're not overlooking any of the key ideas. The best way to rectify this is through **collective study**.

Of course, we recommend to those starting out that cannot engage in collective study or participate with Mount Tai Study Circle⁷³ (MTSC) for one reason or another that they follow the basic curriculum that we have put together to ground themselves in the fundamentals. You are also welcome to write to us for supplemental readings, advice, criticisms, or questions. When first learning Marxism, it is generally most useful to begin with Marxist philosophy (dialectical materialism); this is because it is the foundation upon which the other component parts of Marxism rest. It is the worldview that encompasses the whole of phenomena and the methodology necessary to appraise it. Additionally, we recommend looking at the reading "*How Lenin Studied Marx*" by Nadezhda Krupskaya to get a clear idea of Lenin's approach toward studying and how he always strove to grasp and utilize the method of Marx and Engels rather than reducing their ideas and conclusions to a ready-made dogma as so many self-proclaimed communists do.

[Stage Two: Collective Study in Study Circles]

Collective study and accompanying theoretical struggle are the principal methods to achieve consensus on Marxist principles.⁷⁴ Here, collective labor overcomes individual shortcomings and confusion and is the first place where Marxists can become more than the sum of their parts. Study circles generate a foundational organizational framework, as they require a baseline of organization in order to facilitate studies and the increasing number of circles engaged in them. This allows for free experimentation in political projects, a base for mass initiatives, and a forum to debate ideas on the contemporary situation. Lastly, it allows for discipline to be developed without overburdening participants with roles they wouldn't be ready for. An example of one such circle is MTSC, whose structure and composition is presented clearly on our website.

Eventually, as a study circle's leadership consolidates itself sufficiently, a need to conduct Marxist analysis of contemporary conditions arises. Thus a journal becomes necessary to begin that analysis while facilitating ideological struggle between Marxist trends and acting as a rallying point for Marxists to organize around. This is paramount for all the disparate and divided study circles to come to the unity necessary to advance both themselves as Marxist organizers and the movement as it develops into the following stages. From here, Marxists should begin distributing propaganda and agitational material for the masses, starting locally, and broadening it from there. Concretely, it would necessarily start in narrow points of struggle such as this workers strike or that student occupation coupled with publications from the

misconceptions far and wide. As another defect, in many contemporary articles published by various leftist groups, they often fail to cite sources or provide bibliographies that give readers the resources they'd need to evaluate the material themselves and come to their own conclusions.

⁷³ For those unfamiliar and curious about our organization can check our website where you will also find our contact information. We aim to be as transparent as possible with regards to our methodology and outlook.

⁷⁴ One thing to note is that self-study should continue even once collective study is underway (and this remains true at each successive stage). This is so that our theoretical development keeps with the pace of organizational and political development.

journal, only later evolving into roles in broader movements as relationships with the masses deepen. This is what it means to form mass links and practice the mass line within our particular context, as the Russians and Chinese did in theirs.

It is important to emphasize that these initial organic links are subordinate to the task of ideological struggle and study at this stage. To forget this would be succumbing to economism and tailism, as the links are useless disconnected from an established political line and national organization. Further, there are two aspects to the links in question: breadth or to what extent these links reach through the land; and depth or how numerous and strong these links are within a given locale. Limiting oneself to the latter amounts to localism, and exposes you to the state concentrating its attention to that one strong locale if need be. Looking at the masses liberally (i.e superficially seeing a communist's role to be doing 'mass work' and forming 'mass links') or as an empiricist source of ideas, amounts to seeing only one side of the process of the development of knowledge, the aspect of "from the masses". However, in order to proceed "to the masses", one can't just regurgitate their own ideas back to them or supplement it with their own dogma as it neglects synthesis. By following this liberal path, the masses are left untrained and are passively seen as indicators of success in and of themselves. Therefore, in order to be able to proceed "to the masses", we must first develop ourselves through the difficult work of theoretical study and ideological struggle. This is how we overcome the tradition of the SPA and its successors.

Once these links start becoming consolidated, pre-party formations, formed precisely for organizing the masses further, take precedence over developing the study circle(s).

[Stage Three: Pre-Party Formation]

Study circles develop the most advanced and enthusiastic Marxists who may then compose a pre-party formation (PPF). They formalize it under a democratic centralist⁷⁵ structure defined by a constitution and maintained through disciplinary codes. Having established links with the working masses, the PPF now works to win over and develop the advanced sections into becoming Marxist organizers themselves; develop the intermediate through a journal along with other propagandizing material; and agitate the backward to raise their level to political consciousness. To elaborate on this point, we cite this key passage from Lenin's *"A Retrograde Trend in Social Democracy"* that is still so relevant for the American left to understand. In it, we ask the reader to play close attention to the characterization of the advanced strata of the proletariat to the less advanced, and the significance of work by Marxists among these sections (all bolds being our own):

"The history of the working-class movement in all countries shows that the better-situated strata of the working class respond to the ideas of socialism, more rapidly and more easily. From among these come, in the main, the advanced workers that every

⁷⁵ As Lenin describes in *"Freedom to Criticize and Unity in Action"*: *"The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full **freedom to criticise**, so long as this does not disturb the unity of **a definite action**; it rules out **all** criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the **unity** of an action decided on by the Party."*

*working-class movement brings to the fore, those who can win the confidence of the labouring masses, who devote themselves entirely to the education and organisation of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously, and who even elaborate independent socialist theories. Every viable working-class movement has brought to the fore such working-class leaders, its own Proudhons, Vaillants, Weitlings, and Bebels. And our Russian working-class movement promises not to lag behind the European movement in this respect. At a time when educated society is losing interest in honest, illegal literature, an impassioned desire for knowledge and for socialism is growing among the workers, real heroes are coming to the fore from amongst the workers, who... **despite the stultifying penal servitude of factory labour, possess so much character and will-power that they study, study, study, and turn themselves into conscious Social-Democrats—"the working-class intelligentsia."** This "working-class intelligentsia" already exists in Russia, and **we must make every effort to ensure that its ranks are regularly reinforced, that its lofty mental requirements are met and that leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party come from its ranks.** The newspaper that wants to become the organ of all Russian Social-Democrats must, therefore, **be at the level of the advanced workers;** not only must it not lower its level artificially, but, on the contrary, it must raise it constantly, it must follow up all the tactical, political, and theoretical problems of world Social-Democracy. Only then will the demands of the working-class intelligentsia be met, and it itself will take the cause of the Russian workers and, consequently, the cause of the Russian revolution, into its own hands."*

To contextualize, this was written over a year after the founding of the RSDLP and consequently there already was a certain fusion that had taken place between Marxism and the Russian labor movement. However, the 1st Congress led to nearly the entire political leadership being arrested, rendering the RSDLP to exist only in name. This left the regional 'sub-party formations' entirely to their own devices with their political work. In the USA, there is nothing that resembles the Bolshevik Faction of the RSDLP. All similar groups that have existed lay as dead mulch beneath our feet, or worse, persist like zombies, in rotting and bloated forms, corrupting all they touch. Above, Lenin is also referring to a working class that at that point had become the most militant and politicized in the entire world. It should be clear that at this point **we are** the advanced sections of the proletariat, 'we' referring to all workers who are not only class conscious but also are actively working towards elevating our understanding of socialism and the means to attain it⁷⁶. Unfortunately, we're also weak theoretically due to the particular effect of American Pragmatism along with the ongoing ideological crisis of Maoism, leaving us without much of a guide (as the Germans were for the Russians). This is further complicated by the lack of continuity and familiarity with past American revolutionary movements wherever they came about between the 1918 revolutionary crisis and the NCM. This makes studying socialism that much more significant for the stage of organizing as a PPF (let alone a party). In

⁷⁶ As this is often confused among the contemporary American left, we clarify that class stand and class position are two different things. You can be a member of the proletariat, or any other class for that matter, but work towards the interests of classes opposite to your own. Of course, your class position 'brands' you with the outlook of that class, but this isn't a metaphysical indictment of your identity for all time. With that said, by 'all workers' we're inclusive of those who may not have had exclusively proletarian upbringings, but nonetheless work towards the liberation of the proletariat and politically embody a proletarian class consciousness.

particular, we must win over the various trends among the 'working-class intelligentsia' to the correct proletarian line and develop it further from there.

*"After the numerically small stratum of advanced workers comes the broad stratum of average workers. These workers, too, strive ardently for socialism, participate in workers' study circles, read socialist newspapers and books, participate in agitation, and **differ from the preceding stratum only in that they cannot become fully independent leaders of the Social-Democratic working-class movement.** The average worker will not understand some of the articles in a newspaper that aims to be the organ of the Party, he will not be able to get a full grasp of an intricate theoretical or practical problem. This does not at all mean that the newspaper must lower itself to the level of the mass of its readers. The newspaper, on the contrary, must **raise their level and help promote advanced workers from the middle stratum of workers.** Such workers, absorbed by local practical work and interested mainly in the events of the working-class movement and the immediate problems of agitation, should connect their every act with thoughts of the entire Russian working-class movement, its historical task, and the ultimate goal of socialism, so that the newspaper, the mass of whose readers are average workers, must connect socialism and the political struggle with every local and narrow question."*

While the advanced stratum includes the politically conscious socialists who are independently capable of leading sections of the working class at various points of struggle within the mass movement, the average stratum consists of the sympathizers and supporters. Sympathizers are a key component for us to establish and deepen our links with as, once primed, they actively agitate and promote our material where possible. We must not vulgarize our material to cater to their level, but provide every means to develop them further so that they can eventually become independent organizers.

*"Lastly, behind the stratum of average workers comes the mass that constitutes the lower strata of the proletariat. It is quite possible that a socialist newspaper will be completely or well-nigh incomprehensible to them..., but it would be absurd to conclude from this that the newspaper of the Social-Democrats should adapt itself to the lowest possible level of the workers. **The only thing that follows from this is that different forms of agitation and propaganda must be brought to bear on these strata**—pamphlets written in more popular language, oral agitation, and chiefly—leaflets on local events. The Social-Democrats should not confine themselves even to this; it is quite possible that the first steps towards arousing the consciousness of the lower strata of the workers will have to take the form of legal educational activities [most political work being illegal in Russia at the time]. It is very important for the Party to make use of this activity, guide it in the direction in which it is most needed, send out legal workers to plough up virgin fields that can later be planted by Social-Democratic agitators. Agitation among the lower strata of the workers should, of course, provide the widest field for the personal qualities of the agitator and the peculiarities of the locality, the trade concerned, etc. "Tactics and agitation must not be confused," says Kautsky in his book against Bernstein. **"Agitational methods must be adapted to individual and local conditions. Every agitator must be allowed to select those methods of agitation that he has at his disposal.** One agitator may create the greatest*

impression by his enthusiasm, another by his biting sarcasm, a third by his ability to adduce a large number of instances, etc. While being adapted to the agitator, agitation must also be adapted to the public. The agitator must speak so that he will be understood; he must take as a starting-point something well known to his listeners. All this is self-evident and is not merely applicable to agitation conducted among the peasantry. One has to talk to cabmen differently than to sailors, and to sailors differently than to printers. Agitation must be individualised, but our tactics, our political activity must be uniform" (S. 2-3). These words from a leading representative of Social-Democratic theory contain a superb assessment of agitation as part of the general activity of the party. These words show how unfounded are the fears of those who think that the formation of a revolutionary party conducting a political struggle will interfere with agitation, will push it into the background and curtail the freedom of the agitators. On the contrary, only an organised party can carry out widespread agitation, provide the necessary guidance (and material) for agitators on all economic and political questions, make use of every local agitational success for the instruction of all Russian workers, and send agitators to those places and into that milieu where they can work with the greatest success... **From this it can be seen that whoever forgets political agitation and propaganda on account of the economic struggle, whoever forgets the necessity of organising the working-class movement into the struggle of a political party, will, aside from everything else, deprive himself of even an opportunity of successfully and steadily attracting the lower strata of the proletariat to the working-class cause.**

However, such an exaggeration of one side of our activities to the detriment of the others, even the urge to throw overboard the other aspects, is fraught with still graver consequences for the Russian working-class movement. **The lower strata of the proletariat may even become demoralised by such calumnies as that the founders of Russian Social-Democracy only want to use the workers to overthrow the autocracy, by invitations to confine themselves to the restoration of holidays and to craft unions, with no concern for the final aims of socialism and the immediate tasks of the political struggle. Such workers may (and will) always be ensnared by the bait of any sops offered by the government or the bourgeoisie.** The lower strata of the proletariat, the very undeveloped workers, might, under the influence of the preaching of Rabochaya Mysl, fall victim to the bourgeois and profoundly reactionary idea that the worker cannot and should not interest himself in anything but increased wages and the restoration of holidays ("the interests of the moment"); that the working people can and should conduct the workers' struggle by their own efforts alone, by their own "private initiative," and not attempt to combine it with socialism; that they should not strive to turn the working-class movement into the essential, advanced cause of all mankind. We repeat, the most undeveloped workers might be demoralised by such an idea, but we are confident that the advanced Russian workers, those who guide the workers' study circles and all Social-Democratic activity, those who today fill our prisons and places of exile—from Archangel Gubernia to Eastern Siberia—that those workers will reject such a theory with indignation. **To reduce the entire movement to the interests of the moment means to speculate on the backward condition of the workers, means to cater to their worst inclinations.** It means artificially to break the link between the working-class

movement and socialism, between the fully defined political strivings of the advanced workers and the spontaneous manifestations of protest on the part of the masses. Hence, the attempt of Rabochaya Mysl to introduce a special trend merits particular attention and calls for a vigorous protest. As long as Rabochaya Mysl, adapting itself, apparently, to the lower strata of the proletariat, assiduously avoided the question of the ultimate goal of socialism and the political struggle, with no declaration of its special trend, many Social-Democrats only shook their heads, hoping that with the development and extension of their work the members of the Rabochaya Mysl group would come to rid themselves of their narrowness. However, when people who, until now, have performed the useful work of a preparatory class clutch at fashionable opportunist theories and begin to deafen the ears of Europe with announcements about intending to put the whole of Russian Social-Democracy into the preparatory class for many years (if not for ever), when, in other words, people who have, until now, been labouring usefully over a barrel of honey begin “in full view of the public” to pour ladles of tar into it, then it is time for us to set ourselves decisively against this retrograde trend!

These two paragraphs are especially significant in our context. It provides a clear definition of the backward strata to be at best ignorant of its class role and at worst completely subordinate to the leadership of one or another bourgeois trend against its own interests. Further, it demands the complete opposite of what nearly every Marxist trend in the United States has stumbled into. That is, the opportunist tendency to lower our ideological level and political work to that of the backwards or intermediate strata, with the added flare of waving red flags occasionally. Indeed, rather than ‘catering to their worst inclinations’, we must agitate them towards socialism with redoubled enthusiasm. What we instead cater to is their particular circumstances, what we colloquially call ‘meeting the masses where they’re at’, as we agitate them towards becoming sympathizers. To reiterate, we must agitate the backward strata toward socialism, raising them above their narrow self-interests while simultaneously addressing their individual needs for effective and understandable agitation.

Now that the tasks for PPFs are clear in the realm of organizing the proletariat, we can proceed. PPFs must reorganize the former study circle apparatus into a specialized formal Marxist school to handle incoming sympathizers of all political literacy levels, thereby facilitating ideological consolidation among the new generation of revolutionaries. As the Marxist movement continues to grow by winning over larger sections of the proletariat to its cause, the need for a draft program also becomes necessary. Research committees responsible for the class analysis key to laying the basis for such a program should already be at work. Once a PPF completes and approves a draft program, the struggle to found the Communist Party begins. Particularly, this struggle involves winning over as many other PPFs and study circles as possible as well as completing the preparatory work for a founding congress (coordinated through an organizing committee).

