Fatton, Robert 1986, Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy, New York: SUNY Press.

Gordon, Lewis 1997, Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age, Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Guevara, Ernesto 2003, Che Guevara on Global Justice: Liberation and Socialism, New York: Ocean Press.

Hardt, Michael 2010, 'The Common in Communism,' Rethinking Marxism, 22(3): 346-356.

Mills, Charles 2003, From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism, Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.

Prucha, Milan 1965, 'Marxism and the Existential Problems of Man,' in Socialist Humanism, edited by Erich Fromm, New York: Anchor Books.

Sexton, Jared 2006, 'Race, Nation, and Empire in a Blackened World,' Radical History Review, 95 (Spring): 250-261.

Wilderson III, Frank 2003, 'Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?,' Social Identities, 9(2): 225-240.

Wynter, Sylvia 2003, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresenatation – An Argument,' CR: The New Centennial Review, 3(3): 257-337.

Riddell, John ed. 2012. *Towards the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922.* Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, ISBN: 1570-1522. Hardback: 283 US. Pages: 1310. Chicago: Haymarket Books, ISBN: 9781608462360.

Reviewed By Paul Kellogg
Athabasca University

Finally, almost a century after the fact, the proceedings of the 1922 Fourth Congress of the Communist International are available in English, thanks to the diligent translation and careful scholarship of John Riddell. Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922 – the latest in a multi-volume collection of documents from the years before, during and after the Russian Revolution of 1917 – was made available to a limited audience in its 2011 hardback edition, and as of November 2012 in a much more affordable paperback version published by Haymarket Books (2011a; 2012a).

Although only in print for a few months (at this writing), Toward the United Front has already served to re-animate an engaged discussion about the big experience which was the Russian Revolution of 1917. November 2011, the eighth annual Historical Materialism conference in London, U.K., marked the book's publication with a series of panels involving thirty-eight different presentations, which 'reflected vigorous activity in this field, while also pointing up some research challenges for historians of the workers' movement' (Riddell 2011b). At Historical Materialism in Toronto, Canada in May 2012, the book was again the centre of many of the discussions, providing the theme for 11 presentations on three different panels (Riddell 2012b).

Ian Birchall, an intellectual long associated with the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in Britain, has written one of the earliest extensive reviews of Toward the United Front. 'Grappling with the United Front' is a very welcome, thoughtful and useful article, an article that serves as a good entry point into the massive volume.

One issue raised early on by Birchall merits further consideration, and will provide the framework for this article. Birchall writes: 'Many years ago, when I was young, it was common to find orthodox Trotskyists who claimed they based their politics on "the first four congresses of the Comintern". (You can probably still find such people in the remoter reaches of the Trotskyist blogosphere.) A position that made some sense in the 1930s, when Trotskyists were insisting that there was a clear break between Lenin and Stalin, became less and less relevant as both capitalism and the working class went through enormous changes' (2012, 195). Birchall is making a point, underlined by Abigail Bakan at a 2012 Toronto symposium on the Fourth Congress, that the proceedings of this (and the other congresses) need to be approached not as textbooks but rather as history books (Riddell 2012b). A too uncritical reliance on the First Four Congresses, is inevitably accompanied by a 'too angular' understanding of the contrast between the 'experienced Russian' leadership of the Comintern, and the 'inexperienced, mistake-prone' leadership of the non-Russians.

Avoiding a too uncritical approach to this complex history has been made much easier with the publication of Toward the United Front and its companion volumes. They provide documentation of important discussions and political positions which are still relevant, many decades later. They also reveal key moments where the Comintern leadership, including its core Russian section, was quite wrong, sometimes

catastrophically so. It is, for instance, generally conceded that the Comintern leadership made a serious error in the March Action of 1921, and this will be briefly examined here. Less well-known is the Russian invasion, the previous year, of the oppressed nation of Poland, which – because less well-known – will be examined here in more detail. These two events taken together graphically (and tragically) illustrate Birchall's point. However, with this history in mind, it will become clear, that this is an important issue for more than just a handful in the 'Trotskyist blogosphere', as he maintains. Some veteran Marxist writers who helped frame this discussion in the 1980s and 1990s, veteran Marxists long associated with Birchall, need to be critically re-read with this approach in mind.

First, take a quick survey of the 1921 German débacle. What we now know as the 'March Action' of 1921 was an attempt by the German Communist Party (KPD), to 'force' the German workers into revolution, even though the party represented only a small minority of the working class. 'The essence of the March Action … was that "the party went into battle without concerning itself over who would follow it" … Rather than break off the contrived operation, the leadership increased the pressure on members and used all the means it could think of, including sabotage and faked bomb attacks on Communist property, to bring other workers out on strike' (Morgan 1975, 398–399).

