

STUDY CLASS:

HISTORY OF THE U.S. LEFT

The Bay Rea Communist Union is again sponsoring a study class of the history of the U.S. Left. In attempting to understand the development of the Left, and particularly the Communist movement, we will focus on three related subjects: 1) the development of U.S. monopoly capitalism and the objective conditions within which the Left operated in various historical periods; 2) the Left's "presence" in the American mass and workers' movements; and 3) the Left's internal struggles which reflected different assessments of objective conditions and the tasks of revolutionaries in different periods.

Our main purpose in sponsoring the class is to stimulate discussion around the task of developing a thorough summation of the history of the U.S. Communist Movement. We view this task as a very large undertaking--beyond the present capability of our small organization (and most other Communist organizations), but as something we should seriously strive for. What we think we can accomplish in this class is: 1) develop a working knowledge of the history of the U.S. Communist movement, and 2) develop our ability to use a Marxist-Leninist approach in analyzing this history.

The following course outline will give you a pretty good idea of the scope of the class. Basically, we will discuss the history of the Left from the Civil War to the present. Primary readings come from Foster's History of the Communist Party U.S.A. and Foner's History of the Labor Movement plus others. We interrupt our American historical chronology in three places in order to stress important international events and contributions: 1) the development of Marxism as the independent ideology of the working class and Marx's and Engels' contribution to building the European communist movement (1848-1876); 2) the contributions of Leninism, the Russian Revolution, and the formation of the 3rd International; and 3) the 7th Comintern Congress in 1935 and the United Front Against Fascism.

We have three criteria for people interested in taking this class: 1) a person should consider himself/herself a revolutionary, i.e., be active in the struggle to fundamentally change American society; 2) people should agree with the practical aims of the class and be willing to honestly and patiently help the group to achieve these aims; and 3) people should be willing to read about 50 pages a week and should feel fairly comfortable reading material which is sometimes complex and theoretical. We urge interested people to look at the course outline and check out the class.

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	COST	
		Book	Xerox
Marx and Engels	Riazanov	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.45	<input type="checkbox"/> 2.55
Reconstruction	Allen	<input type="checkbox"/> 2.25	<input type="checkbox"/> .95
Letters to Amer.	Marx, Engels	<input type="checkbox"/> 2.45	<input type="checkbox"/> .50
Hist. Labor Move. (Vol. 3)	Foner	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.65	<input type="checkbox"/> .65
Hist. Labor Move. (Vol. 4)	Foner	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.65	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.65
State and Revolution	Lenin	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.00	
Left-Wing Communism	Lenin	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.00	
HCPUSA*	Foster		<input type="checkbox"/> 15.00
NPIAH*	Foster	<input type="checkbox"/> 3.45	<input type="checkbox"/> 1.45
Collapse 2nd Int'l	Lenin		<input type="checkbox"/> 1.80
Tasks Pro. in Rev.	Lenin		<input type="checkbox"/> .35
3rd Int'l Place Hist.	Lenin		<input type="checkbox"/> .20
Rept. Int'l Sit.	Lenin		<input type="checkbox"/> .50
Hist. Amer. WC	Bimba		<input type="checkbox"/> .80
Rept. 7th Cong.	Dimitrov		<input type="checkbox"/> .95
Peoples Front	Browder		<input type="checkbox"/> .90
Tehran	Browder		<input type="checkbox"/> .75
Britain in WF	Dutte		<input type="checkbox"/> .80

Total \$ _____

This is an order form for all assigned reading materials. Indicate by checking boxes which materials you need. (Prices indicated are maximum-- we may get them down.)

*History of the Communist Party U.S.A.
 *The Negro People in American History

WEEK 1 -- Development of Marxism as the Independent Ideology of the Working Class -- Significance of Communist Manifesto.

READINGS: Riazanov, Marx & Engels, pp. 13-27, 63-102. (54 total)
Suggested: Marx-Engels, Communist Manifesto

1. What questions of both a general and a specific nature did the Communist Manifesto seek to resolve -- in what sense was it the product of a definite moment in history?
2. What was Marx's initial attitude and practical approach toward the German revolution of 1848? How did he assess the various class forces? How did he look at the question of the role of communists in the developing revolutionary movement? What conclusions did he draw from his experience in the revolution? (i.e., with regard to the importance of independent working class organization.)
3. How and why did Marx and Engels, both of the bourgeois intelligentsia, emerge at the head of the working class movement in the 1840's? (Compare their role to that of Proudhon and Weitling, two self-educated artisans.) What does this tell us about the relationship between consciousness and being in general and specifically what does it tell us about the relationship between socialist consciousness and class struggle?

WEEK 2 -- Building the Communist Movement in Europe - 1848-1876

READINGS: Riazanov, pp. 129-198. (69 total)

1. What was Marx's view of the purpose of the 1st International? What was the nature of the various trends in the European labor movement at the time (i.e., Anarchism, 'Pure and simple trade unionism')? On what basis did they arise? How did Marx seek to reconcile these trends within the International? What caused the International to collapse?
2. Compare Marx's role in the organization and development of the International with his role in developing the Communist League -- what is consistent about his approach? What is different about his emphasis?

WEEK 3 -- The Civil War and Reconstruction in America

READINGS: James S. Allen, Reconstruction, The Battle for Democracy, pp. 17-29, 181-216.

Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 50-62. (49 total)

Suggested: Foster, HNPIA, pp. 187-294.

Allen, Reconstruction, pp. 29-181.

Marx-Engels, Civil War in America, pp. 57-8.

1. What was the communist movement's attitude toward the developing civil war in America? Why did the communists consider the war inevitable? What did they believe was historically revolutionary about it? How did they assess the various class forces involved? How did the Marxists view the early Abolitionist movement?

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2. What comparisons can we make between the German revolution of 1848 and the American Civil War including reconstruction -- i.e., tasks of the revolution, role of class forces, attitude of labor movement, role of communists, etc.? What are the similarities? What is unique about the American experience? How has this experience conditioned the subsequent revolutionary struggle in America?

WEEK 4 -- Problems of Party Building in America - 1876-1900

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 62-91.
Marx-Engels, Letters to Americans, pp. 273-293. (49 tot.)
Suggested: Foner, HLM Vol. 2, pp. 11-47, 115-189,
279-345.
Marx-Engels, Letters

1. What were the main political trends in the American Labor Movement in the 1870's and 80's? How do they compare with similar trends in Europe during the period of the 1st International? Why wasn't the American Socialist Labor Party more successful in drawing these trends together? (compare SLP's approach in this regard to Marx's in the building of the International.)
2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the SLP under De Leon? How does the SLP of the 1890's compare with the SLP of the 1880's -- in what ways does our present movement reflect the errors of the SLP in either one or both of these periods?
3. What were some of the particularities of America in the latter part of the 19th century that made the development of an independent working class political party and movement so difficult? How did the SLP deal with these particularities? To what degree do these factors influence our movement today?

WEEK 5 -- The Socialist Party - 1900-1905

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 91-106.
Foner, HLM Vol. 3, pp. 367-392.
Foner, HLM Vol. 4, pp. 13-39. (66 total)
Suggested: Lenin, Trade Union Neutrality

1. What was the composition of the S.P. at its founding? What were its political strengths and weaknesses? In what ways did the S.P. represent an advance over the S.L.P.? In what ways did it reproduce the S.L.P.'s errors? What new problems of its own did it generate?
2. Why was the IWW formed? What elements of the labor movement did it draw together? What was its historical significance?
3. What lessons can we draw from the early experiences of the SP and the IWW in regard to the proper relationship between socialist consciousness on the one hand and the practical requirements of both the economic and political struggles on the other? (Consider this question particularly with regard to our approach to trade union work.)

WEEK 6 -- The Socialist Party - 1905-1914

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 107-126.
 Foner, HLM Vol. 4, pp. 391-434. (59 total)
 Suggested: Lenin, Caricature of Imperialism.

1. What is the relationship in this period of the development of monopoly capitalism and the rise of mass struggle (i.e., the 'progressive' movement) to an expanding socialist movement?
2. What was the political outlook of the right, left, and center groups in the party between 1905 and 1914?: a) What was the particular form of Berger's 'American Bernsteinism'? b) What role did Hillquit play in regard to the right and left wings -- particularly in the struggle in 1912? c) What role did Big Bill Haywood play in the development of the left wing? (Compare his role in the American movement to that of Weitzling in the European movement 70 years earlier -- what were the similarities and what were the differences in their political views? In what ways were the views of these working class leaders expressions of the prevailing class struggle in their time and place?)
3. Would it be fair to say that the whole socialist movement (right, left and center) made 'economist' errors? What different forms did these errors take? What conclusions can we draw about the problem of 'economism' in our own movement?

WEEK 7 -- World War I

READINGS: Lenin, Collapse of the 2nd International. (52 total)
 Suggested: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 127-142.
 Luxemburg, Junius Pamphlet.

1. On what basis did Lenin and the left wing of the Second International determine that World War I was "imperialist, predatory and anti-proletarian" in character? What tactical line flowed from this approach? What tactical line did the right wing and the centre of the 2nd International adopt in regard to the war? How did they theoretically justify this approach? On what basis did Lenin expose the opportunism of these 'theories' (particularly Kautsky's 'ultra-imperialist' approach)?
2. What were the objective conditions of the epoch of the 2nd International? How did they engender and foster opportunism? What were the objective conditions of the new epoch (imperialism)? How did these conditions alter the requirements of the class struggle? Why were the parties of the 2nd International unable to adjust to the new demands of the class struggle?

WEEK 8 -- Russian Revolution

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 148-156.
 Lenin, Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution.
 Lenin, State and Revolution, pp. 289-327. (59 total)
 Suggested: Lenin, State and Revolution.

1. Why were the differing tactical approaches of the opportunists and the 'internationalists' in regard to the war bound to collide with even greater impact (developing into an armed conflict in fact) as the Russian revolution unfolded? How did the Mensheviks assess the revolution and the tasks of the proletariat? What was Lenin's assessment? How did these two contradictory views reflect two fundamentally different outlooks on the nature of the state and revolution?
2. What were the unique historical conditions which enabled the Russian workers to achieve in 1917 the victory which eluded the German and French workers in 1848 and 1871? How was the Russian success facilitated by the experience of the German and French failures?

WEEK 9 -- Formation of 3rd International

READINGS: Lenin, 3rd Int'l and its Place in History.
 Lenin, Report on Int'l Situation and Fundamental Tasks of 3rd Int'l.
 Lenin, Left-Wing Communism, pp. 1-4, 93-111. (49 total)
 Suggested:

1. What was the international significance of the Russian Revolution? What was its theoretical and practical impact on the struggle between the revolutionary and opportunist wings of the 2nd International? In what sense did the revolution clear the way for the founding of the 3rd International?
2. What was the historical context in which 'left wing communism' was written? What problems was Lenin attempting to solve? What is the relevance of this book today?

WEEK 10 -- Formation of CPUSA

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 157-196. (55 total)
 Bimba, History of American Working Class, pp. 256-264.

1. How was the struggle between the revolutionary and opportunist approaches to the Imperialist war reflected in the activity of the American Socialist Party? What were the objective conditions in America in which this struggle unfolded? What were the positions taken (left, right, center)? What impact did the October revolution have on the development of this struggle?
2. What was the composition of the communist movement at its founding? What were its political strengths and weaknesses? What were the questions that divided the movement in its first years? What were the objective conditions in which the communists struggled for answers? How were these questions eventually resolved?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the early development of the American communist movement 1919-23 and the development of our own movement today?

WEEK 11 - Communism and Black Liberation

READINGS: Foster, HNPIA, pp. 397-429, 437-462. (57 total)
Suggested: Foster, NPIAH, pp. 355-397.
CI, 1928, 1930 Resolutions.
Haywood, Negro Liberation, pp.
Davidson, series in the Guardian

1. What is wrong with the statement: "the racial expression of the Negro is simply the expression of his economic bondage and oppression, each intensifying the other. This complicates the Negro problem but does not alter its proletarian character."? What is 'special' about the question of Black Liberation? In what sense does the struggle of Black people for liberation stand on its own? In what sense is it inseparable from the overall struggle for socialism? How did the failure of the socialists to grasp this distinction condition the development of both the socialist movement and the Black liberation movement between 1890 and 1929? On what basis (both theoretical and practical) did the Communist Party correct the errors of its predecessors (SLP and SP) during the 1920's?
2. How are the two conflicting approaches to the Black National question (SLP, SP vs. CP in 1929) reflected in our movement today? What is the significance of this debate?

WEEK 12 - The CPUSA in the 20's

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 196-224, 236-259. (52 total)

1. What was the CP's approach to the formation of a Labor Party in America? What was the theory behind it? What kind of a practical line was developed and implemented? What were the results? How should we evaluate the concept of a labor party today?
2. What was the basis of the 'Coolidge Prosperity Period'? How did this 'prosperity' affect the labor movement? How did it affect the CPUSA? (Is there a connection between the absence of a revolutionary mood among the workers and the absence of a unified communist party? What general lessons can we draw about the relationship between the character of the party and the character of the class struggle in which that party is involved?)

WEEK 13 - The Crisis

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 276-292.
Bimba, HWCA, pp. 350-373. (39 total)

1. How did the CPUSA evaluate the impact of the crisis on the American people and the American working class -- did a revolutionary situation exist in the early 30's? What is the relationship between the economic and political factors in the development of a revolutionary situation? What was the relationship of these factors in America 1929-33?
2. What was the significance of the TUUL in the labor movement? How did it differ from its predecessor the TUEL? Did the organization of the TUUL represent a sound TU policy on the part of the CPUSA? Do organizations like the TUUL and TUEL have a role to play in the labor movement today?
3. How and why did the Unemployed Councils assume such a broad mass character? What was the significance of the Unemployed Councils in the labor movement? What are the similarities and differences between the struggle of the unemployed in the 30's and the struggle of the unemployed today? What lessons can our movement draw from the experience of the UEC's?

