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The Communist Youth International, 1919-1943*

What came to be called "communism" emerged as a broad political movement after the Bolshevik revolution and the end of World War I. It manifested itself institutionally in the Communist International (CI) and its auxiliary organizations. The first, and one of the most important, of these was the Communist Youth International (CYI), founded in Berlin in November 1919 several months after the Comintern. Created under circumstances quite different from those of the Comintern, the youth international in its early years played an important, independent role in the development of the communist movement. By the mid-1920s, however, its role as a "transmission belt" between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the international communist youth movement had been established securely. Under the direction of the Comintern, the Soviet party, and the Soviet communist youth organization (Komsomol), trends and events in the youth international, with some few exceptions, followed those in the Comintern and the parties. The fate and fortunes of the communist youth movement inevitably became controlled by and dependent upon outside forces.

The youth international has an importance beyond itself. Its history provides an important example of how the communist movement developed *in practice* in the early post-war years. Young communists exercised a significant influence on this development. Among the most devoted supporters of the Russian Bolsheviks, they played an active part in the creation of many communist parties. Mostly situated on the extreme left of the socialist political spectrum, they served also as a moral and idealistic spur to all revolutionary forces. Above all, they raised, as few other communists did, the fundamental issue of the nature of the new communist movement. At its beginning, the communist movement was another phase in a continuing effort by "left-wing social democrats" to implement an orthodox interpretation of Marx's ideas on revolutionary social change. The Russian Bolsheviks were indeed the predominant factor within the new, revolutionary International. Because they had been successful, their ideas carried great weight. But just as before 1917, even before 1914 and the outbreak of war, socialists had been divided over many crucial matters of theory, strategy, and tactics, the early communists were not really in agreement on several basic issues. What it was to be a communist was under debate and in the process of definition in the years immediately after World War I. New differences had arisen over how to interpret the prospects for revolution, what a revolution meant, and which strategies and tactics were to be followed. It was over mundane, but critical, questions of organizational structure and process, however, that the "revolutionary solidarity" of these first communists broke down. Enthusiasm for "action" was not to prove strong enough to keep them together. Coming from different countries, with different traditions and cultural experiences, the various communists brought with them different conceptions of what was an appropriate basis for a revolutionary organization. These differences over organization reflected a deeper disunity over the purposes of the new communist movement.

It was at this time that the Russian party not only consolidated at home its authoritarian, Marxist-Leninist features, but also went on to shape the entire communist movement in its image. It did so by imposing an organizational structure through which it could determine the purposes the communist movement was to serve, and by suppressing or uprooting other, less authoritarian conceptions of communism. The first signs of this development were apparent in the youth international in the years from 1919 to 1924.

One cannot understand the history of communism, or developments in the movement after the death of Stalin, without recognizing that its separation from the "socialist mainstream" was in many ways an artificial one. The youth international's history demonstrates that the diversity which after 1956 flourished openly within what traditionally was called the international communist movement was *not* new, but had deeper historical origins. This diversity should be seen as the reappearance of an earlier pluralism whose roots went back into the "socialist mainstream", a pluralism that had been suppressed under Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin without destroying its sources. The insistence of the young communists on autonomy, on a less restrictive definition of democratic centralism, and the Russian Bolshevik response to these pressures were an important indication of the course the new communist movement was to take and a precursor to the imposition of Marxism-Leninism as the only permissible conception of communism.

The Communist Youth International, like most other communist organizations, was thus not a completely new phenomenon. A close relationship existed between the early communist movement and the "socialist

* This paper draws heavily upon Richard Cornell, *Revolutionary Vanguard. The Early Years of the Communist Youth International, 1919-1924* (Toronto, etc., 1982) and Richard Cornell, *Youth and Communism* (New York, 1965).

mainstream". The CYI was neither grafted onto the old socialist movement, nor did it take root in different soil. Rather, it grew out of a socialist movement whose membership, despite their differences, felt that they shared a common destiny. It flourished in its way as a new branch. Indeed, the young communists took over the existing socialist youth movement (something the parties could not do) and forced their opponents to create their own movement.

1. The Origins of the Communist Youth International

Idealism, frustration with adult tutelage, and natural youthful rebelliousness led many young workers and apprentices at the end of the nineteenth century to organize themselves into socialist youth organizations. A varied pattern emerged of national movements differentiated according to focus of activity, form of internal organization, and degree of involvement in political affairs. Two common themes, however, ran through this diversity: anti-militarism and economic discontent. While both factors were present, the activities and orientation of each youth organization tended to be shaped by one or the other.

Quite consciously the young socialists, right from the formation in Belgium in 1886 of the first youth organization, struggled to assert a separate identity. Impelled toward unity by ideology and the rigors of existence in a hostile political environment, the young socialists nevertheless drew apart from the socialist parties. While not all socialist youth groups were equally successful, for the most part the young socialists had their own leaders, organizations, and independent existence. The most important reason for the formation of independent youth organizations was the rejection by the young workers of the "spiritual tutelage of the older generation, no matter whether well- or ill-intended".¹ In the early years this independence from the parties created few problems. However, as time went on sources of conflict began to develop. An estrangement between the generations set in that was to reach the brink of schism by 1914.

