Education Programme

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A Marxist education series with links to key texts on Marxists.org and theoretical work from the League

New Education pamphlet for new members
New Members Education pack [1] (Downloads as a PDF)

I INTRODUCTORY SERIES (4 meetings)

1. The Class Struggle and Socialism
Reading:
The Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels) [2]
Socialism Utopian and Scientific (Engels) [3]

Questions:
What are classes and why are they important for understanding history?
How do historical changes take place?
In what sense is the modern working class similar to previous oppressed classes and in what sense is it different?
Why is the working class the agent or carrier of socialist change?
Is socialism the automatic result of the development of capitalism?
Can socialist production be organised in some areas or industries within the overall capitalist system and if not, why not?
What is the difference between utopian and scientific socialism?

2. Reform or Revolution?
Reading:
Reform or Revolution (Rosa Luxemburg) [4]
Where is Britain Going? esp. chapters 2-5 (Trotsky) [5]

Questions:
How do Marxists answer the argument that historical and political change is mainly gradual?
What is a revolution? Why do Marxists believe that revolution is necessary and possible? What is the difference between socialist revolution and earlier types of revolution?
Is violence ever justified? Can there be non-violent change? What would be the consequences for the working class if the reformist road were followed to its conclusion? Why are reformist ideas so strong within the working class movement?

3. The Revolutionary Party
Reading:
The Urgent Tasks of our Movement (Lenin) [6]
Where to Begin? (Lenin) [7]
The Organisational Structure of the Communist Parties, the Methods and Context of their work. (Communist International)
What is to be Done? (Lenin) - especially part I (D), Part II and Part III. [9] Theses on Communist Organisation [10]

Questions:
What is a party? Why does the working class need a political party? What is the principal purpose of a revolutionary party? What is ?spontaneity?? Is the working class spontaneously socialist? Is the job of the party to organise the spontaneous struggle or to divert it? If the working class must be led by a party, how does that conform with Karl Marx?s statement that ?the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself??
How should a revolutionary party be organised? What is a ?professional revolutionary?? What should the obligations of party membership be? What is meant by ?democratic centralism?? Can democracy and centralism contradict each other?

4. The Revolutionary Programme
Reading:
The Transitional Programme (Trotsky) [11]
On the Backwardness of the American Workers (Trotsky) [12]
Whither France? (Trotsky) [13]
Once Again, Whither France? (Trotsky) [14]
Questions:
What is a programme? Is it an essential feature of a revolutionary party? What was the ?minimum maximum programme?? What is a ?transitional programme?? Does the transitional programme abolish the minimum programme altogether? Are transitional demands ?unrealistic?? Should demands be raised that are far ahead of the existing consciousness of the masses? Can transitional demands be met within the capitalist system? Do transitional demands apply in non-revolutionary situations? Is the Transitional Programme valid today?

II Fundamentals of Marxism

1. What is Marxism?
Reading:
The Three Sources and Component Parts of Marxism (Lenin) [15]
Karl Marx (Lenin) [16]
The German Ideology (Part I) (Marx) [17]
Questions:
What are the component elements of Marxism and how do they relate to each other? What is philosophical materialism? What is the dialectic? How do these concepts relate to Karl Marx?s theory of history? Is Marxism more than a method of prediction and perspective? Is Marxism a science? What should we make of Lenin?s statement that Marxism is ?all-powerful because it is true?? Is Marxism a closed or finished system? Can Marxism be developed to take account of new and changing phenomena, and, if so, how?

2. Marxist Political Economy
Reading:
On Marx?s Capital (Engels)
Wages, Prices and Profit (Marx) [18]
Karl Marx (Lenin) - section on Political Economy [19]
Anti-Duhring, Part II - Political Economy (Engels) [20]
Das Kapital [21]
Karl Marx?s Theory of Crisis (Richard Brenner, Credit Crunch: A Marxist Analysis)
Questions:
Why does Marx begin his analysis with an examination of the commodity? How does he distinguish
between the use-value and the exchange value of a commodity? What is the source of value and how can
this be proved? What is labour-power? What is exploitation? Are workers paid the true value of their labour-
power? What is wrong with the slogan ?A Fair Day?s Work for a Fair Day?s Pay?? How does capitalism
conceal its exploitation of the worker? Can capitalism continue forever?