The party paid an enormous price for this adventurism. It was, arguably, irreparably damaged. Thousands of party members were arrested, "400 sentenced to some 1,500 years hard labour, and 500 to 800 years in jail, eight to life imprisonment and four to death" (Broué 2006, 506). Tens of thousands left the party, many leaving politics altogether, with party membership plummeting from 450,000 to 180,443 (Angress 1963, 217n). Pierre Broué's 1971 study, available in English since 2006, documents the very accurate analyses of the Luxemburgist cadres Clara Zetkin and Paul Levi, who in March 1921 – before the fact – were absolutely clear that the German left was in no position to challenge for state power, and who were the first, Levi especially, to openly oppose the ultraleft politics which led to such a disaster (2006, 507–515). By contrast, the Comintern leaders – the members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) – pushed hard for the March Action, and were proven completely wrong. Lenin and Trotsky – after the fact – provided extremely clear critiques of the failures of the March Action. But hindsight is always 20/20, and in the decisive weeks in March, the ECCI's key representatives in Europe were aggressive advocates for this very costly failure. The lessons from this catastrophe are codified in the politics of the united front. There is a straightforward reason this term informs the title of the Fourth Congress proceedings. The united front concept, as Birchall indicates, was the central theme of the Fourth Congress (and the Third Congress) of the Communist International.

We know a little bit about the March Action. It is a classic example of the problem of substitutionism – bypassing the mass self-emancipation of the working class, and attempting to substitute for it the actions of a minority "radical" section of the class.

We know quite a bit less about an even more serious event, the 1920 Russian invasion of Poland. Here was a much more extreme case of substitutionism – the attempt to substitute the revolutionary class with the bayonets of the Red Army.

In the spring of 1920, a Polish army had occupied Kiev, the most important city in the Ukraine. The Russian counter-attack was quickly successful in pushing the Polish army back to the "ethnographic" border of Poland. Unfortunately, the Russian Army did not stop there, but instead launched a massive invasion of Polish territory.

Leon Trotsky opposed this invasion. "Trotsky was convinced … that the entry into Polish territory by a Russian army, even under a red flag, would be felt like an invasion in the manner of Tsarism and would provoke a leap in Polish nationalism." Trotsky did not believe "in the export of the revolution at the point of bayonets" (Broué 1988, 269, author's translation). On the Russian side, nationalism also came to the fore – but not the nationalism of an oppressed nation, but the ugly patriotism of Great Russian chauvinism.

> Many Russians, including former Whites who had fought against the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War, opposed the reestablishment of Polish independence, and regarded the war as a traditional conflict between two opposing states. As a result, numerous former tsarist officers joined the ranks of the Red Army, including most famously, A.A. Brusilov, who wrote on 1 May 1920, that the, '… first measure [of the Soviet regime] must be agitation of national patriotism, without which an army cannot be strong and battleworthy' (Croll 2009, 19–20).

In Russia, the Bolsheviks were playing with a very dangerous fire – the fire of Great Russian chauvinism. Trotsky saw this, and argued against the invasion, but unfortunately stood almost alone against the vast majority of the Russian leadership, including against Lenin (Trotsky 1970, 457). Ignoring the advice of Trotsky meant ignoring the advice of the person who was, without question, the most experienced in these matters. In 1917, he had been head of the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the St. Petersburg Soviet, the committee which organized the October Revolution. From 1919 to 1925 he served as People's Commissar of army and navy affairs, and was the pre-eminent political and organizational leader of the Red Army which emerged victorious and saved that revolution from defeat by foreign invasion and internal civil war. But this experience was ignored, and against Trotsky's advice, the invasion of Poland proceeded, and proceeded with little sense of restraint or caution.

The 1920 Second Congress of the Communist International was in session while the invasion was under way (proceedings of which are available in Riddell 1991a; Riddell 1991b). "Delegates to the Communist International sitting in Moscow were in paroxysms of excitement as they watched the flags showing the positions of the Red armies move

forward every day on the huge map that hung on the wall. World revolution seemed within reach" (Zamoyski 2008, chap. 4). This reflected the view, held by virtually all of the senior Comintern leaders, that a military victory in Poland could be a spark for revolution in Germany. In the full flush of these illusions, Lenin gathered Comintern delegates from Germany around a map, asking them where in East Prussia there was likely to be an uprising to greet the victorious Red Army, after it had swept through Poland and reached the border with Germany. "The three Germans," one of whom was Paul Levi, "stared at him in amazement. East Prussia was known as one of the most conservative German regions". Expecting an uprising there to greet invading Russian troops correctly struck these delegates as absurd (Angress 1963, 67).