The tendency in the youth movement to form independent organizations was accelerated by the ideological and political differences that emerged within the socialist movement. In the years before World War I the younger generation of socialists found the arguments of the radicals, or orthodox Marxists, increasingly more appealing. A complete overthrow of existing society through confrontation, rather than its gradual transformation, was more in tune with youthful impatience. Direct participation in political affairs, in anti-militarist activities and the "revolutionary struggle", was more in accord with the youthful urge for action. A conflict thus developed between young socialists committed to revolutionary activity and reformist or pragmatic party leaders hesitant or unwilling to commit their parties to radical action.

The founding of the Second International in 1889 found a belated echo in the youth movement. After abortive attempts in 1889 and 1904 to form a union of socialist youth organizations, the International Union of Socialist Youth Organizations (IUSYO; *Internationale Verbindung der sozialistischen Jugendorganisationen*) was founded in 1907 at the socialist youth conference held in Stuttgart in connection with the meeting of the socialist parties. The leaders of the Second International were able to contain the self-assertiveness of the young socialists by influencing the selection of the executive organ of the IUSYO, the five-man International Bureau, and the international secretary.

The dominant figure at the youth conference was the German Left socialist, Karl Liebknecht. After 1907, Liebknecht served as an inspiration and "elder statesman" for young socialists throughout Europe. His anti-militarist views made a deep impression on the younger generation. The Stuttgart conference was important for what it portended for the future. Under Liebknecht's influence, its mood of anti-war activism contributed to the growth of the socialist youth organizations. The enthusiasm for action at the youth conference, in sharp contrast to the prevailing caution within the socialist parties and the Second International, promoted the search for an independent political role for the youth organizations. It was thus followed by a slow but sustained effort to turn the IUSYO into a politically active, independent youth international.

It was World War I which was to complete the radicalization of the socialist youth movement. The consequences of the war, and the behavior of the socialist party leaders, led most young socialists at war's end to the conclusion that if their ideals were to be realized, they must take the initiative themselves. They could not rely on the socialist parties to remain true to the revolutionary prescriptions for social change inspired by Marx. The spontaneous tradition of independence from before the war was thus strengthened and reinforced. On the foundation of this tradition, which found its most symbolic expression in the youth international, a strong,

¹ Robert Danneberg, *Die Rekrutenschulen der internationalen Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna, 1914), p. 6.

independent, politicized, and orthodox Marxist youth movement developed in Western and Central Europe. This was to become the communist youth movement in 1919, when the IUSYO was transformed into the Communist Youth International.

Both the Second International and the IUSYO were shattered by the war. The IUSYO, however, was able to regroup itself and become the focal point for socialist anti-war activities and propaganda. As the war went on, it was the International Bureau of the youth international and the youth groups, primarily in the neutral countries, cooperating with it that gave the anti-war opposition its most broadly based support. The central figure in these efforts was Willi Münzenberg, the dynamic secretary of the Swiss socialist youth organization.

A major step in reviving the youth international was the conference of young socialists in Bern in April 1915. The conference of all who professed to be "revolutionary socialists" was to see one of the first tests of strength between the militant, divisive views of Lenin and the pacifist, conciliatory approach of the Centrists. It was thus a prelude to the dissolution of the international socialist movement, which was to begin at Zimmerwald later in 1915 and culminate in the formation of the Communist International in March 1919. The conference supported "revolutionary socialism", but did not endorse Lenin's call for an "international civil war" and a break with the Right socialists.² More important, it recreated the youth international as an active, independent organization free from party or Second International control. This was a critical turning point in the history of the socialist youth movement.

The Bern conference moved the Secretariat of the IUSYO from Vienna to Zurich and elected Münzenberg as International Secretary. Afterwards, the youth movement became absorbed in finding an organizational structure with which it could first preserve itself, under the difficult conditions that prevailed, and then expand into an effective force for ending the war and promoting radical social change. Under the dynamic leadership of Münzenberg the IUSYO by 1919 was to become through its militant anti-war and anti-capitalist agitation the dominant force within the socialist youth movement.

2. The Founding of the Communist Youth International

By the time the Communist Youth International was formed in November 1919, war-weariness, economic privation, a discredited capitalist system, nationalist antagonisms, the appeal of the new Bolshevik regime in Russia, and the inherent ease with which younger people accept change all had contributed to turn many young workers, former soldiers, and students to the more revolutionary socialist organizations. Resisting these influences were the traditions scorned and denounced by the socialists as "bourgeois", the desire for peace and an end to

² The Russians apparently attached great significance to the Bern conference. Alexandra Kollantai, at this time a Menshevik-Internationalist, wrote in February 1915 from Stockholm to Lenin's wife, Krupskaya. Referring to the plans for the conference, Kollantai noted that the youth organizations constituted the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement in all the neutral countries. "It seems to me," she went on, "that [the young socialists] can more quickly than any others serve as the basis for a revived revolutionary international". From a letter in the CPSU Central Party Archives, Moscow, cited in M.M. Muchamedžanov, "V.I. Lenin i međunarodnaja socialističeskaja molodež' v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny", *Novaja i novejšaja istorija*, 1967, no. 2, pp. 3-13. The Bolshevik representatives left the conference soon after it began, apparently over voting procedures. The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks each were given one vote, and the Bolsheviks returned. Münzenberg reports that Lenin, while dissatisfied with the resolution adopted by the conference, encouraged the Bolshevik delegation to remain. See Willi Münzenberg, *Die Dritte Front* (Berlin, 1930 and 1931), p. 163. Evidently Lenin felt that the resolution was the best that could be hoped for under the circumstances, and while certainly not as clear a call to revolutionary action and a split with the Right socialists as he would have liked, it was step toward his views. According to Angelica Balabanova, Lenin sent Inessa Armand to the conference to represent the Bolshevik view and win the conference to the Bolshevik position. "He did not dare to come himself, sat downstairs in a little adjacent café drinking tea, getting reports from her, giving her instructions". See Bertram Wolfe, "Lenin and Inessa Armand", *Encounter*, XXII (1964), pp. 83-91. Balabanova also says that Lenin himself prepared the resolution offered by Armand and rejected by the conference. The text of this resolution is not available, but it would appear most likely to have followed the position of Lenin outlined in his letter to the *Naše Slovo* group of 9 February 1915. V.I. Lenin, *Sočinenija*, 2nd edition, 30 vols. (Moscow, 1929-1932), vol. 29, pp. 318-25, and discussed in Olga Hess Gankin and H.H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War* (Stanford, 1940), p. 163.