Reading:
The ABC of the Materialist Dialectic, from In Defence of Marxism (Trotsky) [23]
Anti-Duhring (Engels) [24]
An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism (George Novak) [25]
Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy (Engels) [26]
Questions:
What is formal logic? What are its limitations? What are the laws of dialectical logic? Does dialectics
abolish formal logic? Give applied examples of the main laws of the dialectic from a) nature, b) politics, c)
personal life. Is the dialectic intrinsic to the Marxist method?
What is materialism? What is idealism? Can the existence of matter independent of our sense-perceptions
be proved - and if so, how? Is it possible to adopt a consistently materialist point of view without the
dialectic? Is it possible to adopt a consistently dialectical approach without materialism?
What does the Materialist Dialectic tell us about the relationship between human beings and history, the
individual and society, the objective and subjective factors in human development and the relationship
between the party and the working class?

4. The Transition from Capitalism to Communism:
Reading:
State and Revolution (Lenin) [27]
Critique of the Gotha Programme (Marx) [28]
The Degenerated Revolution - chapter 1, the transition from capitalism to communism (Workers
Power/IWG). [29]
Socialism: The transition to Communism [30]
Questions:
What is a state? What have been the historic reasons for the existence of the state? Is it possible to
?abolish? the state? What is meant by the ?smashing? of the state? What is meant by the dictatorship of
the proletariat? To what extent must capitalist norms persist under the dictatorship of the proletariat? What
is a semi-state? can socialist construction be carried out without a semi-state? What are the economic
foundations for the withering away of the state? Will there be distinct stages in the development of a
communist society? Can the transition to socialism be blocked and reversed and if so, how?

5. Marxism and the family:
Reading:
The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the state (Engels) [31]
Marxism and Women?s? Liberation (LRCI) [32]
Questions:
Can Marxism explain the existence of women?s? oppression? Does the oppression of women pose a
problem that cannot be answered by historical materialism, with its stress on social relations of production
and class antagonism? Explain the origins and social roots of the oppression of women, youth and sexual
minorities. Why does Engels identify the origins of both the state and the patriarchal family in the break-up
of the primitive commune? Does subsequent anthropological work confirm or undermine Engels? position? Why did the Communist International insist that there is no distinct ?woman question? separate from the class struggle as a whole? Do working class men benefit from the oppression of women? Should we support the demand for wages for housework? What are the programmatic errors of the feminists and the ?economists? and how can a revolutionary programme against women?s? oppression be developed today?

III FUNDAMENTALS OF LENINISM

1. Lenin?s critique of economism
Reading:
Where to Begin (Lenin) [7]
What is to be Done? (Lenin) [9]
?What is to be Done? The question economism can?t answer? from The Politics of the SWP - a Trotskyist critique (Workers Power) [33]
Socialism and Black Liberation chapter 4 (Workers Power) [34]
Questions:
What is ?economism?? What is the significance for Marxists of correctly appraising the relationship between spontaneity and consciousness? What for Lenin is the spontaneously arising ideology of the working class movement? What are the limits of trade union ideas and trade union politics? What did Lenin mean by describing trade unionism as ?the ideological enslavement of the workers to the bourgeoisie?? If, as Lenin says, ?class political consciousness must be brought to the workers from without?, how can this accord with Karl Marx?s dictum that ?the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself?? What is the distinction between propaganda and agitation? What should the role of the socialist intelligentsia be in the revolutionary party?
What is there in common between economism and i) terrorism, ii) separatism, iii) processism.

2. Lenin and the National Question
Reading:
The Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Lenin) [35]
Critical Remarks on the National Question (Lenin) [36]
Preliminary draft theses on the national and colonial questions (Lenin for second congress of the Communist International) [37]
Marxism and the National Question (Dave Stockton, Trotskyist International 12) [38]
Bolsheviks and the National Question (Dave Stockton, Trotskyist International 13) [39]
On the Sino-Japanese war (Leon Trotsky) [40]
Questions:
Why is the national question a bourgeois question? Why does it have a ?negative character? for Marxists (Lenin). Why do Marxists support certain national struggles and not others? What principles govern that support? How can the proletariat fight for national ie bourgeois rights whilst maintaining its class independence?
What is a nation? What do Marxists mean by the right of nations to self-determination? When should Marxists support demands for national autonomy and/or independence? Should Marxists ever support separation by nationalities from workers? states?

Reading:
Imperialism, highest stage of capitalism (Lenin) [41]
Imperialism and the decline of capitalism (Michae Proebsting, Credit Crunch: A Marxist Analysis)
Questions:
What for Lenin are the distinguishing features of imperialism as a distinct phase of capitalism? Why does he call it the highest stage? Is imperialism a policy or a system? Does imperialism develop the colonial world or strangle it? Can we speak of imperialism today when most of the former colonies have won political independence? What are the political consequences of Lenin's theory? What is the ?labour aristocracy?? In what sense does imperialism prepare the world for socialism?