If it was absurd to expect conservative German peasants to rise up at the sight of Red Army bayonets, it was even more absurd to expect Polish peasants – long the victims of Great Russian chauvinism – to greet this army as their liberators. The Russian general leading the invasion – Mikhail Nikolaievich Tukhachevsky – had achieved extraordinary success in the Civil War in Russia. But that success was based not so much on his military "genius," but on the clear understanding, primarily shaped by Trotsky, of the class politics behind the Civil War. In Russia, the military campaigns coincided with a class struggle of peasants against landlords. This meant that Tukhachevsky could march his massive armies through land where the peasants would "provide them with supplies and make good his losses in men" (Zamoyski 2008, chap. 4). For the Russian peasants, the victory of the Red Army over the White Army meant a victory by the Russian peasants over the landlords who had kept them poor and oppressed for generations. This made Red Army victories in the Civil War in Russia, part of the revolutionary victory of the oppressed classes in Russia.

But Poland was not Russia. True, the Polish peasants were oppressed by a rich and corrupt landlord class, just as were the Russian peasants. But they were also oppressed by Russia, through a long history of invasions and occupations. The relation of Poland to Russia was analogous to that of Ireland to Great Britain, Quebec to English Canada, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) to the United States. The Polish people were an oppressed nation within the prison-house of nations that had been Tsarist Russia. An army of Russian peasants was not going to be greeted as a liberation army any more than would be a British army in Ireland, an English Canadian army in Quebec, or an 18th-century U.S. army in Haudenosaunee territory in what is today New York state.

There is another aspect to the invasion – an odious aspect – that has to be examined. Not only was the territory through which the Russian army was marching that of an oppressed Polish nation – it was territory with a very large Jewish population. The instrument with which the "liberation" of Poland was to be accomplished – the Red Army – was to say the least, ill-suited to the added task of liberating the Jews of Poland. Tukhachevsky might very well have been a brilliant general. He also had a background, as a young man, of being an anti-semite. In 1917, during World War One, he was a

prisoner-of-war in Bavaria, and there made the acquaintance of French journalist Remy Roure, "one of the most prominent journalists and newspapermen in France in his day, a founder of Le Monde and its political editor from 1945 to 1952" (Furr III 1986, 297 fn 11). In 1928 Roure published, in Paris, a biography of his now famous former cellmate. He records a conversation revealing the most vile anti-semitism. "The Jews … are a low race. I don't even speak of the dangers they create in my country" (Zamoyski 2008, chap. 3). Those who wish to read the whole excerpt can follow the footnote. This small portion of the full quotation reveals Tukhachevsky's anti-semitism very clearly. The year of this prison interview was the same year, a few months later when back in Russia, that he was to join the Bolshevik Party.

Anti-semitism was an issue not just for ex-aristocrats like Tukhachevsky, but for the very poor peasant class which formed the core of the Red Army. This millions-strong conscript army was a brilliant construction, crafted principally by Trotsky, but it was not well-suited to liberating an oppressed nation, let alone one with a large Jewish population. Three-quarters of the Red Army soldiers were peasants, and, according to Orlando Figes "… its [rank-and-file soldiers frequently became involved in violent looting, especially when passing through non-Russian (particularly Jewish) areas."

> The Red Army, it is important to bear in mind, was predominantly Russian in its ethnic composition. Even units conscripted in the Ukraine and other non-Russian regions (for example the Tatar Republic) were largely made up of Russians. Anti-Semitism was a powerful and growing force in the Red Army during the civil war, despite the fact that a Jew, Lev Davidovitch Trotsky (Bronstein), stood at its political head. Trotsky received hundreds of reports about his own soldier's violence and looting in Jewish-Ukrainian settlements, some of which he must have known from his youth (1990, 195–196).

This chronic problem became acute once the Red Army was defeated, and retreating in disarray back to Russia. "The men had begun deserting in large numbers, while those who remained took out their disappointment on the inhabitants of the villages and towns they passed through, particularly the Jews" (Zamoyski 2008, chap. 5). Political commissars, attached to this army, were horrified. When the retreat took the army, now reduced to a rabble, into the heavily Jewish city of Zhitomir in the Ukraine, a telegram, dripping with urgency, was sent to Lenin.

> In recent days Zhitomir has faced a new task. A new wave of pogroms has swept over the district. The exact number of those killed cannot be established, and the details cannot be established (because of the lack of communication), but certain facts can be established definitively.

> Retreating units of the First Cavalry Army (Fourth and Sixth Divisions) have been destroying the Jewish population in their path, looting and murdering … Emergency aid is vital. A large sum of money and food must be sent (Lenin 1996a, 117).

These Russian bayonets were not going to lead to liberation in Poland.

The invasion – the attempt to spark an uprising of the oppressed people of Poland through the use of the bayonets of a Russian army – was an unqualified disaster. Trotsky called it "the catastrophe before Warsaw". Because of the invasion, he argued, "the development of the Polish revolution received a crushing blow" (1970, 458–459). "[W]e have suffered an enormous defeat" said Lenin, "a colossal army of a hundred thousand is either prisoner of war or [interned] in Germany. In a word, a gigantic, unheard-of defeat" (1996b, 106). But in this speech, Lenin only partially confronts the scale and importance of this defeat. He did not, for instance, address the fact that it was a defeat preceded by a completely wrong perception of the likely response of the Polish nation, and a defeat resulting from a military operation carried out against the advice of Trotsky. In addition, Lenin was almost certainly underestimating the scale of the defeat. A contemporary military history puts Russian losses in excess of 200,000. Tukhachevsky "like his hero Napoleon in 1812 … had lost an army". In the days before finally signing a peace treaty, with conditions worse than had been on offer before the Russian invasion, "the road to Smolensk and Moscow lay open" (Zamoyski 2008, chap. 5). The defeat in Poland, then, did not only destroy prospects for revolution in Poland. It severely jeopardized the very existence of Soviet Russia.

With these two incidents in mind, read a selection from the 1985 history of the Comintern written by the late Duncan Hallas, a founder and for many years a central leader of the SWP in Britain. "[O]n the main issues, on the central thrust of its political line, the Comintern leadership was right and all its opponents, in their different ways, were wrong. That is precisely why the heritage of the first four congresses, in principles, in strategy and in tactics, is so indispensable to revolutionary socialists today" (1985, 164).

This perspective informs Hallas' entire approach. In the Introduction to his book, he quotes Trotsky, who wrote: "The International Left Opposition stands on the ground of the first four congresses of the Comintern." Hallas then argues that "[t]he Socialist Workers Party, in Britain, also stands on this ground – which is why the emphasis of this book is on the Comintern's revolutionary period, the period of the first four congresses and immediately after" (1985, 8–9). Two years after the publication of his book, Hallas went on a North American speaking tour to mark the 70th anniversary of the Russian Revolution of 1917. In an interview published at the time, he argued: "We take from Trotsky …the tradition which he contributed to making, of Bolshevism and of the Communist International in its early years after the Russian Revolution. …The whole

complex of both ideas and experiences that were developed during this period of socialist history are what guide us" (1987, 5).

Hallas' book is an excellent introduction to the Comintern. It is very much a critical history. He highlights the great accomplishments of the Comintern, including a focus on the united front method. He documents clearly the degeneration after the first four congresses, when the Comintern became little more than an extension of the foreign policy of the then state-capitalist Soviet Union. And he has criticisms of aspects of its work in the earlier period. "The perspective of the Red International of Labour Unions was mistaken and, by 1921, this should have been recognized and the necessary conclusions drawn" (1985, 164). But his overall emphasis is on the key role of the first four congresses, and in those congresses the superiority of the Russian experience, the Russian political method and the Russian leadership, when contrasted with the inexperience and political confusion that existed outside of Russia. The March Action story does, of course, strain this orientation considerably. Hallas recognizes the terrible role of the Comintern leadership. But he dilutes this by deflecting the problem towards the German KPD, emphasizing that the ECCI enthusiasm for this adventure found a huge echo among leading members of the German party. That is true, but beside the point. There is no reason, with the evidence he presented, that a story could not be told of a quite far-seeing German cadre, trained by Rosa Luxemburg, who had a pretty good sense about what to do in Germany in the early 1920s, but who were muscled out of the way by a well-financed, well-staffed Comintern cadre, who had no sense about what to do in Germany in the early 1920s. We cannot schematically separate the "good judgement" of the experienced, well-trained ECCI from the "bad judgement" of the inexperienced, ill-trained German leadership. It is a frame which simply will not work.

