

THINGS BEFORE

HISTORY & MATERIALISM



THE HISTORY OF THE SOVIET UNION'S KUTV

Коммунистический университет трудящихся Востока

BY TALIALUX

COMRADES ARMED

WITH

THE MIGHTY WEAPON OF

LENINISM

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READING THE late American communist Harry Haywood's book, *Black Bolshevik*, readers are given a glimpse into Haywood's time at the Soviet Union's Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV). What exactly was taught at the KUTV? Who were its students? What was the Communist International (Comintern) hoping to achieve by creating this university? This paper provides a brief overview of the history of the KUTV. In this piece, I will outline the history of the KUTV and its lasting impacts on the communist world.

In 1921, the Comintern, created the KUTV. In Stalin's speech to the KUTV class of 1925, he laid out exactly what he wanted colonized peoples to gain from the education, "The task of the University of the Peoples of the East is to make them into real revolutionaries, armed with the theory of Leninism, equipped with practical experience of Leninism, and capable of carrying out the immediate tasks of the liberation movement in the colonies and dependent countries with all their heart and soul."¹ Two years later, Stalin made another speech to the uni-



versity's students. He reiterated the importance of Leninism, stating that students should be "armed with the mighty weapon of Leninism" and, when graduated, would "devote all their energies and knowledge to the cause of emancipating the toiling people of the East from imperialist oppression."²

Ranging from China to the US, and as far abroad as Palestine, the university accepted oppressed peoples from all over the world.³ Stalin spoke to what the definition of "East" was and who the KUTV accepted: "The first group consists of people who have come here from the Soviet East, from countries where the rule of the bourgeoisie no longer exists, where imperialist oppression has been overthrown, and where the workers are in power. The second group of students consists of people who have come here from colonial and dependent countries, from countries where capitalism still reigns, where imperialist oppression is still in full force, and where independence has still to be won by driving out the imperialists."⁴

Further expanding on the importance of separating the KUTV's students into two groups, Stalin stated that, "one line having the

The Soviet East

aim of creating cadres capable of serving the needs of the Soviet republics of the East, and the other line having the aim of creating cadres capable of serving the revolutionary requirements of the toiling masses in the colonial and dependent countries of the East."⁵

Stalin went on to explain the specific goals for each cadre, speaking directly to the unique conditions of demography and geography. For the KUTV's Soviet East cadre, Stalin listed five overarching goals. He wanted students to:

1. "Create industrial centers in the Soviet republics of the East to serve as bases for rallying the peasants around the working class.
2. Raise the level of agriculture.
3. Start and further promote the organization of co-operatives.
4. Bring the Soviets closer to the



masses.

5. Develop national culture."⁶

For the KUTV's colonized cadre, Stalin's five goals for them were:

1. "To win the best elements of the working class to the side of communism and to create independent Communist Parties.
2. To form a national-revolutionary bloc of the workers, peasants and revolutionary intelligentsia against the bloc of the compromising national bourgeoisie and imperialism.
3. To ensure the hegemony of the proletariat in that bloc.
4. To fight to free the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie from the influence of the compromising national bourgeoisie.
5. To ensure that the liberation movement is linked with the proletarian movement in the advanced countries."⁷

Ultimately, the overall goal of bringing these student groups together was to create a "proletarian culture" that informed each group's "national culture" and, ultimately, to foster international solidarity.⁸

The KUTV's first-year class represented over 60 different ethnic groups, and included both male and female party members.⁹ To be admitted, students were required to be between the ages of 18 and 32 and to have organized with a communist party for at least 2 years.¹⁰ Throughout the years, some of the admission standards would change, but involvement with a party remained a key priority. For example, a 1932 letter to the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) laid out even stricter guidelines for those members coming from imperialist nations: "Candidates must be selected from the most valuable, staunch and mature elements of the party and the working class [...] All selected comrades must be of good health such as would enable them to sustain a lengthy period of intellectual study in the climatic conditions of Moscow [...] Candidates must be fully literate either in their native or in one of the European languages and should know arithmetic at the level of whole numbers."¹¹

In 1924, while at the KUTV, Ho Chi Minh wrote that, "the Russian Revolution is not satisfied with making fine platonic speeches and drafting 'humanitarian' resolutions in favor of oppressed peoples, but it teaches them to struggle, and helps them materially and morally, as proclaimed by Lenin in his theses on the colonial question."