conflict, the appeals of the reformist Right socialists, and general apathy. The socialist youth movement was certainly the most vigorous manifestation of the radical mood that swept Europe at the end of the war. This youthful radicalism was to prove to be less enduring than anticipated. It led to unrealizable expectations and to a conflict that could not be won with the leaders of the new communist movement.

Enthusiastic and dedicated, with grand visions and great expectations, delegates from the socialist youth organizations gathered in Berlin illegally on 20 November 1919. Despite the unprepossessing circumstances, an aura of anticipation permeated the meetings. Everyone accepted as self-evident that the revolutionary process had begun, inevitably to end in a socialist society. All that remained was to unite and smite the old order a final blow. The intention was to create a fully independent youth international which could lead the fight for revolutionary action. This was to be done by transforming the IUSYO into the Communist Youth International. There was little difficulty in eliciting unanimous support for a commitment to the overthrow of bourgeois society and the creation of a dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet power. While there was a difference of opinion on who qualified, all "true" revolutionaries were to be identified and mobilized behind an agreed program. In order to adopt appropriate strategies and tactics, a clear evaluation of the existing situation, with all its obstacles and opportunities, had to be agreed upon. The serious differences of opinion on these issues mirrored those that were emerging within the Comintern, from which an "ultra-Left", anarcho-syndicalist opposition was to crystallize. The delegates at Berlin adopted an equivocal declaration that avoided a firm decision.

The most controversial and emotional subjects discussed by the delegates concerned the very nature of the communist youth movement. Now that communist parties were being formed, and the call issued for all "truly" revolutionary socialists to unite, it was not evident that separate youth organizations remained necessary. Although some in the parties did advocate fusion of party and youth organization into one revolutionary organization, Lenin did not. He appreciated the continued usefulness of a separate youth movement. In any event, it was quite clear that the delegates accepted its existence and importance without question. It was not clear, however, on what basis one justified the youth movement remaining independent of the parties, or what indeed "independence" meant in the context of a unified movement of all "truly" revolutionary socialists. As a consequence, a disturbing uncertainty remained on several points - namely, the specific role the young communists were to play in the developing revolutionary struggle, which activities the young communists were to be occupied with, the priorities to be attached to these tasks, who was to make these determinations (the parties, the Comintern, or the youth themselves), and the relations between the CYI and the Comintern and between communist youth organizations and communist parties.

Of critical importance here was how the young communists saw themselves. An important refinement to Lenin's notion of an avantgarde emerged gradually and indistinctly from the wartime experience of the youth movement. It was given direct expression for the first time by the delegates to the Berlin congress, and its pre-eminent spokesman was Willi Münzenberg. Now, in effect, there was to be a vanguard within a vanguard. The young communists would be the vanguard of the revolutionary forces (who themselves were the "vanguard of the proletariat"). The young revolutionaries, it was asserted, would always be in the vanguard because they were more militant and dedicated. They would always be more committed, more impatient, more willing to cast out the old and the established and to bring in the new. They had not grown weary, or been tainted by a willingness to compromise. The young communists could be depended upon never to lose hope, or to slide into the egregious errors of "opportunism" or "reformism". If not kept watch over, it was argued in the debates, even the elite communist parties would deviate from a clear and resolute revolutionary path. Even the communist parties were not immune from "calcification" or "ossification". It was believed that it was extremely unlikely that the revolutionary character of the youth organizations would be weakened from within by self-doubt. The parties, however, were seen as another matter. They were more heterogeneous and included individuals of all shades of enthusiasm and commitment. The members had joined for a variety of motives, some of which led the young communists to question their ability to resist the pressures to compromise. Although most party members still spoke of revolution, the young communists feared that their hopes for the future had been soured by events, that their willingness to do battle with the bourgeois enemy had been eroded by the brutality of war. The young communists doubted whether the party members would have the strength to stand firm against all adversity, avoiding the little compromises and concessions that led to a breakdown of revolutionary resolve.

This image of the youth movement might well have satisfied certain needs of the young communists themselves. It may also in some significant way have reflected the situation within the socialist youth movement during World War I. It may indeed be a fact that young socialists are always "more revolutionary" than older socialists. But the notion that the young communists were the real leaders of the revolution most certainly did not correspond to the way in which party leaders saw the youth movement. The Comintern spokesmen whose

views were presented to the congress, Karl Radek and Mieczysław Broński, certainly did not accept the image the young communists had of their place in the revolutionary process. Very paternalistically, they saw the youth movement strictly as an auxiliary force under party direction.