4. Lenin and the Struggle against Imperialist war.
Reading:
Peace Utopias (Luxemburg) [43]
The War and Russian Social Democracy (Lenin) [44]
War and the Fourth International (Trotsky, Writings 1933-34). [45]
Lenin and Imperialist War (Trotsky - Writings 1938-39). [46]
Questions:
What are the fundamental causes of war in the imperialist epoch? Are Marxists pacifists, and if not, why not? Under what circumstances would Marxists support a war? What is revolutionary defeatism? What is revolutionary defencism? How would the tactics of Marxists in an imperialist country differ, i) in a war against another imperialist country and ii) in a war against a colony or workers' state? What is the connection between imperialism and reformism? How does the pacifism of reformists differ from the pacifism of workers and youth? Do Marxists support draft evasion or conscientious objection? What is the ?proletarian military policy? and is it a development or abandonment of Lenin's policy? Do Marxists support the slogan of ?disarmament?? Do Marxists support conscription?

IV THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

1. Bolshevik, Menshevik and Trotskyist concepts of the impending revolution
Reading:
Trotsky - an Introduction (Richard Brenner - Chapters 1, 2 and 6) [47]
Permanent Revolution (Trotsky) [48]
Three conceptions of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky, Writings 1939-40 [49]
1905 and the Origin of the Theory of Permanent Revolution? Fifth International Journal Volume 1, Issue 3) [50]
Lenin, Trotsky and the Permanent Revolution? (Paul Morris, Trotskyist International no.18) [51]
Questions:
What is a bourgeois revolution? Why were all the factions of the Russian Marxists agreed that the coming revolution would be bourgeois? What were the principal questions that were impelling Tsarist Russia towards revolution? What was the main difference between Lenin and the Mensheviks on the character of the revolution? What did Lenin mean by the ?democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry?? Why did Trotsky regard this slogan as inadequate? Did Trotsky?s theory of permanent revolution involve underestimating the peasantry or ignoring the bourgeois character of the revolution?

2. 1905 - the dress rehearsal
Reading:
1905 (Trotsky) [52]
Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution (Lenin) [53]
Questions:
What forces and what illusions were exhausted and weakened in the 1905 revolution? What is the
significance of the soviets which emerged in 1905 and can they only arise spontaneously? What was the nature of the Bolsheviks? initial sectarian error in 1905 and what caused it? What did 1905 show us about the role and significance of the General Strike as a tactic? Should the Petrograd Soviet have launched an armed uprising? Were the Bolsheviks wrong to launch a rising in Moscow, as Plekhanov later claimed?

3. 1917 - from February to October

Reading:
The Road to Red October (Workers Power)
Trotsky - an Introduction (chapter 1) [47]
The April Theses (Lenin) [54]
Can the Bolsheviks retain state power? (Lenin) [55]

Questions:
In what sense were the April Theses a break with the ?Old Bolshevism?? What was dual power? Why did Lenin argue against an insurrection in July? How did the Bolsheviks use the method of the united front as regards the Provisional Government and how important was this in winning over the masses to Bolshevism? What were the implications of the Bolshevik slogans for ?Constituent Assembly?, ?Bread, Peace and Land? and ?All Power to the Soviets?? What was significant about the Bolsheviks? response to the Kornilov coup? What are the conditions for the success of an armed insurrection? If Lenin had not returned to Russia in the spring of 1917, would there have been an October Revolution? What does this tell us about the role of the individual and political leadership in history?

4. Did Lenin lead to Stalin?

Reading:
Stalinism and Bolshevism (Trotsky, Writings 1937) [56]
Trotsky - an Introduction (chapters 4 and 5) [47]
Defending the Workers? Dictatorship [57]
In Defence of October (Dave Stockton, Trotskyist International 09) [58]

Questions:
Did Lenin?s stress on a centralised and disciplined party lead directly to Stalin?s one-party state? Did the failure of socialist construction in Russia prove the Mensheviks right? Could there have been an alternative, peaceful, parliamentary outcome to the events of 1917? What were the main differences between the regime of the Bolsheviks before and after the rise of Stalin? What should we make of the following measures of the Bolsheviks in power: i) the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, ii) the suppression of other parties, iii) the repression of the Kronstadt rising in 1921, iv) the Ban on Factions in 1921? What measures must the working class adopt to avoid the bureaucratic degeneration of 21st century revolutions? Did Lenin lead to Stalin?

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Links: