

Apprentices of the World Revolution: Norwegian Communists at the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ) and the International Lenin School, 1926–1937

Ole Martin Rønning (*The Norwegian Labor
Movement Archives and Library, Oslo*)

If we try to assess the long-lasting consequences of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the different aspects that we may take into consideration literally line up. This article's point of departure is the international communist movement, which, led by the Russian Bolsheviks, grew to be a considerable global political force after their successful revolution in 1917. British historian Eric Hobsbawm once stated that the October Revolution produced by far the most formidable organized revolutionary movement in modern history, with a global expansion that has no parallel since the conquests of Islam in its first century.¹ In order to develop an international movement of such size and complexity, and to keep this movement under firm Bolshevik authority, which was more or less undisputed until the end of the 1950s, a multitude of mechanisms and internal dynamics had to be in place.

This article focuses upon one mechanism that intended to support the development of the communist movement in the 1920s and 1930s: international cadre schools in the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks, the Communist

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), 55.

International (Comintern), and national communist parties all wanted to unify the international communist movement along a set of common ideological guidelines. As a means to achieve this, the Bolsheviks and the Comintern established several educational institutions for foreign communists in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. The article will describe the formation and development of this educational system. Further, the intention of the system to shape the identity of its students through their performance of defined practices, will be analyzed from a Scandinavian perspective. Finally, the Norwegian Communist Party is used as a case study in order to evaluate the possible influence and role of Moscow-educated cadres in the party's organization.

The Comintern veiled its educational programs for foreign cadres in secrecy, causing the widespread creation of myths in Western countries. Very few knew, in fact, what went on at the schools. Western intelligence services looked at them with suspicion, viewing their alumni as potential Soviet agents and dangerous revolutionaries. Only after researchers got access to Soviet archives in the 1990s, did the Comintern cadre schools become the subject of a series of historical studies. Most of them do have a national or ethnical perspective, such as the education of Austrian,² Chinese,³ English,⁴ Irish,⁵

2 Hans Schafranek, "Österreichische Kommunisten an der 'Internationalen Lenin-Schule' 1926–1938," in *Aufbruch-Hoffnung-Endstation. Österreicherinnen und Österreicher in der Sowjetunion 1925–1945*, ed. Barry McLoughlin et al. (Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1994), 435–465; Julia Köstenberger, *Kaderschmiede des Stalinismus. Die Internationale Leninschule in Moskau (1926–1938) und die österreichischen Leninschüler und Leninschülerinnen* (Wien: Lit Verlag, 2016).

3 Alexander V. Pantov and Daria A. Spichak, "New Light from the Russian Archives: Chinese Stalinists and Trotskyists at the International Lenin School in Moscow, 1926–1938," *Twentieth-Century China* (April 2008): 29–59.

4 Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "Stalin's Sausage Machine. British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926–37," *Twentieth-Century British History* 13, no. 4 (2002): 327–355; Alan Campbell et al., "Forging the Faithful. The British at the International Lenin School," *Labour History Review* 68, no. 1 (2003): 99–128; Alan Campbell et al., "The International Lenin School: A Response to Cohen and Morgan," *Twentieth-Century British History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 51–76; Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926–37: A Reaffirmation of Methods, Results, and Conclusions," *Twentieth-Century British History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 77–107; Alan Campbell et al., "British Students at the International Lenin School: The Vindication of a Critique," *Twentieth-Century British History* 16, no. 4 (2005): 471–488; Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "The International Lenin School: A Final Comment," *Twentieth-Century British History* 18, no. 1 (2007): 129–133.

5 Barry McLoughlin, "Proletarian Academics or Party Functionaries? Irish Communists at The International Lenin School, Moscow, 1927–37," *Saothar. Journal of the Irish Labour History Society* 22 (1997): 63–79.

Scots,⁶ and African cadres.⁷ General studies also exist.⁸ As far as the Nordic countries are concerned, Finnish and Norwegian participation in the cadre schools has been thoroughly explored,⁹ while Icelanders also have been studied.¹⁰ All of these studies have profited from the rich source material: the records of the Comintern schools that today are accessible at the Russian State Archive for Social-Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow.

THE MOSCOW CADRE SCHOOLS—AN OVERVIEW

In 1920, the Bolsheviks decided to develop a unified, centralized, and hierarchically structured model of party education. At the apex stood the Communist Academy, while the level below consisted of several party universities.¹¹ Two of the universities originally intended to provide higher ideological education for Soviet national minorities in their native tongue, as part of the contemporary and quite liberal national politics of the Bolsheviks. This was the Communist

6 John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "The Scots at the Lenin School: An Essay in Collective Biography," *Scottish Labour History* 37 (2002): 50–71.

7 Woodford McCellan, "Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools, 1925–1934," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 371–390; Irina Filatova, "Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923–1937," *Paedagogica Historica* 35, no. 1 (1999): 42–66.

8 Leonid G. Babitschenko, "Die Kaderschulung der Komintern," *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (1993): 37–59. Julia Köstenberger, "Die Geschichte der 'Kommunistischen Universität der nationalen Minderheiten des Westens' (KUNMZ) in Moskau 1921–1936," *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2001/2002): 248–303; Julia Köstenberger, "Die Internationale Lenin-Schule (1926–1938)," in *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale*, ed. Michael Buckmiller et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), 287–309.

