

## IV.3 INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES

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### Think Tank, Publisher, Symbol: The Comintern in the Early Soviet Media Landscape\*

*Abstract:* The following short article sheds light on the periodicals published by the Communist International in Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union during the 1920s. Embedding its ventures into the wider context of Soviet press, the article not only adds a forgotten chapter to the history of Comintern press, but traces the ways by which the international organisation tried to partake in the early Soviet media landscape.

The activity of the Communist International (Comintern) as a “global player” is fairly well researched thanks to the opening of the archives in post-Soviet Russia. The wide and deep structures of the Comintern, including its most arcane and classified activities, have been meticulously researched in both the East and West.<sup>1</sup> Yet one question has yet to receive the attention of scholars: how did the Comintern act and how was it perceived within its host country, Soviet Russia? We know from contemporary accounts and works of fiction that the Communist International was an important symbolic figure and projection screen in revolutionary Russia, especially in the first years of its existence. However, this aspect of the Comintern’s history will be addressed elsewhere<sup>2</sup>. This paper will deal, in a concise form, with the tangible activities of the Comintern within the Soviet field of politics from the organisation’s foundation in 1919, throughout the 1920’s, until the consolidation of Stalinism. This will be done through a specific focus to the Comintern’s role in Soviet press. Indeed, Comintern periodicals which were aimed at the Soviet reader are barely covered in specialized publications and bibliographies.<sup>3</sup> Even Soviet research on the Comintern’s

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<sup>1</sup> See: Fridrikh I. Firsov: *Sekretnye kody istorii Komintern. 1919-1943*, Moskva, AIRO-XXI, 2007; Bernhard H. Bayerlein: *Das neue Babylon. Strukturen und Netzwerke der Kommunistischen Internationale und ihre Klassifizierung*. In: *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2004), S. 181-270; Grant M. Adibekov, Eleonora N. Shakhnazarova, Kirill K. Shirinia: *Organizatsionnaia struktura Komintern. 1919-1943*, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 1997; Pierre Broué: *Histoire de l'Internationale Communiste. 1919-1943*, Paris, Fayard, 1997; Kevin McDermott, Jeremy Agnew: *The Comintern. A History of the Comintern from Lenin to Stalin. 1919-1943*, Basingstoke-London, Macmillan, 1996; Aleksandr Iu. Vatlin: *Komintern. Pervye desiat' let*, Moskva, Rossiia Molodaia, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> See Gleb J. Albert: *Representations and Practices of Revolutionary Internationalism in Early Soviet Society, 1917-1927*. PhD Project. In: *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies Online XVI* (2010), 23, pp. 17-24. URL: <[http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/incs/home/data/pdf/INCS\\_23\\_ONLINE.pdf](http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/incs/home/data/pdf/INCS_23_ONLINE.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> Vilém Kahan’s classical Comintern bibliography (*Bibliography of the Communist International. 1919-1979*, Leiden e.a., Brill, 1990) does not cover Comintern periodicals at all (apart from congress bulletins). Bernhard Bayerlein, in his monumental depiction of the Comintern’s structure, lists most of its press organs (Bayerlein, *Das neue Babylon*, p. 239). So does Krystyna Dolindowska’s bibliography, including the purely Russian-language Comintern

history mostly omitted the existence of Comintern press aimed at the domestic audience in Russia.<sup>4</sup> This paper is based on preliminary findings from research conducted in Russian archives and libraries, and it does not claim to offer a complete picture. It is likely that yet more Comintern periodicals aimed at a Soviet readership remain as yet undiscovered.

### **The Comintern and Transnational Knowledge Transfer**

Besides its functions as an organisation to convey revolutionary propaganda and political action, the Comintern held a further central function – namely, as a body of expert knowledge and of transnational knowledge transfer. The Comintern maintained a number of research institutes to supply communist politics with global analyses, including the “Institute of World Economy and World Politics”, run by the prominent Marxist economist Jenő Varga,<sup>5</sup> and the “International Agricultural Institute” maintained by the Red Peasant International.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Comintern’s expert knowledge was highly valuable to Soviet policy and decision makers, not least through providing the Soviet leadership with capable foreign language interpreters and international contacts.<sup>7</sup> In this respect the Comintern was perhaps just as much valuable as it was in its function as a propagandistic symbol.