The major opposition to the youthful avantgardism, however, came from two representatives of the Russian youth organization (Komsomol), Lazar Shatskin and the young German, Alfred Kurella, who had been sent by Lenin to place his stamp upon the new youth international. The Russians were prepared to assign only a limited political role to the youth movement. The young communists were to be active inside those socialist parties where communist fractions were struggling for control, but were to engage in other political actions only when called upon to do so by the party and/or Comintern. The main concern of Shatskin was to prepare the youth movement for its assigned tasks after the assumption of power - the organizing and political education of all young people. The wording of the program on this point was again the result of a compromise that did not settle the matter. These differences over the role of the youth also marked the debates on the relations between the CYI and the Comintern, an issue which was to be at the heart of the bitter dispute in early 1921 between the leaders of the youth international and the Comintern and party leaders in Moscow.

In light of what was to happen over the next several years, the simplest way to interpret the Berlin congress might be to dismiss it as the petty wrangling of a handful of naive romantics who had an absurdly exaggerated notion of their importance. If one views the proceedings in their proper perspective, however, one must concede that the delegates represented a political and social phenomenon that had grown to significant proportions by this time. In most of the European countries, there was a large, and growing, mass movement of young socialists willing and eager to work for a revolutionary transformation of existing society. These young socialists did, at this time, consider themselves to be "more revolutionary" than the adults.

Furthermore, the delegates were addressing issues whose importance really went far beyond the youth movement. Although not recognized adequately at the time, the debate over the role of the young communists was in reality a debate over the nature of the communist movement itself. Leninist, Luxemburgist, anarcho-syndicalist, and "democratic pluralist" conceptions of communism were to be found, explicitly or implicitly, behind the positions taken in these debates. This issue, it is true, ultimately was resolved outside the youth movement. Nevertheless, it was at Berlin that the critical questions of the communist movement were first articulated and subjected to discussion and debate in a broad, international forum.

Lenin and the radical Left had been forced by their minority position and their inability to capture the International Socialist Bureau, to set up a new, third International. The creation of the Comintern was the work of the Russian Bolsheviks, who exercised a controlling influence. The founding of the CYI, however, was the work of the young revolutionary socialists in Central and Western Europe. The Russian communists were in no position to assume the mantle of leadership. The Berlin congress demonstrated that the initiative lay with the Central and West Europeans. The Russians, through Shatskin and Kurella, could argue, cajole, and perhaps even threaten, but they could not exert a directing influence upon the proceedings.

Probably the most important result of the presence of Shatskin and Kurella in Berlin was the articulation in the youth movement rather earlier than in the Comintern of the view that the Russian model of organization was desirable and necessary for all communist groups. Shatskin's advocacy of strict centralization and subordination of the youth international to the Comintern, and of youth organizations to the parties, reflected the changed attitude of the Russian party to its new (October 1919) communist youth organization, the Komsomol.

The Russian arguments for subordination of the youth organizations to the parties was much criticized after the Berlin congress as acceptable for Russia, but not Western Europe.³ The Russian party may at this time only have meant to apply the Leninist notion of centralization to the youth groups, but it certainly foreshadowed its application to the parties in 1920 through the imposition of the Twenty One Conditions. Thus, the first phase in the transformation of democratic revolutionary parties into organs of Leninist dictatorship has its origins as early as the fall of 1919.⁴

³ See, for example, *Neue Jugend*, 22 October 1920, and *Jugend-Internationale*, May 1921, p. 233-35.

⁴ See Richard Löwenthal, "The Bolshevization of the Spartakus League", in David Footman (ed.), *International Communism*, St Antony's Papers, no. 9 (London, 1960) for the suggestion that this occurred only beginning with the Second Comintern Congress in the summer of 1920. Furthermore, E.H. Carr's citation of both Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, and the stiffening of the Comintern attitude in the spring of 1920 (the dissolution of the Amsterdam Bureau by ECCI in April and the attitude of ECCI toward the British Labour Party and the German USPD expressed in May) as the points from which to

3. "Clarification"

The new CYI leaders were faced with two major tasks after the Berlin congress. They had (1) to build on existing strengths and tie supporters of the new youth international closer together, construct an organization capable of furthering the revolutionary goals of the CYI, and help to resolve the political/factional conflicts within socialism once and for all in favor of the new communist movement,⁵ and (2) achieve recognition by the Comintern leaders of their more apocalyptic evaluations of the prospects for revolution and their assertion of an independent role in the revolutionary struggle. These difficult tasks were left to the Executive Committee (ECCYI) of five which had been elected by the congress. Under the leadership of Willi Münzenberg, ECCYI was soon functioning in Berlin.⁶

By mid-1920 ECCYI had overcome most of its organizational problems, although acceptable arrangements between the CYI and the Comintern and between youth organizations and parties were lacking. When the CYI began operations, it could count as members the largest socialist youth organizations in Soviet Russia, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Norway. However, as almost forty percent of the membership came from the Russian Komsomol there was a need to expand support for the CYI outside Soviet Russia. This led the new leaders of the CYI to enter into an ideological and political struggle for supremacy, the outcome of which would be critical for the future of the CYI and its hopes for revolution.

The other factional forces (reformist Right and the Centrists) still exercised considerable influence within the youth movement. Nevertheless, the young communists began this struggle from a relatively advantageous position. They were favored by the post-war high tide of political radicalism that was sweeping through most of the socialist youth organizations, not just those represented at Berlin. The CYI leadership was pursuing the Leninist policy of polarizing the socialist movement and enrolling all "truly" revolutionary young socialists under the banner of the CYI. This meant weeding out "ultra Left" influences and "clarifying" the Centrist youth groups (i.e., efforts to split and break up the Centrist organizations). The issue of "ultra-Leftism" was especially painful for the CYI and the new communist youth organizations, for it had wide support among the young communists. At the Second Comintern Congress in the summer of 1920, for example, Münzenberg was very much on the left,

date the change in Comintern organization (Russian experience would serve as an example to the Comintern and the revolutionary movement in other countries) should be preceded by reference to the attitude of the Russian delegates to the founding congress of the CYI.

⁵ As an organization, the youth international was expected by its founders to support the Bolsheviks in Russia, "the revolution", and the Comintern. All young communists and supporters of the Third International were asked to assist the Executive Committee of the Comintern to become a body capable of exercising genuine leadership. As *Jugend-Internationale* noted in its March 1920 issue, this had not yet happened. "The only unifying factor in the Communist International until now has been the common program. An international organization with a united international leadership, the prerequisite for international action, is lacking [...] Today there is in almost every land an international bureau or secretariat of the Communist International. This not only makes common, united action impossible, but impedes considerably the political activity of the Communist International."

⁶ The composition of the Executive Committee reflected the relative importance of the various constituent youth organizations - two from Germany, one each from Scandinavia, the Slavic countries, and Latin Europe. An International Bureau, to meet periodically between congresses on the Bolshevik model was also established. It has been suggested by a leader of the young Italian communists of the time that in order to win Russian acquiescence in the location of ECCYI in Germany, Münzenberg and the Europeans had to pay a price: acceptance of the subordination in principle of the CYI to the Comintern. Whether or not this was so, it was in any case more natural for the leadership to reside in Central Europe. The Europeans knew that the young Russian revolutionaries had begun to organize seriously only in 1917. The Europeans had long traditions and a degree of importance before the Russians even had a socialist youth movement. While Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and other Russian party leaders had considerable experience and knowledge of a socialist movement in a capitalist system, this was not the case with the Russian youth leaders. The young communists in Europe were quite unwilling to give up their position of leadership to the Russian organization. According to one of the Komsomol representatives, Alfred Kurella, both ECCI and the Komsomol recognized the impossibility of demanding a shift to Moscow at this time.

opposing the "opportunist" tendencies that he perceived in the International. His remarks indicated that he was concerned far less with growth in numbers, than he was in maintaining "purity". He also had doubts about the utility of the Twenty One Conditions for membership in the Comintern adopted by the Second Congress; not because they were too restrictive, but rather because they were not severe enough if those "who only a few weeks ago or even days ago fought against the Third International with all means [the Italian, Serrati, the German USPD, and the French Socialist Party] today say that they have no objection to signing the resolution on conditions".⁷ A proposal by Münzenberg that the Comintern undertake "at least the spiritual preparation of the broad masses", and the "technical-military-organizational preparation of the communist parties" for civil war was buried in a commission.⁸ It was to the broad mass of as yet unorganized youth, and to the young Centrist socialists, that the CYI turned to build up a mass organization. Those not yet politicized were seen as virgin soil, waiting for the crust of indifference to be penetrated and broken open by the sharpness and self-evidence of communist ideas and the agility of communist agitation. As for the Centrists, they talked of revolution, but found themselves unable to act when the time came for decision. They would commit themselves to violence only as a last resort. They would not abandon the bourgeois traditions of freedom and pluralist democracy. Except for a militant left wing, they would not consider an active struggle for power.

By early 1921 the efforts of the CYI to destroy the influence of the Centrist youth organizations had been completed for the most part. The results were varied, from complete failure in Austria and Finland, where the communists were forced to withdraw from the socialist youth organization, to initial successes in France, Germany, and Czechoslovakia and fairly complete control over the young workers' movement in Italy. The successes of the young communists appeared promising when seen in sheer numbers. Measured in terms of delegates to congresses and the number of members they presumed to represent, the situation appeared to show a wide commitment to the principles of the Berlin program. However, these early successes were deceiving. An increasingly stable and less revolutionary environment, and their own internal problems, prevented the communists from consolidating and expanding their influence. Internal difficulties, especially, drained away much of the movement's vitality. One of these was the delayed reaction in the youth organizations to the strict centralism of the Twenty One Conditions (as their full import became understood) and the increasing Russian dominance of the international communist movement.

Splitting and dispersing the corps of young post-war radicals (Left, ultra-Left, and Centrist) blunted their effectiveness. Of even greater consequence was the impact of communist "clarification" work on the extensive reservoir of uncommitted young workers. Most young workers were dissatisfied and hoping for something better. They were looking for leadership and concrete results. Their attention and support was best obtained by simple and direct appeals from a united socialist youth movement. Instead, they became unwilling objects in an ideological and political struggle that they could not understand. The communist youth organizations reached the high-water mark of their strength and influence (until the Popular Front, anti-fascist days of the 1930s) in late 1920 and early 1921 as a result of their disruption of the Centrist youth organizations. But their gains only gave the illusion of success. The very *raison d'être* of all communist organizations was compromised from the outset. The doctrinal assumption that "true" Marxists, "true" revolutionary socialists, had to remain "pure" when, with only a very few temporary exceptions the masses were not revolutionary in the communist sense, prevented them from gaining sufficiently wide support. This was to become clear in 1921 when the Comintern launched its united front policy. In 1920 and 1921, however, the young communists looked forward to the future with great expectations.

4. The Nature of the Youth Movement

A second crucial issue remained unresolved, however. Were the young communists to play an independent role in the revolutionary process, through their own independent organizations? The character of the new "truly revolutionary" communist movement and its organizations was not self-evident. Beyond a simple faith in the need for a "disciplined" movement, it was not clear what kind of organizational structure, decision-making processes, inter-party relations, or relationship between the International's leading bodies and its constituent

⁷ *Protokoly kongressov kommunističeskogo internacionala. Vtoroj kongress komintern, ijul' -avgust 1920 g.*, pp. 214-15.

⁸ *Internationale Jugendkorrespondenz*, 5 May 1921, p. 1.

organizations were required. Inheriting a tradition of independent political activity, the young communists knew precisely what they wanted the youth movement to be. However, others had a quite different view of the communist movement. The insistence by the Russian Bolsheviks that their conception of communism be accepted by all led to serious conflict and schism.

The extensive diversity of condition between the national communist movements called for a more precise understanding of what centralization, in the form of democratic centralism, really meant in the International. The second Comintern congress resolution on the role of the communist parties in the proletarian revolution (July 1920) was based on the Leninist conception of the role and structure of *all* communist organizations. This conception of democratic centralism was carried over into the CYI by the Russian Komsomol, which by the time of the Berlin congress had come under strict party control. As it turned out, a viable reconciliation could not be found between democracy and centralization. The latter, by virtue of developments within the Russian party and its dominant position in the communist movement, was to prevail. The conflict in 1920 and 1921 between the CYI and the Russian party leaders, who also controlled the Comintern, provided the early evidence of this.

The clash between the "revolutionary vanguardism" of the young communists in Central and Western Europe, with its emphasis on independence, and Russian centralism produced a lively debate over principles in various journals and periodicals from mid-1920 until mid-1921. In October 1920, the third Komsomol congress attempted to establish the authoritative position: the Russian precedent of strict party control was to be decisive for all other communist youth organizations. This subordination applied to policy issues as well. Shatskin declared that the policies of all the youth organizations were to be determined by "the experience of the Russian youth league, whose basic principles are suited to any youth organization under conditions of proletarian dictatorship."⁹ Russian experience was thus claimed to be relevant *after* the revolution under a dictatorship of the proletariat. Young communists expected in these years that the revolution would soon spread, so that all saw themselves as part of a movement in their own country that would soon be in power and busy installing a dictatorship of the proletariat. Russian experience, according to which the youth organization devoted itself primarily to mobilizing young people, as potential recruits for the party, and instilling in them a "proletarian consciousness" would then indeed be useful or illustrative, if not definitive. What they resisted, however, was the Russian insistence that Russian policies were suitable even *before* any revolution occurred abroad.

The impetus to extend the Bolshevik model to the youth movement, and to the resistance to it, came from the controversies over strategies and tactics. In the years preceding the Third Comintern Congress (June-July 1921), and even later, many of the youth organizations, reflecting the youthful urge for "action", were strong supporters of the more radical, more militant elements within the Comintern. This was particularly so of most of the members of ECCYI, and of those youth functionaries co-opted by ECCYI. ECCYI supported or sympathized with the anti-parliamentary, anti-trade union tactics of the "ultra Left". ECCYI and the European communist youth organizations were also supporters of the "revolutionary offensive," especially in Germany in early 1921. Thus, the Bolshevik leaders, by means of the Comintern and the Komsomol, sought to subject the CYI and its members to the discipline of Moscow.

The most important intervention in the affairs of the youth international occurred in April 1921 when ECCI prorogued the second CYI congress, assembled in Jena, Germany, and ordered it to be held in Moscow after the third Comintern congress. As the delegates gathered in Moscow in July 1921 there were thus two sources of controversy between the CYI and Comintern leaders: first, the demand of ECCYI for more freedom of movement in organizational questions for the CYI, and that of the European communist youth leaders for independence from the communist parties; and second, the widespread support within the youth movement for the policy of the "revolutionary offensive" and the attitudes that lay behind this support.

After bitter debate and the intervention of Lenin himself, ECCYI, led by Willi Münzenberg, reluctantly bowed to discipline and accepted the Comintern position on all issues. The future role of the youth movement was now established. The youth organizations were to become "transmission belts" for the implementation of party and Comintern policy. Imposition of Russian control over the CYI was completed by the move of ECCYI to Moscow, and the removal of Münzenberg to the task for he was to develop his wider reputation - the formation of communist "front organizations". The Second CYI Congress established new relations between the youth organizations and the parties, issued new directives for "going to the masses", and gave to the new ECCYI

⁹ Quoted in Ralph Talcott Fisher, Jr., *Pattern for Soviet Youth* (New York, 1959), p. 55. See also pp. 53-56, 101-103, and 139-140 for discussion of the Soviet party view of Komsomol/party relations and the role of the Komsomol in the CYI.

the task of creating a centralized world organization on the Russian model. Opposition within the national youth organizations was slowly overcome during 1921, but the leaders, now following the Comintern lead, were soon to lose many of their most enthusiastic troops. Furthermore, the conflicts within the parties during 1923 and 1924 were once again to bring the youth organizations into party-political affairs.

Following the new Comintern policy, the focus of CYI activity after the Second Congress was on establishing a "united front" with other socialist youth groups. The mutual hostility that had developed between the communists and most other socialists doomed the efforts at cooperation from the beginning. The "united front" was pursued in various forms by the communists until 1928, when a complete rupture took place, only to be revived again in the post-Weimar era as the Popular Front.

