

Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: A Historical Controversy Revisited

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ABSTRACT

'Bolshevization' and 'Stalinization' have been used variously by historians of American and British Communism to designate and date the processes by which the Comintern and national parties were subordinated to Soviet policy. Despite their pervasive influence on the American and British left, this literature reveals little curiosity or consensus about the politics of Bolshevism and Stalinism, their history and relationship, indeed, these labels have sometimes been employed inexactly and interchangeably. In some narratives, Bolshevization dates from 1924 and was completed from 1929. In others, the Comintern and its affiliates were Stalinized from 1924, in still others, from 1929. The historiography of the Soviet Union, in contrast, includes forensic interrogation of Bolshevism and Stalinism, their meaning, periodization and consequences as well as the continuities and disjunctures between them. This work has been overlooked by historians of the American Workers' Party and the British Communist Party. The present article assesses both literatures. It utilizes insights from Sovietologists to argue that Stalinism constituted a politics and practice connected with but distinct from Bolshevism. Reviewing Comintern and party history, it proposes a specific periodization. State Bolshevism, 1919–1923, saw subjugation of the American and British parties to Russian imperatives. Incipient Stalinism, 1924–1928, witnessed restructuring of the politics of subordination. From 1929, Stalinization accomplished a distinctive subordination. It enthroned a politics and practice foreign to that of Lenin and the Bolsheviks which endured, through different phases, until the 1950s.

KEYWORDS

Lenin; Stalin; Bolshevism–Bolshevization; Stalinism–Stalinization; Soviet Union; Comintern; Communist Party of Great Britain; Workers' Party of America

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Introduction

Did Lenin lead inexorably to Stalin? Was Stalinism the inevitable outcome of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917? Should historians consider developments after 1917 as a continuous process and employ 'Bolshevik' and 'Stalinist' interchangeably? Or accord greater weight to discontinuities between the early and later 1920s, between the party-state of Lenin and Stalin? Should Stalinism be characterized as a politics, programme and practice, distinct from, even antagonistic to, Bolshevism? How did Bolshevism and/or Stalinism – and their correlatives, Bolshevization and Stalinization – influence the Comintern and its national affiliates? Scholars have pondered such questions for decades. The passions aroused during the Cold War have abated but they continue to divide historians.

In the early post-war period, students of the Soviet Union nurtured few doubts that tyranny was inherent in the 1917 revolution, the Stalin regime its natural destination (Fitzpatrick, 1986, p.375).¹ By the 1980s, Sovietologists approbated continuity in more sophisticated forms, although dissenting academics qualified mainstream consensus.² In recent decades, the turn from political to social and cultural history ensured these issues were relegated to the footnotes (Kangaspuro & Oittinen, 2015; Litvin & Keep, 2005). For their part, historians of the Comintern favoured an undifferentiated political tradition: 'the later developments are the logical result of the basic assumptions of Lenin and of the history of the Russian revolutionary regime and the Communist International' (Borkenau, 1938/1962, p.12).³ The historiography of national Communisms reflected conflicting interpretations. An early history of the American party argued that many of the sources of Stalinism were to be found in Bolshevism; but Stalinism was radically different (Howe & Coser, 1957/1962). The major work on American Communism in the 1920s never mentioned Stalinism or Stalinization. Its author believed Bolshevism – and Bolshevization – persisted through the decade (Draper, 1957, 1960). The pioneering study of German Communism, in contrast,

employed ‘Stalinization’ to denote the subordination of the party (KPD) to Moscow between 1924 and 1929 (Weber, 1969, 2008). During the last quarter of a century, the historiography of American and British Communism has largely disdained argument about continuity and disjuncture, while inclining, sometimes inexplicitly, towards the former. Most historians devoted scant attention to the literature which aired these controversies.⁴ Research which does address them (for example, LaPorte, Morgan & Worley, 2008a) is uneven and inconclusive.