The archives contain a variety of accounts which demonstrate the ways in which the Comintern served Soviet institutions as a body of transnational knowledge transfer – not only when it came to ideas, but also printed materials. The Comintern appeared to be the first address when it came to obtaining foreign Marxist literature for the needs of the Russian Communist Party (RCP(b)). For example, when the Ural committee of the RCP(b) in early September 1920 asked the Central Committee’s Agitprop department for German literature to maintain propaganda among Germans in the town of Ural’sk, the CC redirected this request to the Comintern – who sent out the necessary brochures just a few weeks later.<sup>8</sup> It was not only communists in the province, but also leading institutions in the capital that made use of the Comintern as an information provider: in November 1924, the German Delegation at the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) wrote a letter to the Malik publishing house in Berlin on the request of professor Raiskii from the Institute of Red Professors in Moscow. The researcher was in need of scholarly literature on the history of the German social democracy, and addressing the German communists at the ECCI appeared the natural thing to do.<sup>9</sup> Such knowledge exchange between Russian and foreign Communist parties’ bodies worked both ways: as part of the 1924 October Revolution jubilee in Germany, CPG education expert Hermann Duncker wrote to the ECCI with a request for

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periodicals, but limited to issues available to the compiler and thus does not give information on the titles’ life span (Krystyna Dolindowska: *Wydawnictwa międzynarodowych organizacji komunistycznych 1919-1943. Katalog. Druki zwarte i ciagle*, Warszawa, Centralne Archiwum KC PZPR, 1987, pp. 102-103).

<sup>4</sup> Liia P. Evseeva (*Pechat' Kominterna. Lektsiia dlia studentov fakul'tetov i otdelenii zhurnalistiki*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1974) mentions that the Comintern’s Russian editions were released at the party publisher „Krasnaia nov” and by the CI’s own publishing house (p. 11), but deals exclusively with the non-Russian press for the rest of the book.

<sup>5</sup> Gerhard Duda: *Jenő Varga und die Geschichte des Instituts für Weltwirtschaft und Weltpolitik in Moskau 1921 - 1970. Zu den Möglichkeiten und Grenzen wissenschaftlicher Auslandsanalyse*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Bernhard H. Bayerlein: *Bauern und Arbeiter aller Länder, vereinigt Euch? Materialien zur Geschichte der Bauerninternationale und des Internationalen Bauernrats (IBR)*. In: *The International Newsletter of Communist Studies Online XVI* (2010), 23, pp. 114-125. URL: <[http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/incs/home/data/pdf/INCS\\_23\\_ONLINE.pdf](http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/incs/home/data/pdf/INCS_23_ONLINE.pdf)>.

<sup>7</sup> When Lev Trotskii needed to write a formal letter to the American Relief Association, he had it translated by the Comintern, even though he was capable of writing English himself (see: Undated note supposedly by Nikolai Sermuks, June 1923. Russian State Military Archive [RGVA], Moscow, f. 4 op 14 d. 13, l. 36).

<sup>8</sup> Russian State Archive of Social and Political History [RGASPI], Moscow, f. 17 op. 60 d. 16, l. 87 and 91.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from the German Representation at the ECCI to Malik Verlag, 20 November 1924. RGASPI, 495/292/9, 298.

“appropriate” Soviet sheet music, including a list of musical works.<sup>10</sup> Thus the Comintern’s couriers did not only carry money and instructions between Soviet Russia and the West, as the popular image of the “Comintern agent” suggests, but also books and orchestra scores. In fact, covert transportation of literature was a central aim of the OMS, the Comintern’s own foreign liaison service.<sup>11</sup>

When, in the second half of 1923, Soviet interest in Germany and its workers’ movement grew significantly, the ECCI’s German delegation even tried to institutionalize and widen the knowledge exchange between Russian and German communism by opening a German Marxist bookshop in Moscow. In a letter to CC secretary Ian Rudzutak from September 11, 1923, the delegation complained that Russian authorities were not putting this plan into action. The Germans further complained that whilst the Soviet “Kniga” publisher did import German books on social sciences, it chose only “bourgeois” literature, thus depriving Soviet communists of contemporary German Marxist thought. By opening a bookshop, the delegation claimed not only to support the CPG’s publishing company, but also to provide the Russian comrades with valuable literature.<sup>12</sup> The plan, however, was met with scepticism by the Bolshevik leadership. A meeting of the CC’s department heads on November 15 – when the preparations for the “German October” reached its peak – decided to postpone the idea, ordering the Agitprop department “to gather more information on the character of the literature that the bookshop of the C. P. of Germany’s party publisher is planning to sell”.<sup>13</sup> Peculiarly, the decision is crossed out from the protocol, and the fate of the German Comintern bookshop in Moscow remains unknown.