Hallas qualifies his close identification with the Russian leadership and their political decisions during the first four congresses. "[W]e cannot simply apply these lessons mechanically without thought to different situations" (1987, 164). But an over-drawn portrait of the virtues of the Comintern and Russian party's leadership makes it difficult to identify and analyze the sometimes serious errors which they made. The Comintern leadership, in the period of the first four congresses, was not always right on the main issues. The invasion of Poland and the March Action in Germany were not small, tactical blunders – but mistakes which had historic, and tragic, consequences. Birchall is right: an angular perspective which uses the frame – "on the main issues … the Comintern leadership was right and all its opponents … were wrong" does open the door to difficulties. But the quote and the framework are from Hallas, a central theoretician of Birchall's party, not someone from the "Trotskyist blogosphere".

Birchall is aware of the limitations of Hallas' book. In another of his recent publications, Birchall argues that it and certain other Trotskyist histories "are valuable in that they defend what was best in the early years of the Comintern …while sharply contrasting that early period to the later Stalinist horrors. Yet they remain essentially

defensive." He contrasts that with the method of Hallas' co-thinker, Tony Cliff, who "drew on a different tradition, the work of Alfred Rosmer and Victor Serge, which combined a total commitment to the basic aims and ideals of the Comintern with a recognition of its limitations in practice" (2011, 400–401).

And in fact Cliff does provide sometimes very harsh criticisms of the actions of the Comintern leadership. On the March Action, he says that "unlike other defeats" it was "not brought about by misdeeds of the local national leadership, but by the adventurist policy imposed on the German party by the leadership of the Comintern." Worse, this mistake would only be partially confronted. The Comintern leaders responsible for the disaster – Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Kun – would be barely reprimanded. Paul Levi – in Cliff's words, "the talented former leader of the KPD, who had been wronged by the central leadership of the Comintern" – would end up expelled and outside the party. With good reason, then, Cliff calls this chapter of his biography of Lenin, "The Great Cover-up" (1979, 110–111).

But remember, Cliff is dealing with this as an isolated exception to a general rule. The March Action was "unlike other defeats". In his four-volume biography of Lenin, the 1920 invasion of Poland – much more serious than the March Action, certainly in terms of lives lost, probably also in terms of its impact on the Russian state – is not even mentioned. He does deal with it in his biography of Trotsky, agreeing that "Lenin's policy turned out to be wrong and costly" (1990, 132). But this seriously understates the scale of the catastrophe. The overwhelming emphasis of the bulk of Cliff's many writings on the Russian Revolution, is on the superiority of the Russian leadership – in particular the superiority of Lenin – when compared with the leaders of the left outside of Russia. Cliff, quite in the spirit of Hallas, in general paints a picture of an experienced, wise Russian leadership, interacting with an inexperienced, sometimes foolish non-Russian left, a non-Russian left prone to errors and mistakes which needed to be corrected through a deep study of the Russian, Bolshevik history. Cliff makes this point very sharply in his biography of Trotsky. "The Congresses of the Comintern were schools of strategy and tactics, and at them Lenin and Trotsky played the part of teachers, while the leaders of the young Communist Parties were the pupils" (1990, 217).

This approach is not helpful. The error on the March Action was not a single moment in an otherwise unblemished record. The 1920 catastrophe in Poland was equally destructive to the revolutionary process, and equally the result of the "teachers" – in this case Lenin – making an error of enormous proportions. This error was not a minor, accidental one – but one which exposed crucial flaws in Lenin's and the Bolsheviks' very conception of revolution. In a secret speech in 1920, Lenin outlined the most serious of these flaws, when he explained to the audience that, while it was not put into a resolution or minutes of the Central Committee, "we said among ourselves that we must probe with bayonets whether the social revolution of the proletariat in Poland had ripened" (Lenin 1996b, 98). This is a shocking statement. The attempt to "export" the

revolution through military invasion is the antithesis of the notion of self-emancipation which underlies any meaningful Marxism, a self-emancipation which was the essence of the Soviet experience at the core of the Russian Revolution. It was not just an episodic mistake. On 23 July 1920, "Lenin wrote to Stalin raising the possibility of a thrust through Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary with the aim of staging a revolution in Italy. In his reply, Stalin agreed that 'it would be a sin' not to try" (Zamoyski 2008, chap. 4). This approach was taken up and codified by Tukhachevsky (1969) in a theory of the "revolutionary offensive war" – an explicit argument that socialism could be advanced through force of arms. Trotsky furiously combatted these deeply substitutionist notions of socialist transformation, this theme, according to Isaac Deutscher, running "like a red thread through his writings and speeches of this period" (1954, 473). In a critique of Tukhachevsky, Trotsky openly links the two episodes – the Russian invasion of Poland in 1920 with the German attempt at a revolution in Germany in 1921. "Since war is a continuation of politics by other means, must our policy be offensive? … This was a very great and criminal heresy, which cost the German proletariat needless bloodshed and which did not bring victory, and were this tactic to be followed in the future it would bring about the ruin of the revolutionary movement in Germany" (1981, 5:306).

The "teacher-student" binary does not work as a framework during two crucial moments, the 1920 war with Poland and the 1921 March Action in Germany. In fact, this framework is misleading as a way of understanding the very core of the Fourth Congress, and the key term in the title of the Fourth Congress proceedings, the "united front". As Birchall indicates, "[t]he united front was not spun out of the skulls of the Comintern's leaders. It was born of the experience of workers in Germany" (Birchall 2012, 199). Riddell, in his introduction – leaning on Broué's classic history – outlines this very clearly.

> The ongoing need for …a united front was posed by an assembly of Stuttgart's metalworkers in December 1920, acting on the initiative of local KPD activists who were strongly influenced by Zetkin. The metalworkers adopted a resolution calling on the leadership of their union, and of all unions, to launch a joint struggle for tangible improvements in workers' conditions. …Although the Social-Democratic leaders rejected this appeal, the Communist campaign in its favour won wide support from union councils. …A month later, in January 1921, the KPD as a whole made a more comprehensive appeal for united action to all workers' organisations, including the Social Democrats. This "Open Letter" reflected the views of party co-chair Paul Levi, working in collaboration with Radek (Riddell 2011a, 6).

It is very significant that it was workers in Stuttgart, Germany who were the first to arrive at the united front approach. As Riddell indicates, it is Stuttgart where Clara Zetkin had her base and where she had influence. This base had been built over years. In 1916 and 1917, Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacists (precursor to the KPD) had "put their advantage as the first outspoken opponents of the war to good use, building themselves strong positions in the party organizations in Stuttgart, Braunschweig, and parts of Berlin" (Morgan 1975, 45). The united front approach emerged out of the experience of the German workers themselves – out of the work, in particular, of the advanced workers influenced by Zetkin and the other Luxemburg-influenced members of the KPD. The united front approach was momentarily generalized into the German movement through the "Open Letter" initiative of another German leader, Paul Levi – but encountered almost universal opposition from the representatives of the Comintern working in Germany. The implementation of the united front approach was tragically derailed through the March Action catastrophe, outlined above. It is only after this catastrophe that the united front approach was generalized as a method, into the Communist International as a whole.

It is true that during both the Third and Fourth Congresses, Trotsky in particular, clearly outlined the key principles of the united front, and in this sense was the teacher, lecturing to pupils at a school of strategy and tactics. It is true that he articulated a clear opposition to Lenin in the run-up to the Polish invasion, and did his best to "teach" the Bolsheviks of their mistake in the months after. But it won't help to replace Lenin with Trotsky, and retain the frame of "teacher-student" to understand the dynamics of the Comintern. To paraphrase the young Karl Marx, circumstances are changed by human beings, and the educator must herself be educated (1976, 4). The emergence into consciousness of the need for the crucial united front orientation came from the experience of the German workers and was at first carried publicly by key German socialists such as Zetkin and Levi. It is the active, organizing experience on the ground, serious socialists interacting with advanced workers, where the educators became educated.

The outline presented here of this little-studied episode in the Russian Revolution poses many issues which can only be touched on here, and which will have to be investigated in greater detail on another occasion. What I want to suggest, is that the different perspectives on the invasion of Poland – best crystallized in the contrast between the vehement opposition to invasion articulated by Trotsky, and the retrospectively naieve and quite wrong support for the invasion by Tukachevsky and Lenin – reflect tensions at the very heart of the Bolsheviks' understanding of the nature of revolution.

This was not the first moment where Trotsky and Lenin found themselves on opposite sides of an argument. Ian Thatcher has characterized the relationship between Trotsky and Lenin during the war years immediately preceding the 1917 revolutions, as "a story of almost continuous opposition" (1994, 114). This opposition was not softened

with anything resembling diplomacy. "Trotsky," Lenin wrote in 1914, "has never had any 'physiognomy' at all; the only thing he does have is a habit of changing sides, of skipping from the liberals to the Marxists and back again, of mouthing scraps of catchwords and bombastic parrot phrases" (1964, 160). The year previous, Trotsky wrote about Lenin, saying "the entire edifice of Leninism at the present time is built on lies and falsification and carries within itself the poisonous inception of its own dissolution" (cited in Service 2009, 129). We can reject the simplistic explanation for this history of antagonism offered by Stalinist historians, an explanation whose purpose is to portray an unbroken line of Trotskyist "crimes" in order to discredit his political legacy. What this antagonism does represent, I would suggest, are some quite different emphases on the key aspects of the class struggle in Russia and Europe on which Trotsky and Lenin built their perspectives.