The two congresses in Moscow in the summer of 1921 marked the climax of a fateful drama. The expulsion of Paul Levi, the subordination of the youth movement, increasing intervention in the affairs of communist parties, and the growing bureaucratization of the Comintern were harbingers of a more restrictive definition of communism. The goodwill of the Russian party remained taken for granted. The right of free discussion had not been terminated. The Comintern had spoken, and a new "line" had been adopted, but differences of organization, strategy, and tactics were only beginning to become issues of discipline.

The communist youth could not escape the effects of the party controversies in 1923 and 1924 over strategies and tactics, issues that by now had become issues of discipline. After the death of Lenin, the new leadership of the Russian party sought to complete the process by which the Leninist model of centralization was being applied to the entire communist movement. Begun in 1919 with the CYI, this process tended to follow developments within the Russian party. As power became concentrated within the party leadership, and as restrictions were placed on the right of dissent and opposition, the Russian party took steps to increase its control over the Comintern and the other parties. This was accomplished by "bolshevizing" the communist organizations. The CYI was active in Germany, France and elsewhere subduing opposition within the youth organization, and at the same time the party. It is in Norway and Sweden, however, that the young communists were most deeply involved in party affairs. The Norwegian example, in particular, demonstrates the confusion that existed in the Comintern over the meaning of centralization. The Norwegian Labor Party had been a founding member of the Communist International. It had accepted the Twenty One Conditions and democratic centralism. However, the Norwegians gave quite a different meaning to democratic centralism than did the Russian Bolsheviks. When Comintern intervention in Norwegian party affairs made this clear to the Norwegians, they rebelled. ECCYI and the young Norwegian communists, now toeing the Comintern line, exerted a significant influence in the controversy within the Norwegian Labor Party over acceptance of Comintern discipline. In fact, the young communists formed the nucleus of the Norwegian Communist Party when the pro-Comintern forces were forced to leave the Norwegian Labor Party.

The process of imposing the Russian definition of communism on the entire communist movement culminated at the Fifth Comintern Congress in July 1924. Although a "mechanical transfer" of Russian experience to other countries was to be avoided, the essence of "bolshevization" was the study and application in practice of Russian experience. The following fourth CYI congress adapted the Comintern decisions on "bolshevization" to the youth movement. After its fourth congress, the CYI was organizationally and politically subordinated to the Comintern. Even more than the parties, the communist youth organizations declined during the balance of the 1920s and the early 1930s, both in numbers and in significance. It was only with the Popular Front that they began to recover. Throughout the rest of its life the CYI remained, as did the Comintern, an instrument of Soviet, then Stalinist policy. Its activities were of some consequence in this regard, especially in France, Britain, and the United States, during the Popular Front period and after June 1941. It was on the whole, however, a negligible factor in the life of young people - socialist or non-socialist. Its demise in 1943 at the same time as the Comintern caused little notice. It was not until the post-World War II period that Soviet communism was able to gain a serious foothold among the youth with the formation of the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students.

5. Historiography

The archives of the Communist Youth International went from Berlin to Moscow in 1921, and have not been open for public use. Even in works sponsored by Soviet authorities there has been limited use of archival material. The main public sources for the history of the CYI are: (1) the reports of conferences and congresses and the periodicals and other publications issued by the CYI, by its predecessor, the *Internationale Verbindung*

sozialistischer Jugend-organisationen, and by its rivals, the Right socialist (*Arbeiter-Jugendinternationale*) and Centrist (*Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft sozialistischer Jugendorganisationen*) youth internationals, (2) the publications of various national socialist and communist parties and youth organizations, and (3) the books, pamphlets, and articles published by the participants in the affairs of the socialist/communist youth movement.¹⁰ For the earlier years the working language of the communist movement was German, thus German language sources are the most valuable for this period. The Russian language materials at this time tended to be translations, or general surveys based on translations, intended for agit-prop purposes within the Komsomol.

There are few histories of the Communist Youth International which cover the entire period of its existence, 1919-1943. It was not until the late 1960s, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the CYI, that a general history, following the accepted Soviet orthodoxy of the time, was published.¹¹ Its bibliography supports the selectivity employed to prove a thesis. This was followed in 1973 by another hagiographic history by the same author.¹²

It appears that the only general history in other languages is in English, a translation of Privalov, *Obrazovanie*.¹³ A very short and highly tendentious summary of the early history of the CYI in English was published by the Young Communist League of Great Britain in the late 1920s.¹⁴ The only other major work in English is Richard Cornell, *Revolutionary Vanguard*. Very brief discussions of the CYI are in the works of E.H.Carr and Ralph Talcott Fisher, Jr.¹⁵

A very important early study, *Geschichte der Kommunistischen Jugend-Internationale*, was published in three volumes in German and Russian by the Executive Committee of the CYI in 1929, 1930, and 1931, and reprinted in German in West Germany in 1970.¹⁶ The discussion of issues and personalities, particularly in the first two volumes, follows quite closely the course of events. The active participation of Richard Schüller and Alfred Kurella in the events they describe enhances the authenticity of their works as sources for the history of the CYI. Although it is tendentious and suffers from omission of much important detail, this three volume history goes beyond the bounds of the accepted hagiographic Soviet historiography as represented in the entry for the CYI, "Kommunističeskij Internacional Molodeži", in the *Bol'shaja sovetskaja enciklopedija*.¹⁷

From the early 1930s until the early 1960s very little attention was paid in Soviet historical literature to the CYI. Beginning in 1962, however, a series of dissertations were completed, leading to a number of articles in Soviet historical, party, and Komsomol journals. These articles, in which the prevailing cult of Lenin is evident, set the tone and agenda for the more extensive, and often repetitive, series of works published from the

¹⁰ For these public sources see the bibliography in Cornell, *Revolutionary Vanguard*, pp. 319-33, and the entry for the Communist Youth International in Thomas T. Hammond (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Relations and World Communism* (Princeton, 1965).

