

# USSR: Toward a global strategic framework

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**The revolutionary activists who founded the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919 had little contact with movements for national and colonial liberation outside Russia. Nonetheless, only a year later, in July 1920, the Comintern adopted a far-reaching strategy for national and social revolution in dependent countries, later termed the anti-imperialist united front.**

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## Part 1: The Comintern and Asia 1919-25

This policy was adopted much earlier than the analogous united-front approach in the industrialized capitalist powers of the West. Moreover, the quest for unity in oppressed countries of Asia and Africa was pursued with persistence, while the united front in Europe was applied by fits and starts.

The anti-imperialist united front did not achieve decisive results in the 1920s, and in China, where conditions were the most favourable, it led in 1927 to a severe defeat. To understand this setback, we must look at ambiguities of the policy itself and at the contradictory relationship of national parties with the Moscow-based Comintern leadership. In subsequent decades, efforts to forge unity against imperialism scored important victories and contributed to the demise of direct colonial rule almost everywhere by the end of the century. The interaction in the early 1920s of pioneer anti-colonial activists with central leaders of the Russian revolution reveals much regarding the dynamic of such movements throughout the century.

## **Socialists and colonial freedom**

The Comintern emerged in part as a reaction against the Socialist or Second International, which unified world socialist forces from 1889 to 1914. The Comintern's Second Congress (1920) denounced its predecessor as having "in reality recognized the existence only of people with white skin," while Indian Communist M.N. Roy told the same gathering that for the pre-1914 International "the world did not exist outside of Europe." [1]

Marxist teaching then rested on an economic logic underlying the emergence of nations. Capitalist expansion, while cruel in its effects, had a progressive result: the creation of the modern proletariat. Some right-wing socialists, like Hendrick Van Kol of the Netherlands, rationalized this into support for enlightened colonialism. Revolutionary Marxists succeeded in 1907 in convincing a Second International congress to categorically condemn colonialism – but only by a narrow margin of 127 to 108. [2] Even then, the International stopped short of calling for independence for the colonies.

Revolutionary uprisings in China, Turkey, and Iran (Persia) in 1908-11 convinced many socialists that liberation struggles in Asia would shake capitalist stability. Lenin heralded the new era by the audacious title he placed on an article in 1913, "Backward Europe, Advanced Asia":

Everywhere in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining in strength. The bourgeoisie there is *as yet* siding with the people against reaction. *Hundreds* of millions of people are awakening to life, light and freedom. What delight this world movement is arousing in the hearts of all class-conscious workers, who know that the path to collectivism lies through democracy! What sympathy for young Asia imbues all honest democrats!

And "advanced" Europe? It is plundering China and helping the foes of democracy, the foes of freedom in China! [3]

It took time for Lenin's inversion of the "advanced-backward" hierarchy to catch on; Comintern documents bristled with reference to "backward" nations.

Fernando Claudín has suggested that the Second International's revolutionary wing, which founded the Communist International, was still bound within two "Eurocentrist" preconceptions, both of which can be traced back to the foundation of Marxism: (1) Liberation of colonial and dependent countries "must be the *result* of the socialist revolution in the West"; and (2) "socialist transformation of the world meant its *Europeanization*." [4] Both issues were addressed in the Comintern's first two years.

When war broke out across Europe in 1914, most socialist parties rallied to support their rulers and their war effort, while a revolutionary minority remained true to the International's previous pledge to oppose this imperialist conflict. Antiwar socialists often explained, however, that they would unconditionally support a war of the colonial slaves against their European masters; among their demands was "immediate liberation of the colonies." Lenin called for support to revolutionary movements for national liberation, even if they were not socialist in character. Not all of his allies in the left wing of anti-war socialists agreed; Karl Radek and Leon Trotsky then dismissed as futile the 1916 Irish uprising against British rule, for example. [5]

### **1917: The impact of revolution**

The peoples of Russia that shook off tsarist rule in 1917 were, in their majority, members of minority nationalities and ethnic groups. Most of tsarist territory lay in Asia, and close to 15% of the population were Muslim in religion. Lenin, Radek, Trotsky, and other Bolsheviks joined in demanding freedom for the subject peoples, including their right to separate from Russia.

When revolutionary workers' and peasants' councils - Soviets - took power in October 1917, measures to promote national freedom were among their first decisions.

One of the Russian Soviet government's first actions was to proclaim the right of all the subject peoples within the boundaries of the old tsarist empire to "free self-determination up to and including the right to secede." Finland, Estonia, and other states had acted on this pledge, establishing their independence. Another early Soviet appeal pledged to Muslim workers and farmers that "henceforth your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable. Declaring null and void all the treaties through which tsarism had lorded it over and looted the Eastern peoples, the appeal called on them to "build your national life freely and without hindrance." [6]

Within a few months, the Soviets were attacked by the combined forces of the old ruling classes in

Russia and expeditionary armies of the imperialist powers. In some cases, as in Ukraine, both sides in the civil war claimed to act in the name of national freedom. Some anti-Soviet forces in minority nations sought assistance from abroad. Strivings for national liberation worked themselves out in the turmoil of a vast revolutionary war sweeping over a sixth of the world's surface.

In November 1918, revolution broke out in Germany, bringing the world war to an abrupt end. Workers' councils inspired by the Russian example cropped up in Germany and some other parts of Europe. Hopes were high that the workers' upsurge in the West would bring aid to the beleaguered and besieged Soviet republic. [7]

## **Founding congress**

The Communist International was launched in March 1919 by an International Communist Conference in Moscow. The imperialist blockade of Soviet Russia limited attendance to 52 delegates, only a handful of whom were from abroad. Thirteen delegates came from non-European minorities in Russia, including delegates from the leagues of Korean and Chinese workers in Russia. [8]

The conference manifesto, drafted by Trotsky, strongly denounced colonial oppression. "There are open rebellions and revolutionary ferment in all the colonies," it stated, projecting that the workers' upsurge in Europe would bring colonial peoples much-needed assistance.

The liberation of the colonies is possible only together with the liberation of the working class in the imperialist centers.... Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia: the hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your liberation.

Comintern historian Sobhanlal Datta Gupta states that while recognizing the colonial question, these words "make it evident that at the time of the birth of the Comintern, it was considered as an appendage to the problem of proletarian revolution in the West." [9] This conclusion may be overdrawn; the text can be read as a simple statement of expectations at a time when, in the view of revolutionary socialists, the probable triumph within months of revolution in central and western Europe would soon demolish the colonial empires.

The manifesto, translated into many languages, influenced anti-colonial in many parts of the world. For example, Claude McKay, a pioneer Black Communist in the U.S., tells us that "this passage in the manifesto awakened interest among many groups of radical blacks, who distributed the document across the U.S." [10]

Other resolutions of the First Comintern congress pledged support to colonial peoples in their struggle against imperialism and condemned the previously pro-war workers' parties for explicitly endorsing colonial rule. [11]

Datta Gupta also notes an ill-advised reference in another congress resolution's reference to the imperialists' use against European workers of "brutal, barbaric colonial troops" – that is, working people conscripted in the colonies. Dutch delegate S.J. Rutgers protested against this passage, proposing instead a denunciation of the colonial powers for attacking workers in Europe "with the same ruthlessness with which they proceeded against colonial peoples." Rutgers' proposal was not incorporated. Yet even as the congress met, African troops deployed in France's intervention against the Soviet republic were demonstrating their opposition to this war; French generals called them "uncontrollable." The error regarding "Black troops" was not formally rectified until the Comintern's 1921 world congress. [12]

## **For 'combined' global struggle**

The founding congress's focus on revolution in Europe was soon modified. Eight months after the founding congress Lenin proposed a framework for an integrated, global struggle against imperialism. By then, the greatest crisis of the civil war had passed, and Soviet armies, including close to 300,000 Muslim and 50,000 immigrant Chinese soldiers, were advancing into Asia. In November 1919, Lenin explained the implications of this struggle to a conference of Communist Organizations of the Peoples of the East, founded the previous year to unite pro-Soviet groups among the predominantly Muslim peoples of the old Tsarist empire. Lenin said, in part:

[T]he socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country against their bourgeoisie – no, it will be a struggle of all the imperialist-oppressed colonies and countries, of all dependent countries, against international imperialism... [T]he civil war of the working people against the imperialists and exploiters in all the advanced countries is beginning to be combined with national wars against international imperialism. [\[13\]](#)

With the overall strategic framework now determined, the Comintern moved to establish an instrument for its implementation. A month later, on 11 December 1919, the Comintern Executive Committee established an Eastern Department to coordinate work in this arena. In addition, an educational arm, the Communist University of Toilers of the East, was formed on 21 April 1921, administered by the Soviet Commissariat of Nationalities. [\[14\]](#)

## **Part 2: Should Communists ally with revolutionary nationalism?**

As described in part 1 of this series, the Comintern leadership concluded at the end of 1919 that “[T]he civil war of the working people against the imperialists and exploiters in all the advanced countries is beginning to be combined with national wars against international imperialism.” [\[15\]](#)

But how would the proposed alliance of workers' and national uprisings be effected? This strategic issue was addressed in the Comintern's Second Congress, held in Moscow 9 July-7 August 1920. The civil war was now won, and Soviet troops were advancing into Poland. Despite the continuing blockade, 218 delegates attended the congress, including 33 representing groups in 12 countries and peoples in Asia. Although most of these groups were no more than small nuclei, Lenin, in his opening report, stressed the significance of their presence in the first truly global congress of world socialism. The congress, he said, was taking the first steps toward union in struggle of the revolutionary proletarians with the masses of countries representing 70% of the world's population who “find it impossible to live under the conditions that ‘advanced’ and civilized capitalism wishes to impose on them.” [\[16\]](#)

The discussion was shaped by the arrival of M.N. Roy, a 33-year-old exiled revolutionary from India with a formed concept of anti-imperialist strategy that differed significantly from that of Lenin. The nub of the disagreement was Roy's skepticism, based on Indian experience, regarding the prospects for a viable alliance with bourgeois nationalist forces. The Bolsheviks, under tsarism, had been dismissive of the revolutionary potential of Russian capitalists, but did not extend this judgment to the entire colonial bourgeoisie, who seemingly had something to gain from national independence.

Roy and Lenin had extensive discussions, in which each modified his theses to accommodate suggestions of the other. The two sets of theses were then presented jointly to a panel of delegates (“commission”), reported into the Congress, and overwhelmingly adopted. Lenin reported to the congress that the commission, in response to Roy's objections, had altered its description of the proposed alliance, substituting the term “national-revolutionary” for the term “bourgeois-democratic.” Lenin continued:

The significance of this change is that we, as Communists, should and will support bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organizing in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited. If these conditions do not exist, the Communists in these countries must combat the reformist bourgeoisie. [17]

Lenin explained that this definition would not apply to the bourgeoisie of the oppressed country if, while supporting the national movement, it joined with the imperialist bourgeoisie against "all revolutionary movements and revolutionary classes," as is "very often" the case. [18]

It has been objected that this terminological change fails to resolve a very real political dilemma. "The bourgeois liberation movement that does not fear the arousal of the 'mass of the exploited' is not to be found in the twentieth century," writes Duncan Halles. A genuinely revolutionary nationalist movement, adds Claudín, is as hard to find as a "white blackbird." [19]

In fact, Lenin, in his report, applied the term "bourgeois-democratic" very broadly, including the peasants, "who represent bourgeois-capitalist relations." [20] Moreover, there certainly are instances in which revolutionary-nationalist movements, as Lenin defines them, have been victorious, as for example in Cuba.

Still, there is a genuine dilemma here, which becomes clear if this formula for alliance is compared with the "united front" recommended by the Comintern for imperialist countries in 1921. The latter policy proposes alliance around specific demands with all major workers' organizations, regardless of their leadership. The decision to ally with revolutionary-nationalist forces, by contrast, was dependent on a judgment call based on their character and the political context.

It has been argued that offers of alliance could seem insincere since Communists were in the untenable position of simultaneously supporting bourgeois nationalists and seeking to undermine them (as would be the case in the Chinese Revolution of 1925-7). In fact it was the bourgeois allies - the Guomindang - that betrayed the alliance in 1925-7, but in its later Stalinist years, the Comintern was notoriously unreliable in its alliances. The period under discussion, however, is not marked by such turnabouts. When reformist leaders expressed doubts regarding the durability of alliances with the Comintern, the early International responded in the spirit of Karl Radek, one of its leaders, who stated in 1922, "That depends on you. Show that you want to fight, and then we will travel at least a part of the road with you." [21]

The Second Congress also laid to rest the second assumption identified by Claudín as "Eurocentrist," namely that every people must experience a capitalist stage of development. "The backward countries," explained Lenin, "aided by the proletariat of the advanced countries, can go over to the soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage." [22] Some historians have maintained that, in saying this, Lenin turned Marxist ideology on its head, by denying the need for societies to develop through an unvarying sequence of productive modes. Nonetheless, this notion found expression in a variety of contexts.

The Soviet republic strove to integrate pre-capitalist nomadic societies into a post-capitalist state. It also attempted, as Clara Zetkin explained to the Comintern's 1922 congress, to encourage the peasantry's "old and deeply felt traditions of indigenous village communism," viewing them as "beginnings of communist understanding." At the same congress, Tahar Boudengha, a delegate from Tunisia, pointed to patriarchal communism in North Africa, saying that "we can nonetheless develop it, reform it, and replace it by fully developed communism." Later in the decade, José Carlos Mariátegui and other Latin American Marxists applied this concept to analysis of indigenous peoples

in their hemisphere. [23]

During the 1920s, the Soviet state was committed to a vast project of assisting minority nationalities in promoting their cultural identity, including through development of national languages and alphabets; education and publishing in these languages; and preference in employment — all in the cause of promoting internationalism among Soviet peoples. Although not well integrated at that time into the corpus of Marxist theory, “affirmative action” for Soviet nationalities took root in the consciousness of many Comintern activists. [24]

These steps were not taken without resistance. Indeed, Lenin’s final writings sounded the alarm against a tendency found among Communists in Russia to act as “a vulgar Great-Russian” bully. [25] In the 1930s, these gains were compromised. Soviet policy veered toward Russification, while Stalin’s murderous purges took a heavy toll among minority peoples. Nonetheless, the achievements in nationalities policy proved to be among the most resilient achievements of the Russian revolution and are reflected even today in structures of the Russian federal republic and the now-independent borderland states.

### **The Comintern looks east**

Relations with pre-capitalist societies came to the fore in the congress held two months later in Baku, Azerbaijan, rightly described by Comintern President Grigori Zinoviev as the “complement, the second half” of the Second World Congress. [26]

Since the “first session” ended in July, events in Europe had taken a decisive turn. The Red Army offensive into Poland had been repulsed, and both sides sought peace. The seven-year cycle of war and civil war in European Russia ended. Meanwhile, Asiatic Russia and its southern borderlands were torn by upheaval and war. British armies were now in retreat from their Central Asiatic outposts, while the Red Army advanced southward and eastward. New Muslim-led Soviet republics had sprung up in the Russian borderlands. Since April, Azerbaijan had been a Soviet republic, with Baku as its capital. Across its southern border, Turkey was gripped by revolution, as a new nationalist government based in Ankara fought to win national independence.

For the Comintern, as E.H. Carr has noted, the Baku Congress was to begin a process “of calling in the East to redress the balance of the West.” [27]

Convened as a mass anti-imperialist assembly of workers and peasants from Turkey, Armenia, and Iran, the congress drew 1,891 participants, mostly from Asian Soviet republics but with delegations of more than 100 from Iran, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. Among them two-thirds recorded their affiliation as Communist, while the balance included a diversity of radical nationalists of many persuasions. [28] The Congress record reflects strenuous efforts to forge a synthesis between national and socialist revolutions, revealing strains over policy in Turkey, Palestine, Communist policy in the Soviet republics of Asia, and toward women.

In a speech to the Baku Congress, Narbutabekov, congress co-chair and also chair of its caucus of non-Communist delegates, sharply attacked chauvinist practices by some Soviet officials in Central Asia. A lengthy protest arguing the case against such abuses, signed by 21 delegates from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iran, and India, was presented by Turar Ryskulov. [29] The indignant Turkestan revolutionists received a good measure of satisfaction. After the close of the Congress, 27 of its delegates travelled to Moscow, met with the Communist Party Political Bureau, and helped shape a decision, drafted by Lenin, addressing their complaints and taking corrective action. This is the only instance where a minority initiative at a Comintern gathering obtained an alteration of Soviet internal policies. [30]



## Organizing revolutionary women of the East

Fifty-five women took part in the Baku Congress, and women's struggle for liberation was addressed during the proceedings on several occasions. The active role of these women challenged the outlook of many delegates whose societies still practiced, to varying degrees, the seclusion of women. A proposal to elect three women to the Presiding Committee aroused strong objections, often rooted in religious faith, among some participants who were not Communists. The issue was discussed by the caucus of non-Communist delegates, and the ensuing debate lasted several days. On the sixth day of sessions, the chair called on the congress to include three women: Bulach Tatu, from Dagestan; Najiye Hanum, from Turkey; and Khaver Shabanova-Karayeva, from Azerbaijan, of whom the last two addressed the Congress. [31]

The proceedings at this point read:

*"'Yes, yes.' Applause, rising to an ovation.... Chair: 'Long live the emancipation of the women of the East!' Loud applause. Shouts of 'Hurrah!' All Stand. Ovation."* A statement on the liberation struggle of women of the East was presented to the congress by Najiye Hanum and Khaver Shabanova (translator). [32]

At the Fourth Comintern Congress (1922), a report on work among women of the East was given at its Fourth Congress by Varsenika Kasperova, head of the women's division of the International's Eastern Department. Kasperova called for development of "an intelligentsia of revolutionary women" of the East and concluded:

Neither the anti-imperialist united front nor the united front of women workers can be realized without drawing in the broadest masses of women. [33]

Kasperova, like a significant majority of prominent participants in the early Comintern who were within Joseph Stalin's reach and whose fate is known, fell victim to Stalin's murderous repression in the 1930s. The Baku Congress is set apart, however, by a grim tally: every one of its speakers from Asia who were within Stalin's reach and whose fate is known fell victim to his frame-up purges. [34]

## Freedom from British domination

While calling for "the liberation of all humanity from the yoke of capitalist and imperialist slavery," the congress aimed its fire chiefly against Britain, whose colonialist armies then dominated the entire southern and south-western tier of Asian nations. It issued a celebrated call for "Go forward as one man in a holy war against the British conqueror." [35]

The Baku Congress contributed to forcing British withdrawal from central Asia during the year that followed, but the result was a consolidation of national capitalist states in Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey, and an ebbing of revolutionary ferment in the region. The Soviet republic's treaties with these countries in early 1921 marked advances for both the Soviet state and the cause of anti-imperialism but also a restabilization of capitalist rule south of the Soviet borders. [36]

The British threat had been most acute in Turkey. British and allied Greek forces faced off against the uprising led by Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), a national movement of the "reformist" variety identified by the Second Congress. The congress received a statement of greetings from the Kemalist movement, to which it did not reply. Nonetheless, in another context, the congress noted that the "broad nationalist-revolutionary movement in Turkey is directed only against foreign oppressors," offering no solution to the suffering of the Turkish masses. It urged Turkish workers and peasants to join in "independent organizations to carry the cause of emancipation through to the end" — an accurate description of the path subsequently taken by Communists in Turkey. [37]

The Soviet government supported Kemal's rebel government with arms and advisors and signed a treaty with it in 1921, repudiating concessions extorted in the past by the Tsarist rulers. Soviet aid contributed to Turkey's decisive victory in 1922 over the occupying powers. The 1922 Comintern congress hailed this outcome as a gain for the Soviet republic and the first breach in the Versailles system of treaties imposed by the victorious powers after the world war. [38] Meanwhile, however, Kemal's regime harshly repressed Turkey's Communists. [39]

The Soviet government faced a similar choice in Iran. Britain effectively occupied Iran in 1919-20, using it as a staging area for attacks on the Soviet republic. As the Red Army pressed back, it entered an Iranian province, Gilan, where it protected a left-leaning insurgent regime. After the expulsion of British forces and the signing of a Soviet-Iranian treaty in 1921, the Soviets withdrew their army, leading to the overthrow of insurgent rule.

Some historians have maintained that treaties of this sort reflected a "political-ethical dilemma," a clash of "ideological and pragmatic interests." Comintern leaders strongly maintained that Soviet and world-revolutionary interests were one, and that the victory for Iran and Turkey over invading powers was a gain for toilers everywhere. At the Comintern's 1921 Third Congress, however, some delegates raised their doubts regarding Soviet state influence in the International. [40] Strains of this type arise in every sphere of revolutionary work and are inherent in the very project of unifying all toilers in a common movement. Nonetheless, the Third Congress debate anticipated what was to become a decisive issue in years to come. After Lenin's death, the Comintern's work was increasingly disrupted by such a "clash of interests," especially regarding shifts in Soviet diplomatic and political policy.

Meanwhile, in British India, the dominant region of South Asia, mass resistance to British rule, firmly under bourgeois leadership, diminished for a time after 1922. Communist nuclei in different parts of India were subjected to severe repression between 1921 and 1924, particularly through three well-publicized conspiracy trials, and the nascent movement was driven underground. In 1924, the Comintern gave its support to Roy's proposal of building a People's Party in India as a revolutionary nationalist alternative to the bourgeois-led Indian National Congress. [41] It was not until 1925, at the close of the period under consideration here, that a conference of about 500 participants founded the Communist Party of India as a national movement.

Latin America was not much discussed in the Comintern's first five years, and it was not embraced in habitual references to the East. True, in the Second Congress (1920), U.S. delegate Louis Fraina declared that "all of Latin America must be regarded as a colony of the United States" and as "the colonial base of the United States." At the Baku Congress, his compatriot John Reed made essentially the same point with reference to the Mexican revolution (1910-20), the only analysis of this upheaval in early Comintern proceedings. Only in the late 1920s did Latin America come into the Comintern's focus as a vital arena of anti-imperialist struggle. [42]

In the Comintern's early years, the challenge of forging anti-imperialist unity was posed in practical terms above all in Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) and China.

### **Part 3: Fruits and perils of the 'bloc within'**

The most advanced experience of Communist alliance with national revolutionists occurred in Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) prior to the Baku Congress. However, it was not mentioned at the congress, even though one of its architects - the Dutch Communist Maring (Henk Sneevliet) - was present in the hall. Maring had been a leader for many years of revolutionary socialist Dutch settlers in Indonesia, who had achieved the remarkable feat of transforming their group into one



predominantly indigenous in leadership, membership, and programmatic orientation. The key to success had been a close alliance with a mass national-revolutionary organization of the type described by the Second Congress, called Sarekat Islam.

Their tactic, which they called a “bloc within,” involved building a Communist fraction within the Islamic organization both by sending comrades into the movement and recruiting from its ranks. The bloc with Sarekat Islam, which started up before the Comintern was formed, had resulted in consolidation of a small but viable Communist party in Indonesia. [43]

Maring’s silence at Baku and his evasive report to the Second Congress (1920) probably reflected uncertainty whether the Sarekat Islam bloc was compatible with Comintern policy, particularly since Sarekat Islam was a pan-Islamic movement of the type that was roundly condemned by that Congress. The Baku Congress would seem to contradict the Second Congress pronouncement, at least in spirit. Two years later, Tan Malaka, a leader of the Comintern’s Dutch East Indies party, helped convince the Fourth Congress (1922) to adopt a more flexible policy on pan-Islamism. [44]

In the late spring of 1921, the Comintern sent Maring on a mission to China. Based on his subsequent actions, he must clearly have thought that the Sarekat Islam experience was relevant to his Chinese assignment.

### **The Far East in upheaval**

The restabilization seen in the Middle East and Central Asia in 1921 did not extend to the Far East. A Japanese interventionist army still occupied Vladivostok and Russia’s Pacific maritime provinces; counterrevolutionary armies operated there and in Mongolia. Through an extended campaign lasting through 1922, Soviet forces defeated the White Guard armies and forced the Japanese army to withdraw. In the process, pro-Soviet forces prevailed in Mongolia, which regained its independence as an ally of Soviet Russia.

To the south, however, China remained dismembered by rival warlord armies and the intrusion of many rival imperialist powers, including Japan. The revolution of 1911 had overthrown the emperor and established a republic, but reactionary and centrifugal forces soon gained the upper hand. Sun Yatsen (Sun Zhongshan), a leader of the revolution and first president of the republic, launched a political movement, the Guomindang (GMD – also known as Kuomintang or the Chinese “Nationalists”), to seek realization of the revolution’s progressive ideals. In 1921, Sun established a regional government in Guangdong, an important southern province. Meanwhile, in July 1921, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed by a small group of revolutionary intellectuals. The GMD and the CCP remained the main actors in Chinese political life until the triumph of the Communist-led revolution in 1949.

### **The Moscow congresses: Progress and frustration**

The Comintern’s Third World Congress held its final week of sessions in the very month when the CCP was formed, July 1921. The International was gripped by a grave crisis arising from events in Germany, and no time was found in the three-week event for a substantive discussion of the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Three sets of theses, reflecting experience of communists in Iran, India, and China, were submitted to the congress, but they were not taken up. Efforts to draft a resolution on the East were unsuccessful. The single session dedicated to the East provoked a strong protest from M.N. Roy for its slipshod approach, while French delegate Charles-André Julien complained that “the main role has been played by cinematography.” [45]

The three sets of draft theses differed in their approach, reflecting a diversity of experience in Iran,

India, and China. M.N. Roy's draft stressed the revolutionary potential of the nascent proletariat in the colonies; drafts by Sultanzade and Zhang Tailei called for a revolutionary anticolonial alliance, anticipating what became known as a revolutionary anti-imperialist united front.

There were similar frictions at the Second, Fourth, and Fifth World Congresses regarding the weight accorded to discussion of the East. What is more, none of the three major expanded Executive Committee conferences of the Comintern in 1922 and 1923 took up struggles of colonized peoples. [46] The tensions on this issue reflected an underlying disproportion. The victims of colonial and semi-colonial subjugation, as Lenin had pointed out, made up 70% of the world's population, but in 1921 communists from these regions amounted to only about 1% of the International's membership. The Comintern's magazine *Kommunistische Internationale* devoted about 10% of its articles in the early 1920s to the "East," a creditable achievement under the circumstances but far less than what was needed to develop policy for still poorly understood regions.

Delegates from Asia did not fail to note the disrespect suggested at certain moments of the congresses. In the Third Congress, the esteemed Bulgarian Communist Vasil Kolarov announced, just at the start of substantive discussion of the Eastern question, that speeches would be limited to five minutes and would not be translated. No measures of this type were adopted in any other early Comintern congress. Kolarov brushed off the protests by Roy and Julien with the remark that the Eastern question had been adequately discussed the previous year. Delegates from the East should be satisfied, he said, with the opportunity afforded them to "make contact with the international proletariat." [47] The following year, at the Fourth Congress, two full sessions were devoted to the Eastern question and a resolution was adopted. Even so, pent up frustrations boiled over. Delegations from 10 Asian countries joined to "protest the fact that the Presidium and the Congress ... have not devoted appropriate attention to the question of the East and the colonies." Complaints regarding handling of the Eastern question at this congress were unique in frequency and vehemence. The response from the Presidium were dismissive. Replying to Eastern delegates' complaints that their work did not meet with interest, Radek stated that "interest in parties is tied to their deeds." [48]

More positively, the Fourth Congress proceedings give evidence of increasing collaboration and cross-fertilization among the delegates from colonized and racialized peoples. In fact, both the 1921 and 1922 congresses display confident self-assertion and often effective pushback from the national delegations. [49] The submission to the Third Congress of three resolutions on the anti-colonial struggle was surely the result of a common project. The joint protest to the Fourth Congress showed a high degree of mutual confidence. The shift at the Fourth Congress toward a more positive assessment of pan-Islamism resulted from protests by delegates of both Indonesia and Tunisia. Two New York-based delegates from the African Black Brotherhood to the Fourth Congress secured adoption of Theses on the Black Question reflecting a broadly pan-Africanist viewpoint. [50]

The Comintern remained unique in its firm commitment to colonial freedom and racial equality, but complaints about insufficiencies in this domain persisted. Frustrations found expression again in the Fifth Congress (1924), when Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh) famously upbraided Communist parties in the metropolitan powers for doing "more or less zero" to aid the struggle for colonial freedom. [51] Such complaints persisted through the 1920s.

When metropolitan parties did step up collaboration with Communists in the colonies, the results were not necessarily all that positive. Indian historian Sobhanlal Datta Gupta tells us that the British Communist Party was chronically patronizing in its relations to the party in India, with the result that Indian Communists who had lived in Britain or collaborated with the British movement had privileged status back home. Roy's independence of thought led to his expulsion from the Comintern in 1929. Many Communist parties in Asia were able "to carve out their own space rather

autonomously in conformity with local conditions,” Datta Gupta says. “[B]ut in India this did not happen.” When the Comintern came to be strictly aligned with the Russian Communist Party, he adds, “[f]or the Communist parties the losses incurred were incalculable.” [52]

## **Opportunity in China**

At the time of Maring’s mission in 1921, China and the Soviet Republic can be said to have been linked by a natural affinity. Both countries had been battered by imperialist interventions, and both were struggling to unify their territories. Both countries had recently experienced revolutions that overthrew ancient empires. Their populations consisted mostly of unlettered peasants. They shared an immensely long Asian frontier.

The situation in China also bore a similarity to events in Turkey: an insurgent nationalist movement was challenging the grip of imperialism and its local allies. But in contrast to the Kemalist movement, the GMD, while bourgeois in leadership, had a progressive cast; its leader Sun Yatsen advocated a form of socialism for China. Starting in 1918, Soviet diplomats made repeated attempts to establish contact with Sun, stressing their perception of “common aims” in terms of “popular liberation” and “enduring peace.” On 28 August 1921 Sun responded, writing to Soviet foreign affairs commissar Georgii Chicherin of his intense interest in Soviet activity, particularly in education of the new generation, which he aimed to conduct “in the same way as Moscow has done.” [53]

Maring’s discussions in 1921 with Sun Yatsen helped set in motion Soviet aid to the GMD, which contributed significantly during the next five years to its rising power and military success.

## **Anti-imperialist unity in China**

The nascent Communist movement in China faced a daunting challenge. While communism in Europe grew out of a long-established Marxist movement, there was no Marxist tradition in China. The few dozen pioneer Chinese Communists had little class-struggle experience and few contacts in the working class. The country was vast, with an immense population. The Communists’ isolation was all the more striking compared to the Guomindang, which – although not structured as a mass party – had immense prestige flowing from its continuity with the 1911 revolution and the reputation of Sun Yatsen.

Maring’s initial observations of the Communist movement, as summarized by historian Alexander Pantsov, was that its members must find a way to work within the GMD. This would, Maring believe:

make it easier for the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] to get in touch with the workers and soldiers of South China, where the government was in the hands of Sun Yatsen’s supporters. Maring emphasized that the CCP must not “give up its independence, on the contrary, the comrades must together decide which tactics they should follow within the KMD ... The prospects for propaganda by the small groups [of Communists], as long as they are not linked to the GMD, are dim.” [54]

Maring shared his views with leading comrades in China, who were quite resistant.

## **Toward a consensus**

Independently of this discussion in China, the Comintern convened a conference in Moscow of Communist and national revolutionaries from the Far East, held on 21 January – 1 February 1922. Among about 140 participants from Asia, the largest delegations came Korea, China, Japan, and

Mongolia. Notably, GMD representatives took part.

The main reports reiterated the Second Congress strategy of support for national-revolutionary forces while applying it to different national contexts. Directly addressing the GMD delegates, Bolshevik leader G.I. Safarov declared:

We are supporting and will continue to support your struggle insofar as it is a matter of a nationalistic and democratic uprising for national emancipation. But at the same time we shall independently carry on our Communist work of organizing the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses of China. [55]

Meanwhile, in China, Maring's proposal to the Chinese Communists went further than conditional support to the GMD; it involved joining the movement and carrying out Communist work within it. Meeting resistance, Maring pressed his case, bringing into play the authority of the Comintern Executive Committee (ECCI). In response, the party's Second Congress (15-23 July 1922) resolved:

[I]t is imperative that the proletariat gain freedom and join the democratic revolutionary movement. There is no other way. [This] does not mean that the proletariat surrenders to the democratic elements who represent only the bourgeoisie.... Yet it is a fact that there must be a temporary alliance with the democratic elements to overthrow the exploitation by our common enemies - the feudal warlords internally and the international imperialists externally. ... [U]nder no circumstances should [the proletariat] become dependent on them or merge with them.... It must assemble in the political party of the proletariat - under the CP's banner - and independently construct its own movement. [56]

The Chinese party leadership continued to oppose aspects of the ECCI's policy toward the GMD through to the disastrous collapse of the alliance in 1927. Initially, this alliance appears to have aided the CCP's growth and integration into working-class struggles, increasing its membership into the tens of thousands by 1925. The party's general secretary, Chen Duxiu, commented the following year that "[T]he victory of the United Front will of course be a victory for the bourgeoisie. But only in the United Front will the young proletariat be able to fight by actual deeds and not by the mere avowal of principles." [57]

The Chinese party position was essentially reiterated in a directive sent by Comintern leader Karl Radek to Maring in August 1922. The full text, published in English in 1994, has been aptly summarized by Pantsov as stressing "absolute independence of the Communist party inside the Guomindang." The directive "pointed out that intra-party cooperation with the GMD must last only until the CCP became a mass political party in its own right as a result of the deepening of the 'gulf between the proletarian, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois elements' in the alliance.'" (For Radek's full text, see footnote.) [58]

#### **Fourth World Congress: A moment of hesitation**

The report to the Comintern's Fourth Congress written in November by Chen Duxiu, by then a GMD member, essentially restates the Second Congress and Radek positions. [59] Given this apparent consensus, it is thus puzzling that the Fourth Congress, held in Moscow 5 November-5 December 1922, had very little to say about China.

As stated, the anti-colonialist struggle in Asia was fully in focus at the Fourth Congress. While celebrating the expulsion of imperialist armies from Turkey and the Soviet Far East, the congress also took note of the International's extension into Africa and of the global Black liberation struggle.

The concept of unity with national liberation struggles was reformulated as an “anti-imperialist united front.” A resolution on Black liberation was adopted that expressed the spirit of anti-imperialist unity by recognizing its kinship with the Second Congress theses on national and colonial struggles. Tarar Boudengha, a Tunisian Communist, highlighted survivals of racist prejudices within some Communist parties and the inadequate support for colonial freedom struggles. He received strong support from Safarov, Leon Trotsky, and the congress resolution. [60]

The one speaker on China, Liu Renjing, talked of the Guomindang only briefly and in a downbeat mode. Noting his party’s decision to enter the GMD, he posed it as a form of “competition with this party,” an effort whose goal was “to split the [Guomindang] party.” In the resolution on the Eastern Question, the GMD went unmentioned except for a parenthetical criticism that some of its representatives advocated “state socialism.” [61]

This skepticism is expressed more strongly in a text by Radek found in the Comintern archives under the heading, “Resolution of the Fourth Congress.” Radek dismisses the GMD as a force allied with imperialism and does not propose that the CP members support it. The text was presumably a working draft; it is not mentioned in the congress proceedings and was not published at the time. Radek’s congress speech to the congress is pessimistic regarding prospects in China but does not take up GMD policy. [62]

One possible reason for this shift in GMD policy is perhaps indicated in the speech by Liu, which laid stress on the GMD’s ouster from government in Guandong, a setback that was soon to be made good. Following the congress, however, on 12 January 1923, the ECCI adopted a statement hailing the Guomindang as “the only serious national-revolutionary group in China” and confirming that Chinese Communists should join it. The ECCI also reaffirmed that the CCP should remain an independent, centralized organization whose main task was activity in the working class to “establish a basis for a powerful mass communist party.” [63]

On 26 January, Sun Yatsen signed a basis of collaboration with the Soviet Union. Soviet aid to the GMD soon followed, and the first Soviet military advisors arrived at the GMD’s Whampoa military academy. Meanwhile, CCP members played an increasingly influential role in the GMD. There was some talk of trying to merge the CCP into the large organization and win it over, but CCP and ECCI statements on China hewed closely to the basic established policy. [64]

In 1925, however, Comintern policy shifted sharply toward reliance on its GMD alliance. The catalyst for this move seems to have been a discussion between ECCI official Grigorii Voitinsky with Joseph Stalin in April 1925, in which Stalin reportedly expressed surprise that the CCP still existed as a separate organization. A speech by Stalin the following month sketched out a different policy, advocating a shift from united front policy to a bloc in the form of a single workers’ and peasants party, “a bloc of two forces – of the Communist Party and the party of the revolutionary bourgeoisie.” [65]

The new policy was adopted and pushed through by the Comintern over the objections raised not only by Chinese Communist leaders but also by Maring and ultimately, within the Bolshevik party, by the United Opposition led by Trotsky, Grigorii Zinoviev, and Lev Kamenev. The policy led to disaster. Sun Yatsen had died in March 1925, and the new leadership, under Chiang Kai-shek, steered the GMD toward a more conservative course and greater distance from the CCP. The Communist Party, imprisoned by Moscow-imposed policy, was unprepared for a hostile blow from the GMD. During the revolutionary offensive of 1927, the GMD turned against the CCP, unleashing a terror campaign in which about 20,000 Communists were killed. The party’s influence in the cities was broken, and the surviving Communists began armed struggle against the KMD in some rural areas. [66]



## **Balance sheet of a strategy**

During the Comintern era (to 1943), the anti-imperialist united front became a decisive factor only in China. Elsewhere in Asia and Africa, the pace of anti-colonial revolution was much slower than had been anticipated in 1920, when this policy was conceived. Communist parties were also slow to develop mass roots and broad influence. Europe, with its colonial empires still largely intact, remained the centre of world politics and the working-class movement, and thus also the focus of Comintern attention.

Nonetheless, during its first years, the Comintern gave attention to and built support in colonial and semi-colonial countries in a manner without parallel in previous socialist history or in the practice of other socialist currents at that time.

The grip of “Eurocentrism” was weakening. However, it gave way in the Stalin era to what one could call Moscow-centrism, in which policies dictated by the Comintern to the parties in dependent countries were increasingly aligned to the needs of the ruling elite in Moscow and the state apparatus over which it presided. Major course reversals in Moscow in 1928, 1935, 1941, and 1945 disrupted Communist parties in the Global South as elsewhere, placing in question these party’s credentials as reliable allies of colonial liberation. On the other hand, in many colonial countries, Communist movements developed strong local roots and leaderships; in China and Vietnam they were soon to win state power.

The anti-imperialist united front was a logical fit with Comintern strategy in dependent countries. It was adopted universally and without friction and pursued consistently – at least in the early years – in the colonial and semi-colonial regions. This record contrasts with that of its analog, the united front in developed capitalist countries, which the Comintern adopted later (December 1921) and against much resistance, and which was then implemented in fits and starts.

The anti-imperialist united front contained an inherent contradiction: the sought-for allies included bourgeois forces which, at best, would march with the Communists along only a limited segment of the road to socialism. Such allies might well break away and become enemies. Coping with this contradiction posed no insuperable difficulties for Communists. However, like implementation of united front policy as a whole, it raised a host of questions that could not be resolved by reference to basic principle but required instead well-honed tactical flair grounded in local experience. This capacity was particularly urgent when, as in China, the Communists undertook to work within a bourgeois-led formation. The Comintern’s founding documents stressed the importance of autonomy and self-reliance for national sections, but even in the early years, this was not always observed in practice.

United-front experience in Indonesia contrasts interestingly with that in China. Progress in the Dutch colony was achieved without assistance from abroad, while the Chinese Communists received a great deal of aid and advice from their World Movement. Ultimately, however, the Chinese experience showed the limits of hands-on direction from afar. Useful at first, remote control soon became a handicap.

And what of is the relevance of the anti-imperialist united front today? It adds, of course, to the broad corpus of experience that shapes the thinking of today’s movements for social justice. However, the political and social landscape has been transformed. The great antagonists – Comintern and colonial empires – have passed away.

It is hazardous to deduce “lessons” from these century-old struggles. Still, the concept of an anti-imperialist united front has been present in some of the varied mass struggles of the new century,

such as in Nepal, Venezuela, Bolivia, Greece, and elsewhere. The very flexibility of anti-imperialist united front policy has given it continued relevance in our time.

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## Footnotes

- [1] John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*, hereinafter *Second Congress*, (New York: Pathfinder, 1991), 1:220; 2:694.
- [2] Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International: Documents, 1907-1917* (New York: Pathfinder, 1984), 5-16.
- [3] V.I. Lenin, "Backward Europe, Advanced Asia" (18 May 1913), in Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, 99.
- [4] Fernando Claudín, *From Comintern to Cominform*, (New York: Monthly Review, 1975), 275.
- [5] Riddell, *Lenin's Struggle*, 212, 357, 369, 372-9.
- [6] Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East*, hereinafter *Baku Congress* (New York, Pathfinder 1993), 12-13; for the full statements, see 247-52.
- [7] See Riddell, ed., *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power* (New York: Pathfinder, 1986).
- [8] For list of delegates, see John Riddell, ed., *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress* (New York: Pathfinder, 1987), 41-3.
- [9] Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India 1919-1943* (Kolkata: Seribaan, 2011), 72.
- [10] Riddell, ed., *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 808-9.

[11] Riddell, *First Congress*, 248, 202.

[12] Riddell, ed. *First Congress*, 131 (Rutgers), 248 (resolution), 342-4 (background); Riddell, ed., *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921*, hereinafter *Third Congress* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 946 (correction).

[13] Riddell, *First Congress*, 261.

[14] Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, 95-96.

[15] Riddell, *First Congress*, 261.

[16] Riddell, *Second Congress*, 1:38-9, 123-5, 118. Regarding the use of ironic quotation marks (on “advanced” but not on “civilized”), it should be noted that the text originated as a stenographic transcript

[17] Riddell, *Second Congress*, 1:213.

[18] *Ibid.*, 213.

[19] Duncan Halles, *The Comintern: A History of the Third International* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2011), 50; Claudín, *Comintern*, 265.

[20] Riddell, *Second Congress*, 1:213.

[21] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 395.

[22] Riddell, *Second Congress*, 1:215. The terms “backward” and “advanced” were used in the Comintern era to designate the level of development of the forces of production in a given society.

[23] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 327 (Zetkin), 705 (Boudengha); Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, eds., *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology* (New York: Monthly Review, 2011).

[24] The Russian term “*korenizatsiia*,” described here as “affirmative action,” is often translated as “indigenization.” See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001). Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. See also John Riddell, “The Russian Revolution and National Freedom,” 2008, at .

[25] V.I. Lenin, “Letter to the Congress,” in *Lenin’s Final Fight: Speeches and Writings 1922-23* (New York: Pathfinder, 1995) 196.

[26] Riddell, *Baku Congress*, 13.

[27] E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923* (London: Pelican Books, 1966), 3:261.

[28] Riddell, *Baku Congress*, 30, 242-3.

[29] Narbutabekov was a left-wing nationalist reformer in Turkestan who rallied to support Soviet power. Ryskulov took part in the Kazakh uprising against tsarist power in 1916. In 1917 he joined the Bolsheviks, where he pressed for more autonomy for Soviet Asian peoples. Head of Turkestan government 1923-25. Both leaders were executed by Stalin in 1938.

[30] For the delegates' protest statement, the Political Bureau resolution, and one of the statements implementing its decision, see Riddell, *Baku Congress*, 292-309.

[31] No biographical information is available on Bulach Tatu or Najiye Hanum. Khaver Shabanova-Karayeva, 19 years old when the congress met, had graduated from medical school and served during the civil war in the Red Army. She was active in organizing Azerbaijani women and served in the Council for Propaganda and Action set up by the Baku Congress. Jailed during frame-up purges in 1937, she was later freed and readmitted to the CP. She died in 1958.