Trotsky, in the manner of Luxemburg and Gramsci, understood the profoundly democratic, self-emancipatory core of the working class, urban, European workers' movement. It was not for nothing that in both 1905 and 1917 he was elected chair of the soviet in St. Petersburg. On several occasions before 1917, Trotsky expressed the opinion that Lenin did not always clearly grasp this urban, democratic, proletarian core of the coming European revolution. Trotsky in 1915 "characterized Lenin as a thinker in whom 'revolutionary democratism and socialist dogma live side by side without having been amalgamated into a living Marxist whole'" (Thatcher 1994, 105). This echoes the young Trotsky, who in the wake of the famous 1903 split in Russian social democracy, agued that Lenin was too much the Jacobin, and not enough a social democrat (a phrase which at the time meant "revolutionary socialist") (1979). Jacobinism was the revolutionary form appropriate to revolutions against feudalism, such as the French Revolution. The leading section of those revolutions was a relatively small section of the urban petty bourgeoisie, relying in the city on the periodic intervention of the urban masses, relying in the countryside on the periodic mass actions of the rural peasantry. There then typically evolved a highly centralized urban core, with a big emphasis on militarization, which operated with a certain suspicion of the urban and rural mass. The mass action in the cities, in particular, could become a problem, as that action tended to push beyond the bounds of the anti-feudal revolution and test the territory of an anti-capitalist revolution, something the Jacobins were not prepared to countenance.

The Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 involved a combination of this kind of Jacobin anti-feudal revolution: a democratic revolution against semi-feudal, Czarist conditions – and something completely new and which demanded very different strategies and tactics: a workers' revolution against capitalism. Neither revolution could win without the victory of the other. Lenin and the Bolsheviks navigated the difficult project of combining both revolutions, and Lenin openly embraced incorporating Jacobinism into the workers' movement. "A Jacobin who wholly identities himself with the organisation of the proletariat — a proletariat conscious of its class interests— is a

revolutionary Social-Democrat" (Lenin 1961, 381). This incorporation, however, was not an easy task. The tactics appropriate to the anti-feudal revolution are not easily imported into the anti-capitalist revolution. Within the latter – at its core urban, working class and democratic – forward progress is only possible through mass self-activity. There is a high degree of democracy built-into this experience – taking its highest form in institutions such as the soviet. Upheavals against feudalism are different. All upheavals against feudalism do, of course, involve furious mass action by the rural peasantry. But they also always necessitate a highly centralized, militarized struggle – the Roundheads of Cromwell's era or the Jacobins of the French Revolution. The insistence on the invasion of Poland represented an over-emphasis on the military aspect of the struggle. The push for an insurrection during the March Action even though the KPD represented a small minority of the working class, represented an attempt to sidestep the self-activity of the urban working class. Both reflected the extent to which, throughout the Bolshevik cadre, there was a misunderstanding of the extent to which the European class struggle had evolved away from the tactics of an earlier era and towards the tactics of mass, democratic, self-emancipation appropriate to the class struggle in contemporary capitalism.

This limitation of the Bolshevik experience does not invalidate a more general point. "On many issues that have proven central to world social struggles, such as racism, colonialism, women's emancipation, and the struggles of small farmers, the [Fourth] Congress mapped out the road that the workers' movement followed during the subsequent century" (Riddell 2011a, 54). The publication of Toward the United Front makes easier a rounded assessment of the work of these Congresses, and of the entire era of the Russian Revolution, an assessment which embraces both the successes and the failures – the helpful and constructive positions taken, as well as the catastrophic and destructive. It is, as Birchall indicates, "an invaluable work of reference" (2012, 196). One of the really striking aspects emerging from this work of reference, is the light it sheds on the deep humanity of the participants. The political "lines" developed at these Congresses did not come from edict or prescription, but were rather the result of sometimes harsh debates between serious activists from different countries, most of them intensely engaged with the social movements of the day. "These delegates were tough women and men who had lived through an exceptionally demanding decade" (Birchall 2012, 197). Reading the proceedings of this and the other early Congresses, will enhance the reputation of some of these militants (Clara Zetkin and Paul Levi for instance), and diminish that of others (Grigory Zinoviev and Béla Kun to name two). That is all to the good. To properly assess the lessons of the past, we need all the information from that past, and on the basis of that information, draw our own conclusions about how best to use this history in our own work in the 21st century.