### The Comintern’s Journals in Soviet Russia

The Comintern did not only provide Soviet functionaries with books, it strove to provide the whole Soviet political sphere with international information through its periodicals. As a self-styled “World Party”, the Comintern strove to carry out an agitprop strategy of global range. Press policy was a crucial part of that strategy. Not only did the Comintern publish a number of journals of a potentially global outreach, it also advised its sections, the national communist parties, to maintain quality organs.<sup>14</sup> In many countries, the newly formed communist parties had to begin from scratch to build up their press, either because the established workers’ movement organs have remained in the hands of social democracy, or because the organised workers’ movement as a whole had to be built up from scratch. In Soviet Russia, however, the situation was different: since party and state apparatus were heavily intertwined, a different type of press surfaced, forming a powerful apparatus by the early 1920s.<sup>15</sup> The Comintern did not participate in building it up – it had to get its way in.

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Hermann Duncker to Ottmar Geschke, 24 September 1924. RGASPI, 495/292/10, 137.

<sup>11</sup> See: Bernhard H. Bayerlein: *Weltüberwachung statt Weltrevolution? Zum Verhältnis von Terror und Rationalität in der zweiten Hälfte der dreißiger Jahre*. In: Klaus Kinner (ed.): *Moskau 1938. Szenarien des Großen Terrors*, Leipzig, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Sachsen, 1999, pp. 42-65, here p. 46; Vladimir I. Piatnitskii: *Osip Piatnitskii i Komintern na vesakh istorii*, Minsk, Kharvest, 2004, pp. 173ff.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from unknown to State Publishing House (Shmidt), 11 September 1923. RGASPI, 495/292/5, 18; Letter from the German Representation at the ECCI to the Secretariat of the CC RCP(b) (Rudzutak), 3 October 1923. RGASPI, 495/292/5, 21-21ob.

<sup>13</sup> Meeting of the Department Heads of the CC RCP(b), 15 November 1923. RGASPI, 17/112/553, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Aldo Agosti: *The Concept of World Revolution and the “World Party for the Revolution”, 1919-1943*. In: *The International Newsletter of Historical Studies on Comintern, Communism and Stalinism* 4/5 (1997/98), 9-13, pp. 73-83; Serge Wolikow: *L’Internationale Communiste, 1919-1943. Le Komintern ou le rêve déchu du parti mondial de la révolution*, Ivry-sur-Seine, Éd. de l’Atelier, Éd. Ouvrières, 2010, pp. 151-161.

<sup>15</sup> See: Julie Kay Mueller: *A New Kind of Newspaper. The Origins and Development of a Soviet Institution, 1921-1928*. PhD diss., Berkeley, University of California, 1992; Matthew Lenoe: *Closer to the Masses. Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers*, Cambridge/Mass., Harvard University Press, 2004.

The Comintern's main journal *The Communist International* was founded in May 1919 and was issued in four languages – German, English, French and Russian. The Russian-language version, *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, was initially printed in the Comintern's own publishing house in Petrograd and later in different party publishing houses. Even though the ECCI Bureau proposed in early 1920 to issue the Russian edition of the journal at a staggering 100.000 copies per print run (with 5.000 alone being reserved for Trotskii's armoured train),<sup>16</sup> it was, in the end, issued in more modest proportions: the print run ranged between 5.000 (1919, 1923), 10.000 (1925) and 7.000 (1928).

Due to its seemingly arcane topical focus, one might expect the journal to have had little impact on the wide masses or even on the bulk of regional/local party activists. However, archival evidence points towards it being a crucial source of information for party activists all over the region. For example, in May 1919, when the Central Committee became aware of the formation of a party organisation in the Dankovskii district (Riazan' province), the secretariat sent there – as a sort of “welcome package” – a set of the CC's past circular letters along with the first issue of *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*.<sup>17</sup> As several directives show, regional party officials were advised by the CC to seek guidance from the journal when preparing campaigns and celebrations related to international communism: for example when preparing agitational lectures on the opening on the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress of the Comintern in 1921,<sup>18</sup> or as reference material for lectures on the international movement in regional party schools.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, when it came to non-international matters, activists could be advised to consult *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional*, for example for arranging “evenings of remembrance” at the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution.<sup>20</sup> Those references to the Comintern journal do not automatically imply that it was indeed available and being read all over the country, since province party cells even repeatedly had trouble receiving *Pravda* on a regular basis.<sup>21</sup> However, province activists evidently did refer to it – in 1923, as a province party newspaper noted, at an “evening of remembrance” in the town of Osa (Perm' region) the agitator recalled the atrocities of the “Whites” referring to information from the “international journal ‘Communist International’”.<sup>22</sup>

An internal ECCI report on the circulation of one single *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* issue (No. 24, April 1923) shows how the journal was distributed within the Soviet Union in the early 1920s. One copy was sold for 70 kopecks. Of the total of 4659 copies that have been spread, 2950 were sold in the Comintern's own bookshops in Petrograd and Moscow, 900 were passed on to be sold at the 12<sup>th</sup> Party congress of the RCP(b), 144 were kept within the Comintern's structures, and the remaining 809 copies were spread across the whole country, including remote destinations such as Irkutsk, Tiflis and Baku. The recipients were mostly regional and local party organisations and newspaper editorial offices, which

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<sup>16</sup> Protocol of the ECCI Bureau, 21 January 1920. RGASPI, 495/1/6, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from the Secretariat of the CC RCP(b) to the Dankovskii uezd committee of the RCP(b), 29 May 1919. RGASPI, 17/65/59, 126, quoted from V. V. Anikeev e.a. (eds.): *Perepiska Sekretariata TsK RKP(b) s mestnymi partiinymi organizatsiiami. VII: April'-mai 1919 g.*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1972, p. 148.

<sup>18</sup> Circular letter of the Agitprop department of the CC RCP(b) to all party committees and functionaries (draft), 10 June 1921. RGASPI, 17/60/15, 14-14ob.

<sup>19</sup> Program of political education for local and regional party schools, 18 September 1920. RGASPI, 17/60/20, 8-9.

<sup>20</sup> Exemplar plan for evenings of remembrance to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, 1 October 1921. RGASPI, 17/60/38, 16-16ob. For “evenings of remembrance” as a mode of agitation, see Frederick C. Corney: *Telling October. Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution*, Ithaca-New York, Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 210-217.

<sup>21</sup> Cf.: Lenoë, *Closer to the Masses*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> *Večer vospominanii (Gor. Osa)*. In: *Zvezda. Organ Permskogo Gubkoma R.K.P., Gubispolkoma Sovetov i Gubprofsoveta*, N° 243, 27.10.1923.

supposedly spread or resold them. Judging by the random list of destinations and recipients in the Soviet province, there was no coherent plan on behalf of the *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* editorial office to spread the journal outside Moscow and Petrograd – it rather seems that it reacted to requests from provincial organisations which were interested in receiving and spreading it.<sup>23</sup>