[Stage Four: A Communist Party]

A party congress formalizes a party by adopting the national program and party rules, waging line struggles over the most pressing tasks, and electing all the party leadership to the central committee (which is to represent the congress when it isn’t in session). Such an event

expresses the fusion of the working class movement with Marxism. Any 'party' that hasn't in fact fulfilled this prerequisite wouldn't qualify as a vanguard party in the Leninist sense, and therefore its founding would be premature. By this point a party school would need to be set up with the Marxist school, to prepare the new generation of **professional revolutionaries**⁷⁷. The news organ would also diversify into various specializations, an official publication for the party (i.e the party organ), and publications aimed at various mass struggles such as student or national movements. Once formed, the purpose of the party, the vanguard of the proletariat, is to lead the working class to its liberation through revolution. It will be, of course, by any means necessary, but that doesn't mean all means at all times, only that it is the Party's responsibility to direct the workers where we are certain to win. One cannot prescribe ahead of time what a communist party should do and in what exact form it should look like, staying true to Lenin's expression of a "*concrete analysis of concrete conditions*"⁷⁸ prior to determining the necessary strategy and tactics.

All along the way, the extent to which revolutionaries must prepare for state repression varies. There's no way to figure out the level of skill it needs until at the very least a PPF introduces a standard of collective discipline. Even then, it won't be until a national party can enforce discipline widely that any counter-repressionary activity would be effective and proactive (in contrast to the common amateurish and reactive efforts of today). Therefore, education on security would play a large role in the party school.

[The Task of Study Today]

Reviewing the process of the development of the communist movement, what begins as self-study soon progresses to collective study in study circles. Once collective study establishes a standard of theoretical training, the circles struggle to win over the advanced sections of the working class and develop the others. Individual Marxists then not only study theory but also train in the skills of agitation, propaganda, and rudimentary organizational discipline. Of course, in order to realize the goal of winning over the masses and developing communists, it is necessary to simultaneously struggle theoretically with other circles and revisionist trends. The agitation, propaganda, and organizing required necessitates a higher level of organization capable of coordinating both this and launching the grand task of formal party construction. PPFs then form to satisfy that aim, and the training of new communists now includes organizational methods to address the concrete problems facing a growing communist movement. This includes a likely response from the state (assuming the PPF has now won over the support of a section of the working class, and is successfully moving to party foundation). The theoretical tasks then only continue to get deeper and more difficult, including a national class analysis and laying out the key principles and demands to be listed in the party program. Once complete, there is then a basis to form a communist party aimed at realizing that program and securing workers' power.

⁷⁷ As Lenin puts it in "*What is to be Done?*", this refers to revolutionaries who's sole occupation is political work in the party.

⁷⁸ Mao reiterated this as well in "*Our Study and the Current Situation*" saying "*Concrete analysis of concrete conditions, Lenin said, is 'the most essential thing in Marxism, the living soul of Marxism'.*"

At the current political juncture, we are in the stage of study circles. Forming new PPFs at this point would be premature and lead to organizers lacking the preparation necessary to operate effectively. At best, a group will stagnate until it resolves its theoretical shortcomings, but in all likelihood it will collapse in a few years. A key reason for this is because forming a PPF requires at least some link with the labor/mass movement (as referenced in [Stage Two: Collective Study]), whereas lacking it amounts to adventurism⁷⁹. That said, the circumstances for existing PPFs are more nuanced. Where the PPFs have gone through the 'trial by fire' and have established a practice that has been effective, throwing out years of work despite national conditions would be counter-productive. For those PPFs, we ask only for them to reflect on the forces they have at their disposal, and assess whether they could spare any for developing study circles. That way, a broader mass of Marxists from among the large sections of fresh blood sympathetic to the cause of socialism can be developed sufficiently for the next stage of our work. However, for the various PPFs continuing the cycle of useless at best and harmful at worst organizing, we call for their dissolution and reorganization into study circles, in line with their current level of ideological development.

For Marxist study circles, the task is straightforward: win over as many sympathizers and Marxists to study as is possible. Develop a curriculum with enough rigor to teach the fundamentals, while also encouraging Marxist students to engage in their community's political life to develop mass links. Keep your priorities straight. Don't emphasize practice at a stage where we don't even know *how* to evaluate practice⁸⁰. Avoid unnecessary work by using existing resources. There's over 200 years of proletarian tradition to familiarize oneself and your comrades with. Struggle theoretically with other trends, leaving no vulgarized principle of Marxism unchecked. If applied correctly, the rewards are exponential. Finally, for those still uninvolved in Marxist organizations, get involved! Of course, we believe Mount Tai is the organization best equipped to address the needs of those interested in learning Marxist theory and preparing them for our future role as communist organizers. However, as long as you're dedicating serious time to study Marxism in a group setting (and alone if that's not possible), we will always be happy to engage with you in the future. This is our responsibility as the new generation of American Reds.

We expect this article to receive criticism; indeed, we encourage it! There's no better issue to struggle over than the question of how we're to reclaim Marxism as a tool wielded by the working class. Doing so, especially from scratch, necessitates that we begin from the beginning,

⁷⁹ By adventurism we mean the term defined by Lenin as "...adventurist in the sense that they had no stable or serious principles, programme, tactics, organisation, and no roots among the masses." From "Adventurism". This is inclusive of both right and left opportunist trends though colloquially leftists often restrict its use to the latter.