References

Angress, Werner T. 1963. Stillborn Revolution: The Communist Bid for Power in Germany, 1921-1923. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Birchall, Ian. 2011. Tony Cliff: A Marxist for His Time. London: Bookmarks.

———. 2012. "Grappling with the United Front." International Socialism II 135 (Summer) (June 12): 195–205.

Broué, Pierre. 1988. Trotsky. Paris: Fayard.

———. 2006. The German Revolution, 1917-1923. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Cliff, Tony. 1979. Lenin: The Bolsheviks and World Communism. London: Pluto Press.

———. 1990. Trotsky: The Sword of Revolution, 1917-1923. Bookmarks.

Croll, Kirsteen Davina. 2009. "Soviet-Polish Relations, 1919-1921". Ph.D. Thesis, Glasgow: Department of Central and East European Studies, University of Glasgow. http://theses.gla.ac.uk/663/.

Deutscher, Isaac. 1954. The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921. London: Oxford University Press.

Figes, O. 1990. "The Red Army and Mass Mobilization During the Russian Civil War 1918-1920." Past & Present (129): 168–211.

Furr III, Grover C. 1986. "New Light on Old Stories About Marshall Tukhachevskii." Russian History/Histoire Russe 13 (2-3): 293–308.

Hallas, Duncan. 1985. The Comintern. London: Bookmarks.

———. 1987. "On Building a Socialist Alternative, Part II." Socialist Worker (Toronto), December, 132 edition.

Lenin, V.I. 1961. "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party) [1904]." In Collected Works of V.I. Lenin: January 1902 - August 1903, Translation of the Fourth, Enlarged Russian Edition, 7:201–423. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

———. 1964. "The Break-up of the 'August' Bloc [1914]." In Collected Works of V.I. Lenin: December 1913 - August 1914, edited by Julius Katzer, Translation of the Fourth, Enlarged Russian Edition, 20:158–161. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

———. 1996a. "Report on Red Army Pogroms, with Lenin's Reaction, 17-18 October 1920." In The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive, by Richard Pipes, 116–118. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1996b. "Political Report of the Central Committee RKP(b) to the Ninth All-Russian Conference of the Communist Party, 20 September 1920." In The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive, by Richard Pipes, 95–115. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Marx, Karl. 1976. "[Theses on Feurbach]." In Collected Works of Marx and Engels: 1845-1847, 5:3–8. New York: International Publishers.

Morgan, David W. 1975. The Socialist Left and the German Revolution : a History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, 1917-1922. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Riddell, John, ed. 1991a. Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920. Vol. 1. 2 vols. New York: Pathfinder.

———, ed. 1991b. Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920. Vol. 2. 2 vols. New York: Pathfinder.

———. 2011a. Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922. Boston: Brill Academic Publishers.

———. 2011b. "Communist History Debated at 'Historical Materialism' London Conference." John Riddell: Marxist Essays and Commentary. November 25. http://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2011/11/25/communist-history-debated-at-historical-materialism-london-conference/.

———. 2012a. Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

———. 2012b. "New Voices and New Views on Revolutionary History." John Riddell: Marxist Essays and Commentary. May 28. http://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2012/05/28/new-voices-and-new-views-on-revolutionary-history/.

Service, Robert. 2009. Trotsky: A Biography. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Thatcher, Ian D. 1994. "Trotskii, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, August 1914-February 1917." The Slavonic and East European Review 72 (1): 72–114.

Trotsky, Leon. 1970. My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography. Pathfinder Press.

———. 1979. Our Political Tasks [1904]. New Park Publications.

———. 1981. How the Revolution Armed : the Military Writings and Speeches on Leon Trotsky : Materials and Documents on the History of the Red Army. Vol. 5. 5 vols. London: New Park Publications.

Tukhachevsky, Mikhail. 1969. "Revolution from Without." New Left Review I 55 (May-June): 91–97.

Zamoyski, Adam. 2008. Warsaw 1920: Lenin's Failed Conquest of Europe. Kindle. HarperPress.

Neigh, Scott. 2012. *Resisting the State: Canadian History Through the Stories of Activists*. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing. ISBN 978-1-55266-520-6. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 227.

Reviewed By Ted McCoy
University of Calgary

What is the value of dissent and resistance in Canadian history? In Resisting the State, Scott Neigh answers this question by suggesting that the history of activism and social movements can provide an alternative to conventional history that lionizes consent and consensus. Along with a companion book on gender and sexuality, the book offers stories of resistance constructed from the viewpoint of activists. Neigh suggests that these