

THE LEFT ALTERNATIVE IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY:  
DRAMA OF IDEAS AND PERSONAL STORIES  
(By the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Comintern)  
*Dates: 26-28 of June 2019.*  
International Conference

CALL FOR PAPERS

Organizers:

Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (Moscow)

In Cooperation with:

Arbeiderbevegelsens Arkiv og Bibliotek (Oslo)

Arbejdermuseet (Copenhagen)

EDDA Research Center (Reykjavik)

Fondation Gabriel Peri (Paris)

Fondazione Gramsci (Rome)

Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága (Budapest)

Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Berlin-Moscow)

Université de Genève (Genève)

YIVO institute for Jewish Research (New-York)

Venue:

Russian State Archive of Social and Political History  
(15, Bolshaya Dmitrovka, Moscow, Russian Federation)

The year 2019 will mark the 100s anniversary of the Third Communist International (Comintern); its foundation in Moscow in 1919 came as the immediate result of the victorious coup perpetrated by the Russian Bolsheviks in October 1917. The Russian Revolution opened the path for implementing the left alternative of the social progress in its most radical forms, having provided for it a workable network-type institutional structure. The Comintern united the “builders of the new world” – the revolutionaries who propagated the idea of the new, justice-based social reality, being prepared to dedicate their whole lives to this mission. In the wake of the emergence of the Comintern, other international communist institutions emerged, such as the Profintern, Krestintern, Young Communist International etc.

The Third – Communist – International was the antipode of the Second – Socialist – International. The fate of the radical leftist idea, as implemented in the Soviet Union, was as tragic as the fates of the majority of those people who got involved in its implementation: a lot

of its advocates lost their lives in the revolutionary battles all over the world, others perished in the years of Stalin's Great Terror.

At the same time, the social democratic alternative, discarded by the radical lefts, has played a prominent and positive part in the social history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it added to social orientation and democratization of capitalism that took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The analysis of this shift, of the place and the importance of its historical component seems to present a topical challenge.

The institutionalization of the radical wing of the European workers' movement took place in direct conjunction with the Great War; however, it took the influence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 to consolidate this movement into its ultimate shape of the "global proletarian party."

The Bolsheviks' success in seizing and retaining the power helped to solidify and multiply the formally scanty ranks of their foreign supporters, turning the "Russian example" into a pattern to be duplicated in various parts of the world, from the Soviet Bavaria to the Guangzhou Uprising in China. Inspired by the victories and the unlimited power within the Soviet Union, the Soviet leaders of the Comintern called for the codification and laudation of their experience and encouraged the worldwide emergence of the parties of the professional revolutionaries, who would regard themselves as the "soldiers of the global revolution."

Both in Russia and outside, the Communists believed that they were the sole perpetrators and activists of the social progress, they shied away from compromises and political alliances. The timid attempts to steer in this direction, such as the policy of the "united workers' front," would sooner or later be dismissed as the "rightism" and hidden opportunism.

The problem of the alternative routes of the evolution of the Socialist movement, including the return to the "critical solidarity" of the European workers' parties, still remains to be one of the "blank spots" of the world's historiography.

At the same time, because of the Comintern and its national sections presenting themselves as the vanguard of the social progress, and because of the numerous sacrifices made by the Communists in their struggle against the "old world," the sympathies towards the radical lefts spread way further than just the working masses of Europe and the population of the colonies. The "leftish" trend in the mainstream cultural and artistic life is a given fact of the interwar history, and this trend was definitely nourished by the ideology and practices of the international revolutionary movement. The analysis of the impulses that came from Russia (*ex oriente lux*) and were forwarded by the Comintern parties, is essential for interpreting the

cultural agenda of the vanguard artists, of the literary and publicist environment and, in the broader sense, of the sociopolitical climate of the 1920-30s.

Having emerged as one of the responses to the global challenges, the international communist movement, in the very first years after its foundation, fell into complete ideological, political, institutional and financial dependence on the country where the Communist Party took all the power in its hands and embarked on the radical restructuring of the society. The VKP(b) ideologists even spoke about the necessity to “Bolshevize” the Comintern; the concept of its “Stalinization” has been established in the Western scholarship, even though in the 1990s this approach was revised by the historiographers. The current perception of the Comintern, the diversity of the interpretation of this term in the historical memory of various countries and regions (the former Soviet Block countries, China, Latin America) would be one of the focal points of the prospective conference.