WEEK 14 - The Comintern: Before and After the 7th Congress

READINGS: Dimitrov, Rept. to 7th Congress, pp. 7-41, 109-113. (38 p)

1. How should we assess the role of the Communist International during the 1920's and early '30's? To what degree did the actual course of events during this period fulfill Lenin's initial (April 1919) conception of 'the Third International and its place in history'? What difficulties did the CI encounter in 'beginning to implement the dictatorship of the proletariat'? How did these difficulties affect the growth and development of the CI's political line and organizational structure?
2. What was the significance of the 7th World Congress? What was the 'new tactical orientation'? On what basis was it adopted?

WEEK 15 - The People's Front in America

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 293-308, 340-356. (66 total)
Browder, The People's Front, pp. 19-36, 145-149, 153-167.
Suggested: Richmond, Long View from the Left.

1. How did the decisions of the 7th Congress affect the work of the CPUSA? Was the party's 'new orientation' in 1935 a correct response to the objective situation in this country?
2. In his report to the 7th Congress, Dimitroff held that the Farmer-Labor Party might be the best form of the popular front in America--why was this form never fully realized? What factors favored the formation of a 3rd party? What factors tended to stifle its formation? How did the CP's approach to the development of a Third Party in the late 30's compare with their approach in the early 20's?
3. What was the historical significance of the CIO in the American labor movement? (What light does its development cast on the Left Wing's historic fight for Industrial Unionism?) What role did the CP play in the formation and development of the CIO? What lessons both positive and negative can we draw from the Party's experience in the CIO? (What is the importance of communists developing a program which corresponds to the realities of the present? How should we go about 'taking care of the future' in this context?)

WEEK 16 - The World Front

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 368-408.
Dutt, Britain in the World Front, pp. 113-144. (71 tot.)

1. What distinguished the Second World War from the First? On what basis did the Comintern develop its 'collective security' and later its 'World Front' policies? How do we explain the 'Second Imperialist War' period (Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact to invasion of the Soviet Union)? What were the duties of each individual communist party in carrying out the Comintern's international line in each of its phases? (between 1935-1943)
2. What lessons can we draw from the experience of the anti-fascist war in regard to proletarian internationalism? What does it mean to adjust the requirements of the class struggle in any particular country to the requirements of the class struggle on a world scale? What does this mean in today's world?

WEEK 17 - The World Front in the U.S. and Browderism

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 408-422.
Browder, Tehran, pp. 11-27, 64-73, 117-121. (47 total)

1. How was the World Front policy carried out in this country by the CPUSA? What were the main political slogans raised by the party in this period and how were they fought for? What kind of relationship did the party develop between the economic and political struggles?

2. How did Browder distort the World Front concept in theory and practice? On what basis did he arrive at his Tehren thesis? What was the impact of Browderism on the party's work? Why wasn't the party more resistant to his influence?

WEEK 18 - The Struggle Against Browderism

READINGS: Foster, HCPUSA, pp. 422-438, 452-468, 506-523, 541-559. (68 total)

1. On what basis was the the struggle against Browderism conducted? What problems was the Party faced with in the immediate post-war period? How successful was the new leadership under Foster in overcoming Browderism and developing a correct approach to the party's tasks in the post-war world?
2. Compare the struggle against Browderism in the CPUSA 1945 to the struggle against opportunism in the SP 1919 -- what are the similarities, what are the differences? Why does Foster support the left-wing and the split in the SP in 1919 but oppose ultra-left tendencies and uphold party unity in the late 1940's? Was he right in both cases?
3. How should we assess Foster's defense of the CP in 1949? On what basis did he deal with the 'advocacy of force and violence' charge? How does the Party's fight for legality in 1949 compare to its similar fight in 1920-22? How would we defend the Communist movement against similar attacks today?

WEEK 19 - The Collapse of the CPUSA and the Development of the New Left

READINGS: A Comment on the Statement of the CPUSA -- CPC
Further readings to be arranged.

1. What caused the CPUSA's collapse into revisionism in the late 50's? Was this collapse inevitable? How might it have been avoided? Why did the revolutionary elements in the party fail in their attempts to reconstitute the party? Compare this failure with the earlier success of the left-wing in breaking away from the SP -- why such opposite results?
2. What were the consequences of the party's collapse on the Black Liberation and anti-war movements of the 1960's? In what sense did these movements become the basic elements of the 'New Left'? How did today's communist movement emerge out of the New Left? In what ways does it bear the stamp of its origin?