Other standard periodicals of the Comintern do not seem to have enjoyed a noteworthy distribution within the Soviet Union. To a large extent, they were not aimed at Soviet Russia. For example, the *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz (Inprekorr)*, the Comintern's weekly news service issued in Berlin and Vienna, was directed at providing provincial Communist press with proper material,<sup>24</sup> yet the Bolsheviks already had press organs for this purpose in Soviet Russia (such as *Krasnaia pechat'*), thus a Russian-language edition of *Inprekorr* was not even produced. However, some activists in the provinces apparently did manage to read it. In the beginning of 1923, an Agitprop functionary in the Vladimir province published a note in a local journal about a translation of Nikolai Bukharin's "Theory of Historical Materialism" into German. In this, he was referring to a review by Hermann Duncker in "Internatsional'nye Izvestiia (Internationale-presse-korrespondents)". The author quoted a substantial portion of the review, and the comparison with the original publication shows a more or less correct translation.<sup>25</sup> The provincial propagandist might have obtained the *Inprekorr* issue in one of the bigger cities: from the memoirs of Lev Kopelev we know that international communist periodicals were available in the 1920s from special foreign press shops – like in Kiev, where the dissident to-be bought Willi Münzenberg's *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* as a boy.<sup>26</sup> All in all, however, it is unlikely that foreign-language Comintern and CP press enjoyed widespread distribution in the Soviet Union. On the eve of the "German October", during a large solidarity campaign in the Soviet Union in favour of the German workers' movement,<sup>27</sup> German communists tried to initiate a subscription campaign for the German CP's central press organ, *Die Rote Fahne*, through a series of articles in *Pravda*.<sup>28</sup> Yet the fact that in October 1924 even the Moscow Committee of the RCP(b) had to ask the Comintern for an issue of *Die Rote Fahne* (which was re-legalised in Germany by that point) speaks volumes about the limited circulation of foreign-language communist press in the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Report about the distribution of *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* N° 24 for April 1923, [before 14 June 1923]. RGASPI, 495/18/197, 11. For inquiries from the province, see RGASPI, 496/1/8.

<sup>24</sup> Irén Komját: *Die Geschichte der Inprekorr. Zeitung der Kommunistischen Internationale 1921-1939*, Frankfurt am Main, Verlag Marxistische Blätter, 1982, p. 15; Edith Gude: *Zur Geschichte der "Internationalen Presse-Korrespondenz"*. In: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 23 (1981), 6, pp. 905-911.

<sup>25</sup> A. Lukachevskii: *O nemetskom perevode "Teorii Istoricheskogo Materializma" N. Bukharina*. In: *Agitator-propagandist. Ezhemesjachnyi zhurnal Vladimirsikogo gubkoma R.K.P. (Bol'shevikov)*, N° 13, February 1923, p. 29. For comparison, see: Dr. Hermann Duncker: *Theorie des historischen Materialismus*. In: *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz*, N° 242, 23 December 1922, p. 1830.

<sup>26</sup> Lev Kopelev: *Und schuf mir einen Götzen. Lehrjahre eines Kommunisten*, München, dtv, 1981, p. 122; Uwe Sonnenberg: *Die Kopelewsche Brücke. Ein Problemaufriss zum öffentlichen Wirken von Lev Kopelev in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1981-1997*, Berlin, trafo, 2007, p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> See: Leonid G. Babichenko: *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b), Komintern i sobytia v Germanii v 1923 g. Novye arkhivnye materialy*. In: *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* (1994), 2, pp. 125-157; Bernhard H. Bayerlein, Leonid G. Babičenko, Fridrich I. Firsov, Aleksandr Ju. Vatlin (eds.): *Deutscher Oktober 1923. Ein Revolutionsplan und sein Scheitern*, Berlin, Aufbau, 2003; Gleb J. Albert: "German October is Approaching". *Internationalism, Activists, and the Soviet State*, 1923. In: *Revolutionary Russia* (2011), 2 (in print).

<sup>28</sup> O raspostranении „Rote Fane“ v Rossii. In: *Pravda*, 15.9.1923; *Podpiska na gazetu "Rote Fane"*. In: *Pravda*, 20.9.1923.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from the German Representation at the ECCI to CC CPG, 31 October 1924. RGASPI, 495/292/9, 232. Also Bernhard Reichenbach, KAPD delegate at the Comintern's 3<sup>rd</sup> World congress, remembered that even though *Rote Fahne* was the only foreign newspaper that international communists could acquire in Moscow, it arrived "very late" (Bernhard Reichenbach: *Moscow 1921. Meeting in the Kremlin*. In: *Survey* (1964), 53, pp. 16-22, here: p. 17).

### The Comintern's Russian Bulletins

The Comintern was interested in maintaining a relationship with Russia's communist press landscape. In May 1919, the RCP(b) issued a circular letter to all its local and regional bodies, urging them to send depository copies of all their printed materials (particularly those dealing with the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress) to the Comintern's press department.<sup>30</sup> It is questionable whether many regional CP bodies followed the call, since even the central party bodies often had to remind the regional organisations to send in their newspapers, but the holdings of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Congress show that the Comintern had received enough material to monitor the congress's reception by the Russian press.<sup>31</sup> However, the Comintern strived not only to monitor Soviet Russia's press landscape, but to actively participate in it. In addition to the Comintern's bulletins issued during the World Congresses (which were rather aimed towards the participants and the international press and less towards a Soviet audience),<sup>32</sup> a general bulletin with Soviet press, party and state institutions as a target group was launched in late 1920. It went under the title "*Biulleten' Kommunisticheskogo internatsionala. Dlia russkoi pechati i organizatsii RKP i politotdelov RSFSR*" ("Bulletin of the Communist International. For the Russian press, RCP organisations and political departments of the RSFSR") and was issued by the Comintern's press bureau, with the Bolshevik press expert Tovii Aksel'rod as chief editor (as stated in N° 7, 26 November 1920).<sup>33</sup> Before ceasing in the second half of 1921, at least 164 issues of the bulletin were released. With approximately 20 pages per issue, before cutting down to 4 pages in 1921, the bulletin encompassed mostly news items from the international communist movement, in part translated from the foreign communist press: strikes, uprisings, party life of the various communist parties, and so on. But it also carried features on the Comintern itself, such as reports from ECCI meetings and reprints of its "open letters" to its sections.

With a print run of only 3.300 (as of March 1921), the bulletin can not be expected to have enjoyed a wide circulation. As its title suggests, it was not aimed at the public, but rather at institutions that manufactured political opinion in Soviet Russia – and even then many may not have received it. Still, the bulletin represented the first attempts in the ambitious project of representing the international communist movement in the Soviet press landscape. The next step was attempted when the Soviet campaign of solidarity with the "German October" reached its peak in late October 1923. During this time, the ECCI brought up a plan to issue a weekly newspaper for the Russian readership. Apparently the idea was born earlier, and independently from the situation in Germany,<sup>34</sup> however it reached the Russian party apparatus only in the late phase of the "German campaign". The RCP's agitprop department initially supported this plan: on November 9 a special commission, composed of Boris Reinshtein (a veteran of the Russian and American socialist movements, and a leading ECCI editor in 1923)<sup>35</sup> and several leading Russian agitprop functionaries, approved the plan and

<sup>30</sup> Circular letter by the Secretariat of the CC RCP(b) to all regional and local party organisations, 9 May 1919. RGASPI, 17/65/59, 126; quoted from Anikeev e.a. (eds.), *Perepiska Sekretariata*, VII, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup> See RGASPI, 488/1/16.

<sup>32</sup> See Kahan, *Bibliography*, pp. 120, 134, 142, 202. For digitised copies of the English-language bulletin of the 4<sup>th</sup> World congress, see <http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=Bulletin%20of%20the%20IV%20World%20Congress%20of%20the%20Communist%20International>.

<sup>33</sup> On Tovii Aksel'rod, see recently: Aleksandr Yu. Vatlin: *Tovii Aksel'rod*. In: *Voprosy istorii* (2010), 1, pp. 33-49.

<sup>34</sup> See Protocol of the ECCI, 28 June 1923. RGASPI, 495/1/68, 138-139.

<sup>35</sup> See the entry "Rejnstejn, Boris Isaevic" in the electronic database accompanying Michael Buckmiller, Klaus Meschkat (eds.): *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der kommunistischen Internationale. Ein deutsch-russisches Forschungsprojekt*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 2007.

suggested to bring it up before the RCP's Orgburo.<sup>36</sup> However it was not met with approval: on November 16, the Orgburo rejected the idea as “not appropriate” and decided instead “to ask the Comintern to improve the ‘Weekly’ that was supposed to serve the party functionaries in Moscow as well as in the province with materials and analyses on the situation in Germany.”<sup>37</sup>

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Mastheads of the “Biulleten’ Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala”, 1920-1921.