History has provided the definitive answer to the question on the unfeasibility of fighting for the global domination under the slogan of the “world’s proletarian revolution,” both as the form and the method. Still, same as any other historical experience, the activities of the Communist International should be analyzed within the framework of economic globalization and increasing involvement of the lower social classes in the political processes. The sacrificial involvement of both the leaders of the communist parties and rank-and-file communists in the anti-fascist movements before and during World War II cannot be left unnoticed. Another noteworthy fact is that the communist movement was not immune to the temptations of The Age of Extremes, it gave birth to the totalitarian dictatorships that committed crimes against their own nations.

The international academic community should consolidate the efforts of its members, in order to provide the substantiated analysis of the activities of the bygone communist movement, relying on the new sources and the most advanced methods of historical scholarship.

The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Comintern offers a unique opportunity for the scholars from different countries, ideological backgrounds and historiographic schools to take a fresh look at this institution’s historical perspective, placing it into a broad historical context and linking it to the history of social democracy – the one that the communist movement once emerged from, severing all the ties. The Soviet system collapsed because of its inability to check the extremes in its ideology and social practices, even after they turned into major impediments to social progress.

And still, even today a lot of people tend to believe that the revolutionary shocks that took place in a number of countries in the end of the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the respective social practices, were the only factors since the days of the Industrial Revolution that managed to diminish inequality.

The Great French Revolution had to wait for two hundred years to be “historicized,” i. e. analyzed without politically biased judgments.

The proposed conference is expected to give a strong impetus to “historicizing” the activities of the left-wing groups of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We believe that the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Comintern offers a unique opportunity to conduct a special international research conference focused on the left alternative in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Apart from the substantive problems of the history of the left alternative, of the institutions and people who have dedicated their lives to this mission, we hope to discuss the issues concerning the identification, preservation, usage and of divulgation, in various forms, of the respective archival data.

### **The suggested theme blocks (sections):**

- The Great War (World War I), the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the split within the international workers’ movement.
- The years of the “formidable assault.” Theory and practice of the global revolution in 1918—23.
- From partnership to suppression: the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern, the “dark years.”
- “The builders of the new world.” Male and Female activists of the Comintern: personal and gender aspect.
- The new challenges of The Age of the Extremes, the Comintern turning right, struggle against Fascism and war.
- The Comintern, its undercover activities, the international network (Prof-, Sport-, Krestintern, Mezhrabpom etc.)
- Post-Comintern: dissolution, transformation of the apparatus, continuity of personnel and missions, the early stage of the Cold War, the “Socialist camp” and Cominform.
- Social Democrats vs the Comintern.
- Ideas and practices of the revolutionary changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Conference proceedings will be published before the opening.

Conference languages are Russian and English.

The Call for Papers is open until 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 2019. If you like to present your project please send your proposal (500 words) along with a brief professional profile (150 words) with the note “LEFT ALTERNATIVE” to:

[nvolkhon@yandex.ru](mailto:nvolkhon@yandex.ru) (please put in a copy: [rgaspi\\_dr@mail.ru](mailto:rgaspi_dr@mail.ru))

Conference participation is without a fee, however travel and accommodation costs are at your expense.

Requirements to the abstracts of presentations:

The text should be literally edited and ready for publication. When writing the text please do not type the title in Caps Lock mode, do not use MS Word styles, do not indent tabs or spaces and do not use special fonts. Tables and photographic materials within the specified rules may be used. Interlinear footnotes and continuous page numbering should be used.

All participants will receive from the Organizing Committed individual invitation letters by E-mail/Fax (if necessary printed letters) and preliminary conference program before 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 2019.

This letter and current information about the conference will be published on the RGASPI official site in the section “The news”: <http://www.rgaspi.su>

On all organizational issues please contact Natalia Volkhonskaya, the Executive Secretary of the Organizing Committee. E-mail: [nvolkhon@yandex.ru](mailto:nvolkhon@yandex.ru) (please put in a copy: [rgaspi\\_dr@mail.ru](mailto:rgaspi_dr@mail.ru)), Cell Phone: +7 916 299 7901, Fax: +7 495 692 9017

in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History.

(15, Bolshaya Dmitrovka, Moscow, Russian Federation, 101999)