[32] Riddell, *Baku Congress*, 25, 158, 204-7.

[33] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 870. Of Tatar origin, Kasparova was born in 1888, worked as a teacher, served in the Red Army, member of the Comintern International Women's Secretariat, later supported Left Opposition against Stalinism, jailed during Stalin frame-up purges, murdered in jail.

[34] Riddell, *Baku Congress*, 52. In the Fourth Congress, by comparison, Stalin's victims included 72% of Communists mentioned in the proceedings and within his reach. See Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 54

[35] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 231.

[36] The Soviet treaties were signed as follows: Iran, 26 February; Afghanistan, 28 February; Turkey, 16 March; Britain, 16 March. In addition, the Soviet republics of Armenia and Georgia were established on 2 December 1920 and 25 February 1921, respectively.

[37] Riddell, *Baku Congress*, 129-30. The congress resolution on Turkey did not refer directly to the Kemalist current. It was framed as a reply to another Turkish bourgeois nationalist current, that led by Enver Pasha, which had also addressed the congress.

[38] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 28.

[39] See the strong indictment of the Kemalist movement by Turkish delegate Sadrettin Celal Antel in Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 616-19.

[40] See especially the speech by Hempel (Jan Appel) in Riddell, *Third Congress*, 691-5. Speeches by Bergmann (Fritz Meyer), Alexandra Kollontai, and Henrietta Roland Holst expressed similar misgivings from different angles. The main reply was given by Leon Trotsky (683-8). Some years later, Trotsky was to pinpoint the divergence between the interests of the ruling Soviet elite and world revolution as a central factor in the Comintern's degeneration.

[41] Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, pp. 131-34.

[42] Riddell, *Second Congress*, 1:229 (Fraina); Riddell, *Baku Congress*, 133 (Reed).

[43] See Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell, 1965).

- [44] For Maring's report from Baku see *De Tribune*, November 3, 1920. For his report to the Second Congress see Riddell, *Second Congress Proceedings* (Pathfinder, 1991), 1:30-1, 254-60. For the new position on pan-Islamism see Riddell, *Fourth Congress (Toward the United Front*, Brill/Haymarket, 2012, 1182.
- [45] See Riddell, *Third Congress (To the Masses)*, 44 (assessment), 1181-3 (draft theses), 855-6 (Roy), 865 (Julien).
- [46] The record of the Executive Committee conferences will appear in Mike Taber, ed. *The Communist International at a Crossroads* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).
- [47] Riddell, *Third Congress*, 854, 870.
- [48] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 707.
- [49] John Riddell, "The Comintern in 1922: The Periphery Pushes Back," in *Historical Materialism*, 22:3-4 (2015), 52-103.
- [50] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 28-33.
- [51] Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, 134-7. Ho Chi Minh's speech is available online at <  
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/ho-chi-minh/works/1924/07/08.htm>>;
- [52] Datta Gupta, *Comintern and India*, 355, 364-5, 368.
- [53] Alexander Pantsov, *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution 1919-1927* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 46; Xenia Eudin and Robert North, *Soviet Russia and the East 1920-27* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1957), 217-21.
- [54] Pantsov, *Chinese Revolution*, 46-7
- [55] Comintern, *The First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East* (London: Hammersmith, 1970), 193-4.
- [56] Tony Saich, ed., *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis*, (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 39. For Maring's account of his role, see Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), 109. Aspects of Maring's account have been questioned, see Dov Bing, "Sneevliet [Maring] and the Early Years of the CCP," in *The China Quarterly*, 48 (1971), 677-97, and subsequent discussion, *ibid.*, issues 54 and 56.
- [57] See:
- Gregor Benton, *China's Urban Revolutionaries: Explorations in the History of Chinese Trotskyism, 1921-1952* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996 (CCP opposition).
  - Michael Weiner, "Comintern in East Asia 1919-1939," in Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, eds., *The Comintern: A History of Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1996), 170-1 (CCP growth).
  - Tony Saich, [The Origins of the First United Front in China: The Role of Sneevliet \(Alias Maring\)](#) (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 362 (Chen Duxiu report).



[58] Alexander Pantsov and Gregor Benton, "Did Trotsky Oppose Entering the Guomindang 'From the First'?" in *Republican China*, 19:2 (1994), 52-66 (Radek text); Pantsov, *Chinese Revolution*, 42 (summary). The relevant text of Radek's memorandum is as follows:

2. The ECCI regards the Guomindang as a revolutionary party that preserves the testaments of the Revolution of 1912 and seeks to build an independent Chinese Republic. In the light of this, the tasks of Communists in China must be as follows;

3. a) The education of ideologically independent elements which must in future form the embryo of the Communist Party; this party will grow in proportion to the growing gulf between proletarian, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois elements. Up to that time, Communists are obligated to support the Guomindang and that wing of it that is based on the workers and artisans.

4. In pursuit of the implementation of these tasks, Communists must set up groups of supporters inside the Guomindang itself and in trade unions.

From these groups must be set up the whole army of propagandists who will propagandize the ideas of the struggle against foreign and Chinese exploiters.

Pantsov and Benton explain that all but the first sentence of this passage is missing from the version published in the Soviet Union in 1969 and translated in Saich, *Origins of United Front*.

[59] Saich, *Origins of United Front*, 361-7.

[60] For a guide to Fourth Congress debates on the colonial and semi-colonial countries, see Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 28-33.

[61] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 711-14 (Liu); 1184 (resolution).

[62] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 32 (summary); 731-3 (Radek speech). For Radek text, see M.L. Titarenko, [VKP\(b\), Komintern i natsional'no-revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Kitae: dokumenty. \(Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1994\)](#), 1:119-21; Saich, *Rise to Power*, 1, 377-8. For a different interpretation of Radek's role at the congress, see Pantsov 2000, 51-2.

[63] Riddell, *Fourth Congress*, 32; Pantsov, *Chinese Revolution*, 59. For ECCI resolution, see Titarenko, *Komintern*, 1:37-8.

[64] Saich, *Rise to Power*, 60-86.

[65] Pantsov, *United Front*, 84-91.

[66] For the opposition's case against Stalin's policy, see Leon Trotsky, *The Third International after Lenin* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1957); Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on China: Introduction by Peng Shu-Tse* (New York: Monad Press, 1976); Harold Isaacs, *Chinese Revolution*.