

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920.* by John Riddell

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The account given here of the relations between industry and agriculture on the eve of stalinism modifies the common picture of industry being held back by a primitive agricultural sector. It is true that the shortfall in agricultural marketings was probably the most important contrast with the prewar economy. But Stephen Wheatcroft argues that this shortfall was not due to the revolutionary removal of landowner and kulak farms, but rather to rational choices made by peasant agriculturists—for example, to use grain to build up devastated livestock herds. Mark Harrison adds further that the 1920s saw a steady rise in marketings. On the other hand, industrial productivity did not fulfill the hopes of the revolution for a variety of reasons, including aging capital stock, a shorter work week, a “liberalized” factory regime and import problems whose effect was particularly pronounced in consumer industries. Thus the assault on agriculture by impatient planners was partly a case of what the Russians call shifting the blame from the sick head to the healthy one.

Anyone who wishes to have a well founded opinion on the economic background to the advent of stalinism should consult this book. A complete reading will lead to a vivid sense of real-life complexities as well as a better grasp of the underlying dilemmas facing Russian rulers of whatever political outlook.

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Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920, volumes 1 and 2. Ed. John Riddell. *The Communist International in Lenin's Time*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991. xiii, 1147 pp. \$140.00, hard bound; \$60.00, paper.

Reading through the thousand pages of proceedings of the second Comintern congress propels one back into an extraordinary moment of conviction and confidence, when for a brief instant people of the margins felt that their time had come. This was really the foundational gathering of the new International, for the first congress a year earlier had collected only a few dozen delegates, almost all of them caught by blockade and civil war in Soviet territory, some of them with quite dubious connections with mass movements. In contrast, in summer 1920 the bolsheviks were riding high, as the foreign intervention in the Russian civil war wound down and the anti-imperialist struggle appeared to be in the ascendancy in Turkey, India and China. Over 200 delegates, some representing movements of considerable strength in both Europe and Asia, arrived at the second congress to debate the conditions for admission to the new International, the “national and colonial question,” attitudes toward parliamentarism and trade unions. Though some, like Britain’s Jack Tanner of the Shop Stewards Movement, questioned the relevance of Russia’s revolutionary experience for more advanced industrial societies, others, including future stalinists like Hungary’s Mátyás Rákosi, already spoke in a language of iron discipline and the danger of deviation from the Soviet example. Some of the debates now have a dissonant ring, particularly the arrogant tone taken toward “bourgeois democracy” and western parliaments, and the assertion of the superiority of Soviet democracy. But others, particularly these early discussions of strategies for transformation of the colonial and “semi-colonial” world, not only had profound consequences in the coming decades but resonate today in the post-Soviet age of rampant nationalism.

Though some militants favored subordinating nationalism strictly to class considerations, in his theses Lenin demonstrated both an awareness of the power of nationalism, even as he hoped to harness it to the proletarian revolution, and his own readiness to ally with “bourgeois nationalists.” In his original Thesis no. 11, Lenin had argued that in backward countries with feudal or patriarchal and patriarchal-peasant relations, “all communist parties must aid the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement in these countries.” The young Indian revolutionary M. N. Roy disagreed with Lenin’s support of the national bourgeoisie and distinguished more clearly than

Lenin the two opposing movements in the colonial world: “the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement, with a program of political independence under the bourgeois order, and . . . the mass action of the ignorant and poor peasants and workers for their liberation from all sorts of exploitation.” Both Roy and Lenin compromised in their discussions over the final draft, and the final resolution stated that “the Communist International should arrive at temporary agreements and, yes, even establish an alliance with the revolutionary movement in the colonies and backward countries. But it cannot merge with this movement. Instead it absolutely must maintain the independent character of the proletarian movement, even in its embryonic stage.” Though the exact nature of the cooperation between nationalists and communists was not prescribed, the Lenin-Roy position adopted by the Congress allowed for provisional common efforts limited by the communists’ ultimate promotion of the social revolution.

The intricacies and nuances of these negotiations, in which even junior members of the revolutionary movement could dispute the positions of the most veteran, are extraordinarily fascinating, especially when one remembers the dessicated debates that were to follow in the post-leninist years. Thanks to the colossal editorial and translation work of John Riddell and his dedicated team, these discussions can be followed in the two excellent volumes under review. (Regrettably Lenin’s original Theses were omitted because they are readily available in translation elsewhere.)

The publication of the documentary record of the Communist International in Lenin’s times is part of an effort by the Socialist Workers’ Party, the major trotskyst party in the United States, to recover a militant past that is rapidly being rewritten. Like the three previous volumes—on the pre-Comintern years 1907–1916, preparing the founding congress 1918–1919 and the proceedings of the first congress, March 1919—these last two are marked by painstaking editorial work, the same careful attention to detail, consultation with scholars in the field, complete presentation of supporting documents, and elaborate glossaries, chronologies, indexes and all the necessary apparatus that make such collections so useful to researchers. The informative introduction by Riddell is unaffected by the occasional use of the language of commitment and what is obviously a labor of love and an important political intervention for its editors is at the same time a major contribution to the history of socialist movements.

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Babushka: The Life of the Russian Revolutionary E.K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia (1844–1934).

By Jane E. Good and David R. Jones. Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1991. x, 253 pp. Index. \$38.00, hard bound.

Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia has suffered the historical fate of many other Russian female revolutionaries: her name has been well known but the woman herself has faded into the shadows cast by male revolutionaries. This may not have been unwarranted in Breshko-Breshkovskaia’s case, for this study demonstrates that she played a role in the revolutionary movement much like those of the two Veras, Figner and Zasulich. That is, she was notable for the purity of her dedication to revolution and her martyrdom, but she remained remote from inner-party politics and contributed little to inner-party ideological debates.

Breshko-Breshkovskaia began her revolutionary career as a *narodnik* living in a commune in Kiev. Arrested during her participation in the “to the people” movement in 1874, she spent the next 22 years in prison and exile. When she returned from Siberia in 1896, she resumed underground activities, soon came under police surveillance but this time fled abroad before the police could arrest her. She ended up in the United States where she made staunch friends among American liberals, particularly feminists. Their support, both moral and financial, helped her more than once