9 Joni Krekola, "The Finnish Sector at the International Lenin School," in *Agents of the Revolution. New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Kevin Morgan et al. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 289–308; Joni Krekola, *Stalinismin lyhyt kurssi. Suomalaiset Moskovan Lenin-koulussa 1926–1938* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006); Ole Martin Rønning, *Stalins elever. Kominterns kaderskoler og Norges Kommunistiske Parti 1926–1949* (PhD thesis, Oslo: University of Oslo, 2010); Joni Krekola and Ole Martin Rønning, "International cadre education of Nordic communists," in *Red Star in the North. Communism in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Åsmund Egge and Svend Rybner (Stamsund: Orkana, 2015), 292–293.

10 Jón Ólafsson, *Kæru félagar. Íslenskir sósíalistar og Sovétríkin 1920–1960* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1999), 50–83.

11 Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind. Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918–1929* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 42–47.

University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) and the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ),¹² both established in 1921 and situated in Moscow. Before long, these two universities evolved into Comintern institutions, accepting students from communist parties abroad. In 1922, an international sector opened at the KUTV, consisting of students from Asian countries and colonies. From 1925, African and Caribbean students also joined.¹³

Originally, the KUNMZ served students from the western parts of Soviet Russia. Education took place in the German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, and Yiddish languages. In 1922, a separate branch of the KUNMZ opened in Leningrad, arranging study courses in Finnish, Estonian, and Latvian. From 1923, the KUNMZ, in compliance with Comintern demands, began to establish special foreign language sections designed for cadres from the communist parties of the following countries: Bulgarian (1923); Yugoslav (1925); Italian (1927); Greek (1928); Swedish (spring, 1928); Norwegian (autumn, 1928); and Hungarian (1930). By the end of the 1920s, the KUNMZ had become a university largely for foreign party cadres, as no more than 31 percent of the students came from the Soviet Union.¹⁴ In the Swedish and Norwegian language sections, students attended from all the Scandinavian communist parties. In addition, came Icelanders, as well as a few Swedish-speaking Finns and Scandinavian emigrants living in the US. For linguistic reasons, students from Denmark and Iceland came to join the Norwegian section, while Swedish-speaking Finns found their place in the Swedish section. A few Scandinavian comrades from the American Communist Party attended the Swedish or the Norwegian section according to their native tongue.¹⁵

In the mid-1920s, the Comintern established another two educational institutions for foreign cadres in Moscow. The Sun Yat-Sen University of the Toilers of China started its activities in 1925. As the name suggests, the Bolsheviks designed the Sun Yat-Sen University for Chinese students. The university came to play an important part in Soviet and Comintern politics directed against China. Actual Comintern tactics of the time envisaged a unified front between Chinese communists and the nationalist Goumindang movement. That caused students from the Goumindang to join courses at

12 KUTV: *Kommunisticheskii universitet trudiashchikhsia Vostoka*. KUNMZ: *Kommunisticheskii universitet natsional'nykh men'shinstv Zapada*.

13 McCellan, "Africans and Black Americans," 375.

14 Köstenberger, "Die Geschichte," 250, 253–254.

15 Krekola and Rønning, "International cadre education," 292–293.

the university. Following the collapse of the Chinese unified front in 1927, the Comintern expelled all Goumindang students. In 1928, a renaming took place, as the university changed its name to the Communist University of the Toilers of China (KUTK).¹⁶ The failure of the unified front, and thereby Comintern politics towards China, had its implications for the factional strides in the Bolshevik party. Due to internal political difficulties following the bitter fight between general secretary Josef Stalin and his adversaries, the KUTK closed down in 1930.¹⁷

Perhaps the most well know of the Comintern's educational institutions was the International Lenin School (MLSh).¹⁸ The Lenin School began its activities in May 1926. The school was located near Arbat Street in the foreign embassy district of the Soviet capital. The School was established as a part of the so-called bolshevization process of the international communist movement, which originated from the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924. At this time centralizing tendencies within the Comintern rose rapidly. Also, Bolshevik demands for loyalty along the party-defined ideological line increased following the death of Lenin, due to escalating internal factional activities that also involved foreign communists. Needs of an intensified and authoritative ideological schooling of foreign cadres became more pressing.

Originally, the Lenin School had four language sections (English, French, German, and Russian) that organized courses of two-and-a-half-years-long duration. Unlike the universities KUTV, KUNMZ, and KUTK, which intended to educate rank-and-file communists, the Lenin School was primarily designed as elite education for top party cadres. In 1929, the Lenin School expanded with a Chinese language sector, and the year after Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish, and Finnish sections followed. In 1931, Polish and Romanian sections opened, joined by a Scandinavian sector at the year end. In the years 1932 to 1936, there also appeared American, Bulgarian, Greek, Latvian-Estonian, Lithuanian, Yugoslav, and Austrian sections. In total, between 3,300 and 3,500 students, originating from at least fifty-nine different countries, took part in the education provided by the Lenin School until it ceased operations in 1938.¹⁹

By the end of the 1920s, the Comintern leadership began discussing an eventual centralizing of the foreign cadre educational system by developing

16 *Kommunisticheskii universitet trudiashchikhsia Kitaia.*

17 Babitschenko, "Die Kaderschulung," 39–40; Köstenberger, "Kaderschmeide des Stalinismus," 26.

18 *Mezhdunarodnaia leninskaia shkola.*

19 Köstenberger, "Kaderschmeide des Stalinismus," 46, 66.

the Lenin School into a common international university. The plan was to incorporate all students from foreign communist parties that at present studied at the KUTV, KUNMZ, and KUTK. No international university ever materialized, but—as mentioned—the KUTK closed down, causing some of its students to move on to the Lenin School.²⁰ Several foreign language sections at the KUTV and KUNMZ dissolved as well, and the remaining students reorganized to the Lenin School.²¹ As part of this process, the Swedish and Norwegian educational program at the KUNMZ shut down in 1932. Students who had not graduated transferred to the newly organized Scandinavian sector at the Lenin School.²²

Following the Comintern's shift to Popular Front tactics in 1935, the International began a process of decentralization of the foreign cadre education that aimed to establish a nationally organized ideological schooling in countries with legal communist parties.²³ This, combined with escalating Stalinist terror and rising xenophobia in the Soviet Union, ultimately ended in total liquidation of the Moscow cadre schools. The KUNMZ and KUTV closed down in 1936.²⁴ From 1936 on, the Lenin School only accepted new students from illegal communist parties. Parallel to intensive purges, which included headmaster Klavdiia Kirsanova, the number of students declined steady until the Lenin School finally locked its doors in 1938.²⁵ The decision to dissolve the MLSh was made about the same time as enrolment began of volunteers in the International Brigades that fought for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War. Like many others who had been associated with the Lenin School,²⁶ also some Scandinavian male students joined the Brigades. They travelled from Moscow to Spain as officers after an additional military schooling.²⁷

The final group of Scandinavian students left the school in spring 1937.²⁸ By then the Swedish Communist Party had set up a new educational institution for Scandinavian and Icelandic cadres, *Björknäs Folkhögskola*, situated outside

20 Pantov and Spichak, "New Light," 35.

21 Köstenberger, "Kaderschmeide des Stalinismus," 59–62.

22 RGASPI: 529–1–636, 139–144. Report of the Scandinavian sections at the KUNMZ, October 21, 1932.

23 Rønning, "Stalins elever," 200–202.

24 Köstenberger, "Die Geschichte," 263; Babitsjenko "Die Kaderschulung," 56.

25 Köstenberger, "Kaderschmeide des Stalinismus," 69–70.

26 Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War. Solidarity and Suspicion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 50.

27 Rønning, "Stalins elever," 198.

28 Ibid., 197.

Stockholm. Even if the school operated in full legality, it nevertheless stood under the auspices of the Comintern, which also financed its operations. The school suspended its activities in the summer of 1939, probably due to the overwhelming threat of war in Europe.²⁹

THE SCANDINAVIAN SECTIONS

At the KUNMZ, about 100 Scandinavian and Icelandic students graduated during the years 1930–1932. In addition came a number of students enlisted at the university, but who never fulfilled their studies due to health or disciplinary reasons, or they were given permission to return home for party duties.³⁰ For the Lenin School, a minimum of 116 students from the Scandinavian countries and Iceland attended. Of them, forty-four were Norwegians, accompanied by at least thirty-seven Swedes, twenty-five Danes, and ten Icelanders. They followed study courses of different duration, varying between nine months and two and a half years, during the period 1926 to 1937.³¹ The cadre education was a pre-dominant male project. Only approximately 13 percent of the Scandinavian students at the KUNMZ were females while the percentage of female Scandinavian students at the MLSh was even less; the number for the Norwegian party was only three women (about 7 percent of Norwegian students at the school).³²

The curriculum of the KUNMZ and the Lenin School featured some common key elements: Leninism, the history of the Bolshevik party, the history of the Comintern, political economy. In order to create a certain national approach, the curriculum also included studies of each country's communist party and labor movement as well as some particular national economical and historical aspects. Another important part of the study courses was practical schooling in organizational party work, based upon the experiences of the Bolsheviks in pre-1917 Russia. The students combined their practical schooling with training in trade union activities, clandestine procedures and some military subjects. Normally, the students added a study of the Russian language as well.³³

²⁹ Ibid., 204–208.

³⁰ RGASPI: 495-529-1, 140. Report of the Scandinavian sections at the KUNMZ, October 21, 1932.

³¹ RGASPI: 531-1-31, 103 and 106. Statistics MLSh.

³² Krekola and Rønning, "International cadre education," 296.

³³ Ibid., 296.

Specialization in military operations or intelligence was not part of the regular party education given. The study programs, nevertheless, included some military training and strategy, but their share of the study units was modest. For instance, at the Lenin School in 1933–1934 the ideological subjects counted for 63 percent of the total teaching time. The lectures in practical work was 30 percent, while in the remaining time (7 percent) the students focused on particular national aspects. This year, the education in clandestine party activities took up only a small amount of the time spent on practical work. Of totally 1,185 class hours, only forty hours (approximately 3.5 percent) were dedicated to such purposes.³⁴

The curriculum of the KUNMZ originally included several basic academic subjects. In this way, students with no formal education could join the courses. However, only the first Scandinavian students who joined the university in 1928 participated in a four-year study program. The length of the education shrank to three, or even two, years as lecturing in regular branches of learning ceased in the years that followed.³⁵ The length of the education at the Lenin School originally lasted two years. Before long, the school developed shorter study courses of nine months or one-year duration. From the start in 1926, no education program in any Scandinavian languages existed at the Lenin School, but a few Scandinavian students joined courses in the German language section. With the foundation of the Scandinavian sector, the school introduced a one-year study course. The first Scandinavians started their studies in the new sector in January 1932, and graduated in January 1933. As mentioned, during the study year, some fellow Scandinavians, transferred when the KUNMZ closed down, joined them. Other study courses in the Scandinavian sector at the Lenin School began in January/February 1933 and 1934. Originally scheduled to begin in autumn 1935, but postponed by unknown reasons, the last course of the sector started in January 1936.³⁶

HUNTING DEVIATIONS

It is not possible to separate the students' experiences at the Comintern schools from the faction strife in the Bolshevik Party in the second half of the 1920s and the practices of Stalinism that evolved in Soviet society in the 1930s.

34 Ibid., 296–297.

35 Ibid., 293.

36 Rønning, "Stalins elever," 81.

Factional strides in the party easily transferred into the sphere of the Comintern schools, resulting in purges of staff members and students blamed of supporting the loosing faction. The Comintern, for instance, accused the future Danish party leader, Aksel Larsen, of Trotskyism during his stay at the Lenin School in 1928. Larsen had to perform self-criticism and to serve a “mild exile” in Nizhny Novgorod for a period of three months.³⁷ New purges of so-called “right deviators” followed at the Comintern schools in 1929–1930 and 1931–1932.³⁸ During the last of these purges, a joint meeting of the Scandinavian sections at the KUNMZ and the Lenin School in December 1931 discussed eventual measures directed against deviations. Students in the sections had to form task brigades in order to search the study material for political errors.³⁹ Parallel to this, former Norwegian party Chairman Peder Furubotn, who the Comintern had summoned to Moscow in 1930, faced accusations of political wrongdoing following a lecture he had held as a teacher for the Scandinavians at the KUNMZ. Consequently, Furubotn lost his teaching job and had to take on compulsory work in Soviet industry.⁴⁰

As shown by several examples found in the sources, the hunt for political deviations, and the coherent public condemnation and punishment of those accused, demonstrates quite clearly how the students at the Comintern schools had to subordinate to the actual ideological line defined by the Bolshevik party.⁴¹ Students were also supposed to adapt to any new direction or change in the political main line without hesitation or asking questions. Within the context of the cadre schools, the Bolsheviks enjoyed supreme powers of definition and were always right. In a political sense, there existed no open educational process at the schools. All the answers were predetermined. In this way, the education was a practice that molded foreign communists into an escalating monolithic structure of Stalinism. During their stay at the schools, students were supposed to learn to speak the “right” language and to think the “right” thoughts. After returning to their home countries, students took on positions in their respective party apparatuses. The Comintern and the Soviet

37 Kurt Jacobsen, Aksel Larsen, *En politisk biografi* (København: Vindrose, 1993), 68–69, 73–74, 82–84.

38 Aleksandr Vatlin, “Kaderpolitik und Säuberungen in der Komintern,” in *Terror. Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936–53*, ed. Hermann Weber and Ulrich Mählert (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 47–48. Babitsjenko, “Die Kaderschulung,” 48.

39 RGASPI: 529-2-316, 60. Meeting report, December 30, 1931. RGASPI: 495-31-62, 2. Letter, January 4, 1932.

40 RGASPI: 495-247-2. Resolution KUNMZ, February 16, 1932.

41 Rønning, “Stalins elever,” 182–188.

party expected the graduates to redistribute the ideological guiding lines they received from Moscow on to the party members and the public, using their newly learned understanding of “correct thought” and thus demonstrating loyalty to the Bolsheviks.

A PROCESS OF INDOCTRINATION?

Scholars have characterized the Comintern schools as “total institutions”.⁴² It implicates that the cadre education had a de-individualizing effect, which caused participating students to subordinate to a collective discipline. It can be argued that a certain moderation to the ideal type of “total institutions” is necessary, at least from a Scandinavian point of view. For the participating students from these countries, the cadre education was a voluntary project. They spent a defined and limited period at the Comintern schools. And, as we shall see, examples do exist of individual Scandinavian students who opposed against the school setting. However, during their educational period in the Soviet Union, students at the cadre schools had to take part in a series of compulsory practices that were constituent parts of Soviet political culture. Performing these practices was a habitual process of learning that aimed to internalize the “right” attitudes among the students. Essential in the learning process was a personal recognition on behalf of the students of the supreme position of the Bolshevik party and the central role of Soviet party activists in the achievement of constructing socialism in the Soviet Union.⁴³

As a compulsory practice, students performed practical work in different spheres of Soviet society. At the schools, they joined different forms of organizational activities, for instance positions of trust in the sector or student group. Students also attended Comintern meetings and visited the offices of the International in order to become familiar with the central institutions of the communist movement. It was possible for them to carry out work tasks in the Comintern bureaucracy or in other international communist organizations such as the International of Trade Unions (Profintern) or the International Red Aid (MOPR). In addition came a regular service in nearby industries, where students took part in ordinary production work or joined

42 Brigitte Studer and Berthold Unfried, *Der stalinistische Parteikader: Identitätsstiftende Praktiken und Diskurse in der Sowjetunion der dreissiger Jahre* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001), 208.