¹¹ V.V. Privalov, *Obrazovanie kommunističeskogo internacional molodeži* (Leningrad, 1968).

¹² V.V. Privalov, *Kommunističeskij Internacional Molodeži. Stranicy istorii* (Moscow, 1973; 2nd edition, 1979).

¹³ Viktor Privalov, *The Young Communist International and its Origins* (Moscow, 1971).

¹⁴ *A Short History of the Young Communist International* (s.l., s.a.).

¹⁵ E.H.Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, 3 vols., (London, 1953), vol. 3; id., *Socialism in One Country, 1924-1926*, 3 vols. (London, 1964), vol. 3/2; Fisher, Jr., *Pattern for Soviet Youth*.

¹⁶ Volume 1: Richard Schüller, *Von den Anfängen der proletarischen Jugendbewegung bis zur Gründung der Kommunistischen Jugend-Internationale* (Berlin, 1931); Volume 2: Alfred Kurella, *Gründung und Aufbau der Kommunistischen Jugend-Internationale* (Berlin, 1929); Volume 3: R[afail] Chitarow (Khitarov), *Der Kampf um die Massen: vom 2. bis 5. Weltkongress der Kommunistischen Jugend-Internationale* (Berlin, 1930).

¹⁷ Second edition, 51 vols., (Moscow, 1949-1965), vol. 22.

late 1960s up through at least 1983.¹⁸ A standard Soviet party study of the international socialist movement during and after World War I dismisses the youth international in one or two unrevealing short paragraphs.¹⁹

Two useful historiographical surveys of Soviet literature on the CYI appeared in the early 1970s.²⁰

The next step in research on the CYI must be a thorough investigation of its archives. It is unlikely that any startling discoveries will be forthcoming, however, for the general trends within the youth international already have been illuminated and are unlikely to be altered in any serious way. The contention or disputed issues that may remain within CYI historiography concern matters of interpretation and evaluation.

Exploration of the CYI archives (as well as national party and youth organization archives) may well uncover much interesting detail about communist youth movement developments, but will contribute primarily to a refinement of our understanding of the participants and positions taken in the debates, and of how developments unfolded. Correspondence in the various archives should shed more light on the details of the relations between ECCYI on the one hand, and ECCI and the Russian Komsomol on the other, and between the Moscow leadership and the national communist youth organizations. One might also hope for more reliable membership figures, a clearer picture of the financial relationships within the youth movement, and more details on Soviet involvement in the various "front organizations" directed toward youth and students.

The principal scholarly needs now are encouragement of the complete opening of all archival materials and trans-national cooperation in the publication and use of these materials as they become available.

¹⁸ Among the more interesting of these articles are three by V.V. Privalov: "Bor'ba V.I. Lenina i Bolševikov za sozdanie kommunističeskogo internacional molodezhi", *Vestnik* (Leningrad Universiteta), Serija Istorii, Vypusk 3, no. 14 (1962); "Vlijanie Bolševikov na meždunarodnoe dviženie molodeži v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny", *ibid.*, no. 20 (1962); and "Lenin i internacional molodeži", *Molodoj kommunist*, 1966, no. 8. Also see M.M. Muchamedžanov, "V.I. Lenin i Kommunističeskij Internacional Molodeži", *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1965, no. 4, and "V.I. Lenin i meždunarodnaja socialističeskaja molodež' v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny"; a reprint of the 1923 reminiscences by Lazar Shatskin, "Lenin i RLKSM", *Junost'*, 1965, no. 7; *Bliže vseh. Lenin i junye internacionalisti. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, 1968); S.M. Gončarova and G.E. Pavlova, "Kommunističeskij Internacional Molodeži - vernyj pomoščnik Kominterna (1919-1943)", *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1969, no. 12; and A. Zinoviev and M.M. Muchamedžanov, "Rol' rossijskogo komsomol v sozdannii kommunističeskogo internacionala molodeži", *Informacionnyj bjulleten'*, 1969, no. 5-6.

¹⁹ *Istorija meždunarodnogo rabočego i nacional' no-osvoboditel' nogo dviženija*, 2 vols., (Moscow, 1959 and 1962).

²⁰ M.M. Muchamedžanov, *Molodež' i revoljucija. U istokov meždunarodnogo revoljucionnogo dviženija molodeži* (Moscow, 1972) and V. Privalov, "Osnovnye napravlenia istorigrafii kommunističeskogo internacionala molodeži (1919-1943gg)", *Poznynye istorii*, tretij vypusk (1973). A more recent work by Muchamedžanov is his *V edinstvye - sila. KIM, bor'ba za edinyj front rabočyj molodeži (1919-1939gg)* (Moscow, 1983). While all three are pre-glasnost, orthodox works, the Privalov volume, with its discussion of the three stages in Soviet historiography on the CYI, is the best.