The “weekly” that the Orgburo deemed “improvable” was yet another Comintern press project in the Soviet Union: Between October and December 1923, a team of ECCI journalists and functionaries issued a bulletin on the situation in Germany. The bulletin was funded by the RCP through a decision by the CC Secretariat from October 5th 1923. However, the institutional hierarchy is not completely clear: the first issue of the bulletin came out already on October 3rd 1923. Also the decision does not concern the funding of the bulletin itself. Instead it deals with distribution: 1060 subscriptions to the bulletin were to be

<sup>36</sup> Protocol of the Commission to issue a Comintern weekly, 9 November 1923. RGASPI, 17/60/511, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Protocol of the Orgburo of the CC RCP(b), 16 November 1923. RGASPI, 17/112/497, 12.

funded for party organisations and an additional 300 for Komsomol organisations. Furthermore additional copies were to be distributed to selected industrial areas.<sup>38</sup> We do not have documentary evidence of the direct funding and commissioning of the bulletin, however the fact that it was issued in the party publishing house “Krasnaia nov”, and that the party appears to have been concerned about ensuring a wide distribution, shows that the bulletin ranked high on the priority list.

The bulletin came out under the title *Biulleten' Komintern o polozhenii v Germanii* (“The Bulletin of the Comintern on the Situation in Germany”) and reached ten issues, the last one being released on 18 December 1923.<sup>39</sup> With a print run of 2.300 copies, it was once again not aimed at a mass audience, but the aforementioned distribution efforts by the RCP(b) may have ensured at least an effective dissemination among party organisations. The Comintern succeeded in mobilizing renowned international communists as contributors such as Karl Radek, Hugo Eberlein, Frida Rubiner, Julian Marchlewski, and also lesser known Comintern-affiliated journalists and editors such as Mark Moiseev and Aron Malecki.<sup>40</sup> As for the contents, the bulletin delivered inflammatory polemics (such as articles directed against CPG “renegades”)<sup>41</sup> as well as factual material (for example, on the geography of Germany, or on organisational structures of the ultra right). What is striking though, is that the ongoing struggles in Germany, especially the “Hamburg Uprising”, are in no way covered – just as the whole fiasco of the “German October” is not really reflected upon, apart from the CPG’s official declaration “Victory of Fascism over the November Republic and the Tasks of the CPG”,<sup>42</sup> which is reprinted in the bulletin’s last issue. This, however, is merely reflective of the difficulties of Soviet and Comintern politics to publically cope with the German “defeat”. And even though the turning of the “German October” into a non-event did set in in the Comintern earlier than in the Soviet political discourse, the Comintern was no different from other institutions in the Soviet political landscape.<sup>43</sup>

With regard to other internationalist campaigns that followed, the Comintern did not play any major role anymore to provide Soviet society with international content. For example, when a large-scale campaign in support of the striking miners in the UK was unleashed in the Soviet Union by the party in 1926, the Comintern did not establish any comparable periodical publications on the events. Although the Agitprop department of the ECCI did release a bulletin on the “English events”, it was not directed at a Soviet audience, and its contents were quite different from the bulletin of 1923. Mostly it carried stories and examples of Soviet grass-roots solidarity with the “English cause”, intended as materials to be reprinted by the foreign communist press.<sup>44</sup> This reflects wider developments which the Comintern and indeed the whole international communist movement was undergoing by that time: it was more concerned with promoting the USSR than with anything else, and the miners’ strike was just another opportunity to show the “superior” solidarity of the “Soviet people”.

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<sup>38</sup> Protocol of the Secretariat of the CC RCP(b), 5 December 1923. RGASPI, 17/112/485, 10.

<sup>39</sup> For a reference, see Dolindowska, *Wydawnictwa*, p. 102.

<sup>40</sup> The materials of the Bulletin’s editorial staff are located at RGASPI, 495/33/302, however they include merely typescripts of the articles.

<sup>41</sup> M. Levin: *Renegat Paul' Levi v roli 'revoliutsionera'*. In: *Biulleten' Komintern o polozhenii v Germanii*, N° 9, 1.12.1923.

<sup>42</sup> Originally published as: *Der Sieg des Faschismus über die Novemberrepublik und die Aufgaben der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands. Leitsätze*. In: *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz* N° 45, 10.11.1923, pp. 1076 ff.

<sup>43</sup> See Albert, “German October is Approaching”.

<sup>44</sup> The typescripts of the bulletin are located at RGASPI, 495/30/294. It is unclear whether there also were printed issues of the bulletin, or whether it was just distributed in typescript form.



### Indirect Presence: The Comintern in the Provinces

Even though the above-mentioned Soviet press projects launched by the Comintern never surpassed a limited range of influence, the Comintern did have a significant, if indirect, presence in the Soviet provinces through the efforts of regional party organs. As evidenced in the Soviet leaflet collection at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), regional agitprop bodies – partly out of obligations and partly out of dedication to the international movement – often reprinted Comintern manifestoes to be spread as leaflets and posters. News on international revolutionary events were also disseminated in this way – the agitprop departments in Moscow and Khar'kov sought to inform the populace both about the foundation and the fall of the Hungarian Republic of Councils in 1919 through printing the corresponding Comintern proclamations as leaflets.<sup>45</sup> Also the World Congresses provided an occasion for reprinting Comintern decisions and proclamations at a regional level.<sup>46</sup> This was even more the case for those locations in which the Congresses were held. For example when the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress opened in Petrograd, not only was a leaflet issued and spread among the populace,<sup>47</sup> but also a special one-day newspaper was printed and sold on the streets by paperboys.<sup>48</sup>

Such one-day newspapers were not just a phenomenon unique to the capital cities. In the provinces party activists also celebrated the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Congress with similar one-off publications. Judging by a surviving copy from Mogilev, regional activists were able to use this platform to transport their own views on the Comintern and international communism. The double-page newspaper featured nearly no reprints of official Comintern material: instead, it carried, amongst other things, an editorial by a local activist hailing the Comintern as the “Great Leader [Velikii Vozhd'] of the toiling masses”, a report on a rally with Red Army soldiers and Polish communists, a greeting address to the Comintern congress by the local Jewish Bund committee, and even a history of the three Internationals in the form of a fictional short story.<sup>49</sup>

### Outlook

While the Comintern was important for Soviet politics in the 1920s as a reservoir of expert knowledge, its press ventures within the Soviet Union were less successful. Nevertheless they are important as evidence of the Comintern's struggle to partake in shaping the representations of international revolution within the early Soviet information landscape – a struggle which the Comintern had probably lost by June 1925, when TASS, the state news agency, received a monopoly to distribute international news within the USSR.<sup>50</sup> However, as we have seen, the Comintern could also rely on provincial party networks to enjoy the

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<sup>45</sup> „Obrashchenie III-go Internatsionala k rabochim i krest'ianam vsekh stran“ [printed in Khar'kov, March 1919]. State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), Moscow, f. 9550 op. 2 d. 2035; [Declaration of the Comintern on the fall of the Hungarian Council Republic, printed in Moscow, August 1919]. GARF, 9550/2/2052.

<sup>46</sup> For the 3rd World Congress, see following leaflets: „Voprosy i postanovleniia 3-go Kongressa Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala. Konspekt dlia agitatorov k Nedele Kominterna“ [printed in Vladimir, September 1921]. GARF, 9550/2/209; „Kommunisticheskii Internatsional: K russkomu proletariatu, k bedneishemu krest'ianstvu Rossii i k Krasnoi Armii“ [printed in Kostroma, July 1921]. GARF, 9550/2/2024.

<sup>47</sup> „Proletariam Krasnogo Petrograda“, 1 July 1920. GARF, 9550/2/2022.

<sup>48</sup> B. G. Metlitskii: *Odin den' v Petrograde. Rasskaz o poslednem priezde V. I. Lenina v Petrograd 18 iul'ia 1920 goda*, Leningrad, Lenizdat, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Tretii Kommunisticheskii Internatsional. Odnodnevnaia gazeta Mogilevskogo Komiteta R.K.P.*, 17. July 1920. The consulted copy survived in the newspaper collection of the State Historical Public Library, Moscow.

<sup>50</sup> See Lenoë, *Closer to the Masses*, p. 20.

dissemination of its material under its own name. This was partly due to the Comintern, as a charismatic institution, being a powerful political symbol within Communist politics in the Soviet Union – probably much more powerful than it was as a formal organisation. The purpose of this paper has been not only to fill the gaps in the Comintern’s press history, but also to encourage further research on its role as actor and symbol within the early Soviet political landscape.