43 RGASPI: 495-30-421, 38-53. Report, 1927. RGASPI: 495-30-533, 125. About the students' practical work, undated (1928). Studer and Unfried, “Der stalinistische Parteikader,” 16–17, 211–212.

Russian party members at the workplace doing agitation among the workers as well as organizational tasks in the factory's party cell. Another kind of practical work happened during school holidays. The students travelled away from Moscow in order to work at industrial complexes, collective farms and do other tasks, for instance at international seamen's clubs.⁴⁴

Some Norwegian and Icelandic students from the KUNMZ conducted a peculiar form of practical work in the far north fishing village of Tsyp Navolok by the Arctic Sea. In the village, the students met Norwegian-speaking inhabitants who descended from immigrants to Russia in the nineteenth century. The students helped the local party organization to persuade the fishers to abandon their old ways of doing individual fishing and instead join a fishers' collective. Due to reports, the "persuasion" happened with such aggressiveness and ruthlessness that an Icelandic student protested and tried to defend the local fishers. Of course, the student's supervisors at the university disapproved his actions, and he had to perform self-criticism when returning to Moscow.⁴⁵

The *udarnik* movement was a Soviet cultural practice that transferred to the Comintern schools, where it was included as compulsory. As a part of the first Five-Year Plan, a militarization took place within Soviet industrial production. So-called shock workers, or *udarniki*, pressed output limits to new highs. The shock workers organized in shock brigades or shock labor teams that competed with each other in a "socialist competition." From 1928, the Comintern schools introduced this way of organizing labor. The leadership of the schools redefined the process of learning into production. The students had to look at themselves as *udarniki* and to join special brigades. High output became a sign of sacrifice and demonstrated that the students had internalized a true Bolshevik attitude.⁴⁶

In the Scandinavian sections at the KUNMZ and the Lenin School, introduction of *udarnik*-principles met with little success. Students did not manage to internalize the prescribed methods of socialist competition into their studies.⁴⁷ Supposedly, the students may have perceived the *udarnik*-movement as a Soviet concept, closely connected to the fulfilment of the Five-Year Plan.

44 Rønning, "Stalins elever," 137–138, 141.

45 RGASPI: 495-31-134, 20–22. Report, October 20, 1931. Morten Jentoft, *De som dro østover. Kola-nordmennenes historie* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2001), 87. Ólafsson, "Kæru félagar," 67–70.

46 Köstenberger, "Die Geschichte," 282–283.

47 RGASPI: 529-2-338, 27. Meeting report, April 13, 1932. RGASPI: 495-15-3, 136. PM, October 25, 1935.

It may be reason to believe that students who did not manage to live up to the standards of “socialist competition” interpreted their failure as a personal shortcoming. Within the universe of the cadre schools such failures were explained as results of the students’ “petty bourgeois” social roots in the Scandinavian countries, and thereby further demonstrating the actual students “backwardness” compared to the idealized Soviet workers.⁴⁸

CONSPIRACY AND DEBAUCHERY

As rules of conspiracy became stricter from the late 1920s, a regime of secrecy engulfed the cadre schools. One reason for this was a need to protect students who came from countries with prohibited communist parties, from persecution in their home countries and eventual foreign agents operating in Moscow. Simultaneously, the strict conspiracy rules functioned as a disciplining cultural practice, which in a symbolic way introduced the students to certain Soviet party procedures, such as restricted access to party documents.⁴⁹ Other actual measures included a mandatory use of aliases during the students’ stay at the schools. Only students from legal communist parties got a limited ability to correspond with their home country, but they could not use their real names. Students could only receive letters through specific safe addresses in Moscow.⁵⁰ Photographing of fellow students was prohibited. In 1932, students at the Lenin School had to apply for permission if they wanted to leave the premises overnight. It was absolutely forbidden for the students to engage in random acquaintances. Students could not go outside in groups larger than three persons, or speak loud in their mother tongue on the street.⁵¹

Complying with the rules of conspiracy became another compulsory practice for the students. It also acted as a proof, demonstrating that students really had internalized an attitude as true communists and developed into Bolshevik cadres. However, in the Scandinavian sections at the cadre schools, there are many recorded shortcomings regarding violation of conspiracy or other disciplinary rules. For instance, in 1934 tutors criticized the Scandinavian students

48 Rønning, “Stalins elever,” 152.

49 Studer and Unfried, “Der stalinistische Parteikader,” 206–207.

50 RGASPI: 495-30-755, 151. Conditions for admission, MLSh, 1931. See Barry McLoughlin, “Stalinistische Rituale von Kritik und Selbstkritik in der internationalen Lenin-Schule, Moskau, 1926–1937,” *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2003): 91–92.