Throughout its short existence, the KUTV included many famous alums, such as Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh; Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping; American communist and author of *Black Bolshevik*, Harry Haywood; leader of the Mau Mau uprising and first President of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta; and founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Crisanto Evangelista. If the purpose of the KUTV was the training of future communist leaders, it can, in retrospect, be generally regarded as a success.

KUTV left a lasting impact on its students. Not only were they able

to meet international comrades, but they also learned practical aspects of communist theory. In *Black Bolshevik*, Harry Haywood described his time at KUTV in great detail. Haywood wrote, "We students studied the classic works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. But unlike the past schooling we had known, this whole body of theory was related to practice. Theory was not regarded as dogma, but as a guide to action."¹² Haywood illustrated this by noting that, "We used to attend workers' cultural clubs and do volunteer work, like working Saturdays to help build the Moscow subways. Education for us was not an ivory tower, but a true integration into the Soviet society, where we received first-hand knowledge from our experiences."¹³ Echoing Haywood's sentiments, Ho Chi Minh wrote in 1924, while at the KUTV, that, "the Russian Revolution is not satisfied with making fine platonic

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The KUTV effectively helped its students learn how to take the theory they were learning and put it into practice by going out into the local communities and talking with the workers. One could argue this was a precursor to the *popular education* pedagogy; that is, according to Walter Rodney, a "method of teaching that is overtly political and rooted in the struggles of ordinary people intent on bringing about social change."¹⁵

The KUTV's educational courses were highly structured and the students' itineraries were thoroughly planned out for the year. Ideally,

if students could attend the entirety of the university's program, the full course of study would be about three years. The students' time would include learning languages, discussing theory, military work, and interning in factories, in addition to free time to explore the country.¹⁶ Examples of courses that were offered by the KUTV included: Political Economy, Leninism, Work among Women, Underground Work, Party Construction, and Historical Materialism.¹⁷ Additionally, while attending these classes, students could participate and work in its research department and write for their own research journal entitled, *Revolutionary East*.¹⁸ While *Revolutionary East* has not yet been translated into English, some important articles published in its pages were: "Land Reform in Central Asia," by E. Zel'kina,¹⁹ "From the Experience of the Syrian Up-



rising," by Palestine Communist Party member, Elie Teper,²⁰ and "The Development of National Scripts Among the Eastern Peoples of the Soviet Union and the Origin of Their National Alphabets," by N. F. Yakovlev.²¹

Due to an eventual restructuring of the Comintern's multiple universities, which included the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West, the International Lenin School, and the Sun Yat-sen Communist University of the Toilers of China, the Comintern voted to dissolve the university, and it was subsequently closed in 1938.²² Although they might not have known it at the time, the Soviet Union's KUTV had a meaningful and lasting impact on its alums. Notably, Ho Chi Minh led Vietnam's successful revolution, defending the country against French, Japanese, and US imperialism. Ho Chi Minh fulfilled every goal that Stalin laid out for the colonized cadre, and the

KUTV's legacy lives on in Vietnam today.

With this brief historical overview of the KUTV, it is the concluding hope of this article that, as communists, we might continue this discussion of the importance of both the KUTV and communist education more generally. There exists, to date, no study or book released in the English language about the students of the KUTV, the general impacts of the university, or the changes KUTV students made in the world after attending the university.

There exist, however, millions of untranslated documents in the Soviet Archives concerning the KUTV and the other schools of the Comintern—documents sorely in need of translation.

The KUTV, in its brief span of existence, fulfilled its potential to unite indigenous and colonized peoples, to build a truly international socialist movement, and to assist in the fight against fascism, colonization, and imperialism.

The KUTV also reminds us that an organized educational and pedagogical approach to communist political practice is essential in the struggle to create a better and more just world.

Sample Courses from the KUTV

1. Political Economy - 200 hours
2. History of the All-Union Comintern 230 - 240 hours
3. Leninism - 280 hours
4. Historical Materialism - 120 hours
5. Party Construction - 330 hours
6. Military Science - 120 hours
7. Current Politics - 80 hours
8. English Language - 160 hours



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