⁸⁰ On that note, properly evaluating practice includes being able to distinguish between correct and incorrect ideas even if they may fail due to the balance of forces or factors that couldn't have been taken into account. To quote Mao "Generally speaking, those that succeed are correct and those that fail are incorrect, and this is especially true of man's struggle with nature. In social struggle, the forces representing the advanced class sometimes suffer defeat not because their ideas are incorrect [!] but because, in the balance of forces engaged in struggle, they are not as powerful for the time being as the forces of reaction; they are therefore temporarily defeated, but they are bound to triumph sooner or later" - "Where do Correct Ideas Come From?". This is in direct opposition to the pragmatist idea that as long as something is successful it doesn't matter if it's correct or not.

guided by Liebknecht's timeless slogan of "*study, propagandize, organize*"⁸¹. It is according to this thesis that Mount Tai sees a path towards a party, and with it, the beginning of the end for American imperialism.

[Recommendations for Further Reading of Marxist Works Referenced in the Text]

[Introduction]

- "State and Revolution" (1917) by Vladimir Lenin:
This text is where Lenin provides the clearest thesis on the Marxist stance on the state, closely looking at Marx and Engels's writings in which they reiterate their understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its essential tie to socialism. Any communist party's that renounce the dictatorship of the proletariat, in word or in practice, deviate from Lenin's understanding of the matter. We recommend this to anyone interested in Marxism and how they see the path to revolution and workers' power in our context.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>
- "And Mao Makes 5" (1978) by Raymond Lotta:
A work that is great as a reference text for many primary sources from the final years of the GPCR. On its own, it's great for learning Mao's role in his final years and his consistent support for the 'Ultra-Leftists' up to his death. It clearly exposes the Chinese revisionists for the capitalist counter-revolutionaries they are.
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/rcp-mao-5.pdf>
- "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism" (1916) by Vladimir Lenin:
Necessary for any understanding of the modern world, Lenin here elaborates on all the main economic characteristics of imperialism and some of its political ramifications, using bourgeois sources to drive home just how irrefutable it is. It also doubles as a polemic against Kautsky, who saw imperialism as resolving some contradictions of capitalism rather than an expression of its inherent crisis. For those looking for more of those political ramifications, Lenin expands on it in "*Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*" (1916).
<http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>
- "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism" (1908) by Vladimir Lenin:
Lenin's magnum opus in the realm of philosophy. In it he clearly deconstructed the agnostic and anti-Marxist philosophy of Machism and the consequences of muddling it with Marxism in any context. During this process in Chapter 6 Section 2, he clearly equates Pragmatism with Machism as an American bourgeois philosophy that rejects objective truth. Therefore, while not directly aimed at pragmatism, it presents a wonderfully constructed argument for its incompatibility with Marxism.

⁸¹ We source this from Lenin's "*What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*", one of his earliest writings where he cites Liebknecht's slogan calling for the tasks of the early German Marxist party.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/>

- “On Practice” (1937) by Mao Zedong:
For anyone interested in learning the basics of Marxist epistemology and dialectical materialist philosophy more broadly, this is an essential text written in accessible language. In it, Mao includes a criticism and elaboration of both Empiricism and its relative opposite that hasn’t been mentioned in the article, Dogmatism. This is to contrast both from the correct Marxist approach towards the theory of knowledge.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm
- “The Collapse of the Second International” (1915) by Vladimir Lenin:
A thorough polemic of the ideological and political bankruptcy of the 2nd International that betrayed the working class in the outbreak of World War 1. A great text to familiarize oneself with what Marxists and Lenin refer to as opportunism and its practical consequences.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/csi/>

[Russia Section]
- “A Valuable Admission” (1901) by Vladimir Lenin:
This text, while short, gave a description of how the state authorities treated both Marxists and the labor movement, and by their own admission, saw how socialism motivated the labor movement to increasingly militant political action against Tsarism. It’s a useful text for some of the historical events and developments mentioned in the article.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/may/11.htm>
- “From the History of the Workers Press in Russia” (1914) by Vladimir Lenin:
Another shorter article, focused on providing a brief history of the workers' press in Russia, it also presented statistics which reflected which classes played the largest political role in opposing the Tsarist government. These statistics further substantiate our presentation that the early years of Marxism were mostly part of an intellectual-political trend for years that gradually involved more and more workers until their fusion was completed in the 1900s.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/apr/22.htm>
- “Our Differences” (1885) by Georgi Plekhanov:
An ambitious text from the 1880s which delineated the key differences between the utopian Narodniks and scientific Marxists. It provides the main theses of Marxist theory applied to Russia, explaining how capitalism was being introduced to the country and how it substantiated the Emancipation of Labor Group’s basis for its draft program pushing for a democratic revolution to freely develop capitalism through which a powerful workers party can best be developed. It applies to our article as further proof of the ideological tasks for Marxists today in delineating our key principles as distinct and

well grounded from all the eclectic and revisionist socialist theories out there. Further, it proves the need to grasp the Marxist method sufficiently for application in our current context, even before we have any deep relationship with the working class.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1885/ourdiff/index.html>

- “How Lenin Studied Marx” (1933) by Nadezhda Khrupskaya:
A great text describing how Lenin valued Marx’s theory, and how his studies informed both his own theoretical work and his political work more broadly once he started organizing in St. Petersburg. To whatever extent Lenin’s approach towards studying Marx is an inspiration, we should take studying theory just as seriously. His phrase, *“Who wants to consult with Marx?”* aptly describes the enduring importance of studying and revisiting the Marxist classics.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/krupskaya/works/howleninstudiedmarx.htm>
- “A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social Democracy” (1899) by Vladimir Lenin:
A quintessential text for Marxists today to be studying, this can’t be stressed enough. An earlier criticism of the growing economist trend, it includes a clear differentiation of the various strata of the proletariat and how Marxists are to deal with them. It further elaborates on the key tasks for Marxist organizers at the stage of regional committees struggling for the reformation of the Party, defining agitation, propaganda, and the importance of study. Lastly, he provides a clear history of both the labor movement and Marxism, and how they developed independently until their fusion culminating in the founding of the RSDLP.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1899/dec/trend.htm>
- “On Agitation” (1893) by Julius Martov and Arkadi Kremer
This text played an outsized role in transitioning the Marxist revolutionary movement from narrow study circles aimed towards propagandizing to advanced workers and otherwise continuing intensive theoretical study to broader political work among the masses. It’s what inspired Lenin’s League to expand their scope successfully in the 1896 strike wave, while also contributing to forming the outlook of the Economists. For those curious to see how concretely broad agitation takes place at the stage of a PPF, this is a great text.
<https://pplswar.wordpress.com/2020/12/08/on-agitation-ob-agitatsii-arkadi-kremer-ju-lius-martov/>
- “Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” (1859) by Karl Marx:
As any writing from Marx, while it has language that may be difficult for laymen to read these days, it’s a highly recommended manuscript providing Marx’s thesis in Political Economy and his general plan for what eventually became Capital.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/index.htm>
- “The Development of Capitalism in Russia” (1899) by Vladimir Lenin:
An instructive application of both historical materialism and Marxist political economy (in other words, effective class analysis) in the particular case of Russia. It not only is a

scientific proof undermining the entire political basis for the Narodniks, but it also advanced Marxist science as it showed how capitalism develops in a semi-feudal country like the Russian Empire, which has applications even today in similar societies such as India or the Philippines. This and Mao's class analyses are clear demonstrations for the need for any revolutionary movement to require a firm foundation in political economy to apply an analysis in our own context. Any effort to build a party successfully is contingent on this.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1899/devel/>

- “Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State” (1884) by Friedrich Engels:
Another instructive application of historical materialism, this time in the realm of anthropology/sociology based on the most current advances in the field at the time. While several details/assumptions are outdated and proven false, the main conclusions on patriarchy, class society, and the state have proven true even after 130 years of new discoveries.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm>
- “The Heritage We Renounce” (1897) by Vladimir Lenin:
Another great polemic against liberal-Narodism, delineating Marxism as not only distinct from both (and how) but also proving Marxism to be the only correct and truly revolutionary inheritor of the Russian revolutionary ‘heritage’.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1897/dec/31c.htm>
- “Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution” (1917) by Vladimir Lenin:
A historic document superior to the April Theses which introduced Lenin's political activity since returning from exile. An essential read for anyone looking to learn about Lenin's appraisal of the chaotic political situation after the Kornilov Affair and leading up to the October Revolution. It is also the program with which the Bolsheviks secured majorities among the major Soviets, seen by Lenin as necessary for victory.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/tasks/index.htm>

[China Section]

- “A People's History of Ideas” podcast by Mathew Rothwell:
A fantastic podcast and one of the best English language sources to date going over the history of the Chinese Revolution. All of his sources are listed in each episode to verify his script, which is also available in text on the website. We can only hope that professor Rothwell will eventually finish it.
<https://peopleshistoryofideas.com/>
- *Report on the Affairs of the New People's Study Society 1 and 2* in “Mao's Road to Power: Volume 2” by Stuart Schram:
This collection of texts has many primary sources of writings written by Mao from his early years of activity. In particular, we draw the reader's attention to his activities in the New People's Study Society, where he served as the secretary.

<https://michaelharrison.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Maos-Road-to-Power-Vol-2.pdf>

- “The Early Revolutionary Activities Of Comrade Mao Tsetung” by Rui Li:
This early ‘official’ biography offers helpful insight as a supplement to what is said in *A People’s History of Ideas* podcast. In particular, the third chapter, *Activities Surrounding the Establishment of the Chinese Communist Party*, and Stuart Schram’s Introduction, are helpful.
<https://www.bannedthought.net/China/Individuals/MaoZedong/AboutMao/EarlyRevolutionaryActivitiesOfMao-OCR-sm.pdf>
 - “On New Democracy” (1940) by Mao Zedong:
This work summarizes a major contribution of Mao’s to Marxism, that of the democratic revolution led by the proletariat in the Semi-Feudal and Semi-Colonial countries. We draw attention to his emphasis on the importance of the May 4th movement as marking the moment that the proletariat stirred to life and began to take leadership over the democratic revolution. The text is very useful for understanding the Chinese Communist Approach toward revolution in China and how they understood Chinese realities.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_26.htm
 - “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society” (1926) by Mao Zedong:
The text represents an early approach toward analyzing Chinese society and its particular class composition. Here, Mao does a good job identifying the various classes and their specific attitudes toward the revolution. As he famously remarked, “*Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution.*” This same question remains to be answered by today’s communists in the USA.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_1.htm
- [USA Section]
- “The Peasant War in Germany” (1850) by Friedrich Engels:
Another classic application of historical materialism by Engels. While we used it to supplement our understanding of the Anabaptists who later came to America, the work definitely is worth studying in its own right. It gives a clear analysis of the class contradictions within feudalism that set the basis for the peasant wars. It also presented key limitations of the movement, including the vacillating character of the “burgher-bourgeois” and the theoretical limitations of the peasantry, drawing a connection to the need for a proletarian-peasant alliance (in contemporary Germany).
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/peasant-war-germany/>
 - “History of the Labor Movement in the United States” (1947) by Philip Foner:
In particular, we used the first 2 volumes to substantiate our understanding of the early

labor movement and the role socialists of all kinds played in its development. Foner's History is one of if not the most exhaustive work on the American labor movement. Any class analysis of the United States would have to include it as one of its primary sources.
<https://archive.org/details/history-of-the-labor-movement-of-the-united-states-vol-1/page/n2/mode/1up>
<https://archive.org/details/history-of-the-labor-movement-in-the-united-states-vol-2>

- “Anti-Duhring: Herr Eugen Duhring’s Revolution in Science” (1877) by Friedrich Engels: A fundamental text of Marxism, applying it in nearly every field from philosophy to ethics to natural science, all to critique Duhring’s attempt to do the same with his own ‘original theories’. It’s definitely one of the more difficult texts to commit to, and really Engels’s popular pamphlet “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” (1880) derived from Anti-Duhring addresses the key things we use to elaborate on the ideas of the Utopian Socialists who ended up influencing early American socialism.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/>
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/>
- “History of the Communist Party of the United States” (1952) by William Foster: A good resource for looking at the history of the CPUSA, especially as a reference for some of the more chaotic events that took place in the early years between 1918-1922. That said, Foster’s writings must be looked at with a critical eye on account of their own vacillations and ultimate submission to right opportunism generally.
<https://www.bannedthought.net/USA/CPUSA/WZFoster/WZFoster-HistoryOfTheCommunistPartyOfTheUnitedStates-1952-OCR.pdf>
- “Black Bolshevik” (1978) by Harry Haywood: The autobiography provides some good personalized details of early party life and shows a clear indication of the ideological weakness the CPUSA revolutionaries struggled with and its consequences. As he leaves party life during WW2, it isn’t a useful resource for understanding Browderism and its influence on the CPUSA during the 40s and 50s.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/haywood/1978/black-bolshevik.pdf>
- “Anti-Revisionist Communism in the United States, 1945-1950” (1979) by Paul Costello: Paul Costello has the great merit of not only being an incredible archivist that has through his work better enabled us to learn from the past than any other communist movement before ours, but also the virtue of having been an active participant in the very struggles of the NCM. His summaries and research on the movement are quite invaluable. Not that we agree with all his prescriptions or conclusions, only that any history of anti-revisionism in this country must contend with and recognize the significance of his efforts.
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1946-1956/costello01.htm>
- “Peaceful Transition and the Communist Party, USA, 1949-1958” (1979) by Bert Lewis: As it is with Paul, while we don’t agree with everything here, the writing provides a clear and consistent description of the struggle between different revisionist trends and the

failed attempts by the anti-revisionist movement to overcome them. One thing worthy of note he points out is a lesson on how we should never blame external factors for internal conditions, as internal conditions are always decisive in the development of a process with external factors only being able to influence it. Revisionism in the CPUSA could've been overcome if their internal conditions could do so, Soviet revisionism only allowed it to proliferate more.

<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/19791203.htm>

- “A Critical History of the New Communist Movement, 1969-1979” (1979) by Paul Costello:
While we do not agree with all of what Paul puts forth, his scholarship is instrumental for understanding the NCM and his work on the EROL is invaluable to today's communists. Provided some critical reading, it is not too difficult to parse Paul's descriptions from his opinions. For example, agree with his opinion on Stalin's legacy or not, he is no doubt correct that it played a major role.
<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/19791301.htm>
- “Moralizing Criticism and Critical Morality” (1847) by Karl Marx:
An article containing a polemic against bourgeois liberalism and the moralizing arguments it uses against Marxism (and in contrast professes bourgeois idealist equity). We just use it for Marx's reference to the Levellers there.
<https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1847/10/31.htm>
- “Marxism and Revisionism” (1908) by Vladimir Lenin:
An article elaborating on revisionism and its utilization by the bourgeoisie to undermine Marxism precisely due to its potential as a guide for the revolutionary proletariat to take power. For anyone curious about what Lenin refers to when he mentions revisionism (as he often does), this is a great text to read over.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/apr/03.htm>
- “August Bebel” (1913) by Vladimir Lenin:
A brief obituary recalling Bebel's largest contributions to the proletarian movement in Germany and internationally. As Bebel was in direct struggle with Lassale in the early German SDP (before it became the SDP), Lenin describes Lassale's ideas and its shortcomings.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/aug/08.htm>
- “The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (1852) by Karl Marx
At the time of its publication, it was an excellent example of timely contemporary analysis and historical materialism. In this text, Marx diagnoses and explains the Bonapartist regime that took hold in France. The text has many brilliant lines from Marx and touches on a wide variety of aspects of class struggle and ruling class machinations in France at the time.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>

[American Maoism Today Section]

- “Socialism and War” (1915) by Vladimir Lenin:
As the subtitle describes, it’s a thorough presentation of the RSDLP(b)’s position on WW1 and the various socialist trends that reacted to it. It includes a brief history of the RSDLP and the various trends that emerged over the course of its development (Ch. 4) in which we can see a clear and concise definition of economism.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s-w/index.htm>
- “Frederick Engels” (1895) by Vladimir Lenin:
Another brief obituary Lenin wrote speaking about the outsized role Engels played in the ICM. A great text to read in itself, but for our purposes, we used it to set the record straight on the history of class struggle as far as Marxists are concerned. It’s embarrassing to not understand such a basic thing.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1895/misc/engels-bio.htm>
- “What is to be Done?” (1901) by Vladimir Lenin:
A foundational Marxist text that is as misunderstood as it is popular. We use it as a reference for what Lenin defines as ‘professional revolutionaries’ and ‘tailism’ (*khvostism* in Russian), both of which are terms first used here, along with elaborations on other concepts. One thing we’ll mention on the nature of misreading the text is how various pre-party formations (from Trotskyites to Pseudo-Maoists) dogmatically apply its practical conclusions without carefully considering the context it was written in. It was a polemic of those organizations holding the party back from formalizing its structure, as it was already prepared to handle the responsibilities of the party and fused with the labor movement. Further, this was done in a semi-feudal police state with no civil rights, and before the invention of mass media (hence his demand for an All-Russia newspaper).
<https://www.marxists.org/ebooks/lenin/what-is-to-be-done.pdf>
- “Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership” (1943) by Mao Zedong:
A great text for both describing how the Mass Line is applied in the War of Resistance against Japan and what Mao means when he talks about the Mass Line. Also, a good presentation of how Mao challenged cadres to develop critical thinking skills in order for them to energetically and creatively apply the relatively broad party directives, converting correct strategy coming from the central body to correct tactics in the local bodies.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_13.htm
- “Quotations From Mao Zedong” (1964) by Mao Zedong:
We only cited Chapter 11 titled “The Mass Line”, though it mostly talks about the various applications of the mass line in the Chinese Revolution rather than a clear definition of it as is done in Methods of Leadership. Quotations is a great reference text to all of Mao’s ideas covering many practical questions in political work. However, we don’t recommend it as a good introduction to the method of Marxist analysis, as it is a practical reference

book rather than a theoretical explainer.

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/index.htm>

- “Preface to the Russian Translation of Karl Marx’s Letters to Dr. Kugelmann” (1907) by Vladimir Lenin:
In this text Lenin quotes and summarizes Marx’s attitude toward the Paris commune and contrasts it with the defeatism of Plekhanov. Below is a characteristic remark:
“The historical initiative of the masses was what Marx prized above everything else. Ah, if only our Russian Social-Democrats would learn from Marx how to appreciate the historical initiative of the Russian workers and peasants in October and December 1905!” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/feb/05.htm>

“Lessons of the Commune” (1908) by Vladimir Lenin:

“Marx set a high value on the historic significance of the Commune—if, during the treacherous attempt by the Versailles gang to seize the arms of the Paris proletariat, the workers had allowed themselves to be disarmed without a fight, the disastrous effect of the demoralisation, that this weakness would have caused in the proletarian movement, would have been far, far greater than the losses suffered by the working class in the battle to defend its arms.” In both texts Lenin, by way of Marx, clarifies that in some revolutionary struggles, the important thing is to try and to teach the masses with experience, even if you lose.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mar/23.htm>

- “Adventurism” (1914) by Vladimir Lenin:
A clear and concise elaboration on Adventurism as an outlook and its consequences in revolutionary movements, both classically and in contemporary contexts. Lots of good points to reflect on with how Americans tend to act without considering the masses.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/jun/09.htm>

[Study & Party Construction Section]

- “Why Communism?” (1933) by Moissaye Olgin
A wonderfully written clear argument for why we should support the cause of communism, especially good for Americans unfamiliar with it or otherwise subject to bourgeois anti-communist propaganda on it (as they were the target audience). Its main defect is that it is outdated; in particular, Chapter 5 focuses a lot on the specific problems of the day in 1933.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/olgin/pamphlets/1933/whycomindex.htm>
- “Marxism Versus Liberalism” (1934) by Joseph Stalin:
An interview between Stalin and H.G. Wells (a British petty-bourgeois novelist) whose socratic style of discussion allows for a clear juxtaposition between the Marxist and liberal outlooks.
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1934/07/23.htm>

- “Freedom to Criticize and Unity in Action” (1906) by Vladimir Lenin:
A brief article describing democratic centralism. There’s plenty of texts from Lenin and others that refer to its application in various stages of a communist party’s struggle for power, but they’re not as clear and concise in describing it as we find it done here.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/may/20c.htm>

[Conclusion]

- “Our Study and The Current Situation” (1944) by Mao Zedong:
A great analysis of the contemporary situation and application of dialectical materialism to concrete conditions. As such, it was not for nothing he cited Lenin’s quote on applying a concrete analysis of concrete conditions. We should never be slack in analyzing a situation, and recognize positive aspects in negative experiences and vice versa. It is on this point we clarify that insistence on organizing only/mainly one section of the masses like the ‘industrial proletariat’ or going to the ‘lower and deeper’ as some groups seem to be so fixated on doing is incongruent with Marxist practice.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_18.htm
- “Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?” (1963) by Mao Zedong:
A clear and concise presentation of the Marxist thesis of how social being determines social consciousness and correctness is based on how an assessment lines up with objective reality rather than its outcome.
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_01.htm
- “What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats” (1894) by Vladimir Lenin:
One of Lenin’s first writing’s preserved and among the best polemics in the contemporary struggle between the Marxists and Narodniks. While its historical value is definitely significant, it does also provide value as proof for what Lenin prioritized at this stage of organizing when the Labor movement was just being won over by Marxist leadership (particularly in St. Petersburg). He emphasized Liebknecht’s slogan because at the time St. Petersburg political scene consisted of several scattered workers and intellectual study circles who he united into the League of Struggle, and so, the tasks were precisely to study (in the first place), propagandize, and organize.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1894/friends/index.htm>