51 RGASPI: 529-1-636a, 27. Instructions, April 13, 1932.

at the Lenin School for demonstrating a poor understanding and practice of the conspiracy rules.⁵² This may suggest that the students' involvement into, and identification with, the Comintern's educational project had its limits.

Scandinavian students committed several infringements of the cadre schools' disciplinary regulations. Most common was drunkenness; in 1931, for instance, the tutors revealed fifteen cases involving students in the Scandinavian sections at the KUNMZ.⁵³ Among them were two Swedish students who committed a major offense when they appeared drunk on the streets of Moscow, boasting to be students at a communist university, at the very evening before Celebration Day of the Great October Revolution, November 7. Of course, to act in that way on such a sublime evening made the case look especially bad in the eyes of tutors and fellow students.⁵⁴ Other examples of violating conspiracy rules, as well as implicit moral norms, included students who had relations with prostitutes or demonstrated "defeatism" in the meaning of requesting to return to their home country.⁵⁵

Students who violated disciplinary rules were subject to punishment. Those who repeatedly violated disciplinary regulations risked to face expulsion from the education. If that happened, the perpetrator was not immediately sent back home, but held at the school and eventually forced to do compulsory work in Soviet industry.⁵⁶ In this way, expulsion came not to represent a kind of "reward" for those students who wanted to leave the school and go home, and with that in mind deliberately violated the rules of behavior. Normal procedures also included a required performance of criticism and self-criticism on behalf of the offender.

CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM

In Soviet politics of the 1930s, criticism and self-criticism evolved into a ritualized practice, with common implied rules and pre-defined verbal forms of expression. The practice of criticism and self-criticism is characterized by historian J. Arch Getty as an example of "an 'apology ritual' in which the apology

52 RGASPI: 531-1-215, 16 and 19. Meeting report, May 10, 1934.

53 RGASPI: 529-1-630, 96. Letter, May 28, 1931.

54 RGASPI: 529-2-316, 59. Resolution, November 15, 1931.

55 RGASPI: 529-1-630, 127-129. Report of the Scandinavian sections at the KUNMZ, 1930-31; RGASPI: 529-1-631, 50. Meeting report, December 19, 1930; RGASPI: 529-2-316, 43. Resolution, 1931.

56 RGASPI: 529-1-625, 66. Resolution, 1931.

element served to affirm the ‘mistake’, to pronounce a lesson to other below not to make the same mistake, and to recognize the status and rights of the party receiving the apology (the leadership) to set the rules.”⁵⁷ Historian Barry McLoughlin has claimed that the ritual of criticism and self-criticism was not a reflection only of underlying structures in Soviet society, but rather took form of an independent cultural behavior; a Bolshevik practice that lived its own life.⁵⁸ The overall aim for those involved was to become “new” in a political sense and thus coming closer to the idealized goal of being a Bolshevized cadre. At the Comintern Schools, students had to perform criticism and self-criticism on a regular basis at group, sector, and party meetings as a compulsory practice that was an integrated part of the learning process. Through this practice, the collective at the school helped students to realize their faults, made them to recognize certain behavior as irregular and thereby create a foundation for change in the actual students’ behavioral pattern.⁵⁹

The above listed compulsory practices represented, taken together and combined with the whole context of the Comintern schools, an integrated environment that must have affected the students’ dispositional system and cognitive pattern.⁶⁰ It is possible to understand the cadre education as a collective mobilization project, where participating students entered the political-ideological mindset as well as the organizational structure of the international communist movement. In the Scandinavian sections at the KUNMZ and the Lenin School, examples can be found of individual students who were driven into obstruction, and even opposition, but the absolute majority adjusted and subordinated themselves into performing the expected actions and showing the right attitudes. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that the cadre education represented a certain impact and helped to form a sort of lasting legacy that the majority of the participants brought with them into future party activities in their home countries.

Even if the education for the Scandinavians was a voluntary project, with little risk involved for those who did not subordinate, it nevertheless put a certain pressure on the participants. From the Comintern’s point of view, the cadre schools were part of an institutionalized selection process of potential candidates to positions in the party apparatus of national communist parties.

57 J. Arch Getty, “*Samokritika* Rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee, 1933–38,” *The Russian Review* 58 (1999): 52–53.

58 McLoughlin, “Stalinistische Rituale,” 95.

59 Studer and Unfried, “Der stalinistische Parteikader,” 153.

60 *Ibid.*, 211–212.

At the end of the stay, tutors together with Comintern officials and party representatives evaluated the students. They did not only characterize the students' achievements at the schools, but also recommended which tasks they could do or what roles they could fill in the party's organization when returning to the home country.⁶¹

THE BACKBONE OF THE PARTY

When trying to assess the consequences of the cadre education for the Norwegian Communist Party, an essential point of evaluation is to what degree Soviet-educated and "approved" cadres really rose to powerful positions in the party. The basis for the survey is eighty-nine Norwegian individuals accepted at the KUNMZ and the Lenin School during the period 1926 to 1936. Eighty-eight of them are identified. Their average age at the time of joining the education was twenty-five for students at the KUNMZ, while the Lenin School students were an average age of thirty years. As mentioned, few women were among them. In total, eight Norwegian students were females (9 percent). Of the eighty-nine accepted, only seventy-one students completed the education at the cadre schools. The rest never finished for a number of different reasons. Six students had to return to Norway because of health issues, while as many as five students died of illness while staying at the schools. Four students got permission from the Comintern to quit their education in order to serve in the party. In addition, three Norwegians were expelled by the KUNMZ for disciplinary offenses.⁶²

From 1930 onwards, persons with experience from the Comintern schools came to dominate the party's leading executive bodies. The party's secretariat and political bureau had the greatest presence of this category of cadres, while they had less representation among the district representatives in the central committee. Other key positions in the party, such as Chairman of the youth organization and editors of the most important party papers, were largely held by persons who had graduated from the Comintern schools. Several secretaries in the district party organizations had the same education. At the district level, Moscow educated cadres also acted as instructors or special representatives for the party leadership.⁶³

61 Rønning, "Stalins elever," 162–163.

62 Ibid., 108–111.

63 Ibid., 361–362.

However, many of the cadres who graduated in Moscow around 1930, and who dominated the leadership of the party until 1934–35, had extensive experience and even held leading positions in the party before they began studying at the Comintern schools. Only in the second half of the 1930s, there is reason to say that cadres of a “new type” gained control of the party. That is, persons who had a minor or negligible role in the party before their education in Moscow, but with or without the help of the Comintern, rose to senior positions in the party hierarchy when returning to Norway after completing their education.⁶⁴

During the Second World War, the German occupation of Norway made the Comintern cadre education most relevant. Firstly, German police was very aware of communists who had studied in Moscow and targeted them as specifically “dangerous” persons. As many as 45 percent of the persons who had studied at the Comintern schools were arrested by the Germans during the war. Secondly, several of the party cadres educated in Moscow took active part in the communists’ armed resistance movement. Due to the war, thirteen of the eighty-eight identified Norwegian cadres from the Comintern schools lost their lives (over 15 percent), which is a dramatically higher percentage compared to the war losses for the Norwegian population as a whole.⁶⁵ There is reason to believe that many Moscow educated cadres felt a high degree of solidarity with the Soviet Union, and that this motivated their involvement in resistance activities after June 1941. Even more important, they had gone through a basic training of how to use clandestine methods and to run an illegal party organization. The party leadership was aware of the specific skills that these party members had, and wanted to give them special tasks in the fight against the Germans.⁶⁶

The special circumstances created by the German occupation provoked a change in the party leadership. A combination of representatives from the older generation, who the Comintern partly had removed from the leadership in the first half of the 1930s, and new party members, recruited during the resistance activities, gained control of the party. They had the upper hand in the party until 1949, when their rivals orchestrated a coup that reinstalled several of the

64 Ibid., 361.

65 Of the thirteen, the Germans arrested and executed five for resistance activities. Four died in concentration camps, two lost their life in combat, and two committed suicide following arrest. In comparison, the war losses for the Norwegian population as a whole was 0.3 percent. Rønning, “Stalins elever,” 317–318.

66 Ibid., 317–318.

Moscow educated cadres who held leading positions in the late 1930s.⁶⁷ This group of Lenin School educated cadres continued to play a heavy influence in the senior leadership of the party well into the 1960s. This probably contributed to the fact that the party was steadfast in its support of the Soviet Union and Soviet politics, even if a certain de-Stalinization took place after 1956.⁶⁸ Only when new cadres emerged, who had other experiences and preferences, and thus represented another political culture, a development began in the party that ended in the late 1960s when a renewed party leadership partly came in opposition to, and conflict with, Soviet positions.⁶⁹

To sum up, the stay of Norwegian communists at the Comintern schools was a voluntary, time-limited self-development project, in which most of them participated with great enthusiasm. From the mid-1930s to the 1960s, except during the years 1942 to 1949, a group of Moscow-educated cadres dominated the CPN's leadership. They came from the same generation, shared the same political and cultural values, and were familiar with Soviet political institutions. There is reason to assume that they internalized elements of Soviet cultural practices and developed a solidarity with the Soviet Union during their stay in Moscow in the 1930s. Experiences gained in the Soviet Union probably influenced on the disposition systems and political practices of these cadres for the rest of the period they were politically active. It may be argued that the Comintern schools played a part in the forming of a Soviet-loyal communist movement in Norway. The cadre education also represented a vital organizational connection between the leadership of the national communist parties and the central institutions of the Comintern. This must have represented a certain impact in maintaining structure and authority within the worldwide Comintern organization.

Bibliography

-
- Babitschenko, Leonid G. "Die Kaderschulung der Komintern." *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (1993): 37–59.
- Campbell, Alan, John McIlroy, Barry McLoughlin, and John Halstead. "Forging the Faithful. The British at the International Lenin School." *Labour History Review* 68, no. 1 (2003): 99–128.

67 Ibid., 320.

68 Ibid., 351.

69 Åsmund Egge and Terje Halvorsen, "Kriteriet på en kommunist er hans forhold til Sovjetunionen.' De norsk-russiske partirelasjoner 1917–1991," *Arbeiderhistorie* (2002): 27–28.

- Campbell, Alan, John McIlroy, Barry McLoughlin, and John Halstead. "The International Lenin School: A Response to Cohen and Morgan." *Twentieth-Century British History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 51–76.
- Campbell, Alan, John McIlroy, Barry McLoughlin, and John Halstead. "British Students at the International Lenin School: The Vindication of a Critique." *Twentieth-Century British History* 16, no. 4 (2005): 471–488.
- Cohen, Gidon, and Kevin Morgan. "Stalin's Sausage Machine. British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926–37." *Twentieth-Century British History* 13, no. 4 (2002): 327–355.
- Cohen, Gidon, and Kevin Morgan. "British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926–37: A Reaffirmation of Methods, Results, and Conclusions." *Twentieth-Century British History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 77–107.
- Cohen, Gidon, and Kevin Morgan. "The International Lenin School: A Final Comment." *Twentieth-Century British History* 18, no. 1 (2007): 129–133.
- David-Fox, Michael. *Revolution of the Mind. Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918–1929*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- EGGE, Åsmund, and Terje Halvorsen. "'Kriteriet på en kommunist er hans forhold til Sovjetunionen.' De norsk-russiske partirelasjoner 1917–1991." *Arbeiderhistorie* (2002): 27–28.
- Filatova, Irina. "Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923–1937." *Paedagogica Historica* 35, no. 1 (1999): 42–66.
- Getty, J. Arch. "Samokritika Rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee, 1933–38." *The Russian Review* 58 (1999): 49–70.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991*. London: Abacus, 1994.
- Jacobsen, Kurt. *Aksel Larsen. En politisk biografi*. København: Vindrose, 1993.
- Jentoft, Morten. *De som dro østover. Kola-nordmennenes historie*. Oslo: Gyldendal, 2001.
- Kirschenbaum, Lisa A. *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War. Solidarity and Suspicion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Köstenberger, Julia. "Die Geschichte der 'Kommunistischen Universität der nationalen Minderheiten des Westens' (KUNMZ) in Moskau 1921–1936." *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2001/2002): 248–303.
- _____. "Die Internationale Lenin-Schule (1926–1938)." In *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale*, edited by Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat, 287–309 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007).
- _____. *Kaderschmiede des Stalinismus. Die Internationale Leninschule in Moskau (1926–1938) und die österreichischen Leninschüler und Leninschülerinnen*. Wien: Lit Verlag, 2016.
- Krekola, Joni. "The Finnish Sector at the International Lenin School." In *Agents of the Revolution. New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, edited by Kevin Morgan, Gideon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn, 289–308. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005.

- _____. *Stalinismin lyhyt kurssi. Suomalaiset Moskovan Lenin-koulussa 1926–1938*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006.
- Krekola, Joni, and Ole Martin Rønning. "International cadre education of Nordic communists." In *Red Star in the North. Communism in the Nordic Countries*, edited by Åsmund Egge and Svend Rybner, 292–302. Stamsund: Orkana, 2015.
- McCellan, Woodford. "Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools, 1925–1934." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 371–390.
- McIlroy, John, and Alan Campbell. "The Scots at the Lenin School: An Essay in Collective Biography." *Scottish Labour History* 37 (2002): 50–71.
- McLoughlin, Barry. "Proletarian Academics Or Party Functionaries? Irish Communists At The International Lenin School, Moscow, 1927–37." *Saothar. Journal Of The Irish Labour History Society* 22 (1997): 63–79.
- _____. "Stalinistische Rituale von Kritik und Selbstkritik in der internationalen Lenin-Schule, Moskau, 1926–1937." *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2003): 85–112.
- Ólafsson, Jón. *Kæru félagar. Íslenskir sósíalistar og Sovétríkin 1920–1960*. Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1999.
- Pantov, Alexander V., and Daria A. Spichak. "New Light from the Russian Archives: Chinese Stalinists and Trotskyists at the International Lenin School in Moscow, 1926–1938." *Twentieth-Century China* (April 2008): 29–59.
- Rønning, Ole Martin. *Stalins elever. Kominterns kaderskoler og Norges Kommunistiske Parti 1926–1949*. PhD thesis. Oslo: University of Oslo, 2010.
- Schafranek, Hans. "Österreichische Kommunisten an der 'Internationalen Lenin-Schule' 1926–1938." In *Aufbruch-Hoffnung-Endstation. Österreicherinnen und Österreicher in der Sowjetunion 1925–1945*, edited by Barry McLoughlin, Hans Schafranek, Alan Campbell, and John Halestead, 435–465. Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1994.
- Studer, Brigitte, and Berthold Unfried. *Der stalinistische Parteikader: Identitätsstiftende Praktiken und Diskurse in der Sowjetunion der dreissiger Jahre*. Köln: Böhlau, 2001.
- Vatlin, Aleksandr. "Kaderpolitik und Säuberungen in der Komintern." In *Terror. Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936–53*, edited by Hermann Weber and Ulrich Mähler. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998.