This debate has been dismissed as arcane and of minimal interest to ‘a post-Stalinist generation.’⁵ On the contrary, clarification is indispensable to accuracy and precision. These problems lie at the heart of comprehending the complexities of the Russian revolution and its consequences, rendering it imperative they be considered by new generations grappling with the problematic past and unprepossessing present of socialism. Scholarship marking the centenary of 1917 confirms their continuing pertinence to broader issues (particularly Smith, 2017; Žižek, 2017; see also Besancenot, 2017; Engelsten, 2017; McMeekin, 2017; Miéville, 2017).⁶ If this landmark in twentieth-century collective action inspired by passion for justice, equality and liberation was destined to culminate in what Edward Thompson termed ‘one of the ultimate disasters of the human mind and conscience, a terminus of the spirit’, what price human emancipation? (Thompson, 1978/1981, p.139). If we conclude, with Eric Hobsbawm, that ‘the tragedy of the October revolution was precisely that it could only produce its kind of ruthless, brutal, command socialism’ (Hobsbawm, 1994, p.498) we are likely to entertain pessimistic conclusions about alternatives to capitalism. The stories we tell about the Soviet experiment, the Comintern and the Communist parties will differ according to whether we conflate or distinguish Bolshevism and Stalinism. In an era when historians specialize and too many consign the big issues to the margins, re-examination of how and why the Soviet Union developed as it did and its impact on world Communism appears timely.

This paper is restricted to the 1920s and focuses on the Comintern with brief reference to the American Communist Party (WP) and its British counterpart (CPGB).⁷ It offers a political analysis. The next section reviews scholarship which discusses continuity and disjuncture between Bolshevism and Stalinism. The third part looks at the Comintern in Lenin's time in the light of that literature; the fourth focusses on the 'Bolshevization' of 1924–1925 and the rise of Stalin. It is followed by scrutiny of the ascendancy of Stalin and how historians have understood developments as 'Bolshevization' or alternatively 'Stalinization'. These sections propose a political periodization based on a historicized distinction between Bolshevism and Stalinism and their influence on the International and its affiliates. Finally, we return to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper.

Bolshevism and Stalinism in the historiography: Sovietology

Bolshevism is fundamental to the literature and requires brief delineation. It represented the attempt to reproduce, in conditions of Tsarist illegality, the political and organizational philosophies of the Second International, exemplified in the German Social Democratic Party, specifically its left wing. Theory and practice evolved to meet new challenges, whether in 1905, 1914, 1917 or its aftermath. Enduring was conviction that capitalism, an international system, could only be challenged internationally; that revolutionary advance required rejection of reformism, syndicalism and economism; and that a democratic party with centralized activity was necessary. The Bolsheviks encouraged freedom of expression internally and externally, and accepted factions were important in developing programmatic clarity and unity in action. That was the kernel of democratic centralism. Lenin remarked in 1906: 'Criticism within the limits of the principles of the party programme must be quite free ... not only at party meetings, but also at public meetings ... The party's political action must

be united' (Lenin, 1906). Such freedom became unsustainable in periods of severe repression and for a party ruling a state facing aggression and civil war.⁸

The Bolsheviks considered a socialist economy and society impossible without eliminating capitalism in advanced countries. As Marx had suggested, revolution in Russia could ignite that process. Under party leadership, workers could establish soviets, overthrow Tsarism, shoulder the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, take steps towards socialism and stimulate revolution in the West – on which further progress hinged. This strategy was premised on the inability of the liberal bourgeoisie to complete the democratic revolution; Marx's conception of an uninterrupted 'revolution in permanence'; and an alliance between proletariat and peasantry. Bolshevism, as we shall demonstrate, constituted a complex, changing politics which accommodated different strands and seeded different approaches. It would not do to play down its diversity and flexibility; or its Jacobin strains, machinations, and ruthlessness. The idea that the Bolsheviks were simply a conspiratorial sect/dogmatic leadership cult possesses little foundation. Lenin was pivotal to the genesis of its ideas, politics and practice, and during his lifetime it appears difficult, even artificial, to talk of 'Leninism' distinct from Bolshevism.⁹ Others, Bukharin, Trotsky, Kamenev, Radek, Stalin and many more, contributed to processes characterized by division and debate.

We will discuss how these ideas developed when Bolshevism in power came under threat and the consequent emergence of Stalinism in the rest of this essay. As an analytical concept, Stalinism was almost completely absent from early Sovietology. The dominant, although often unargued, 'straight line' thesis conceived the path twentieth-century Russian history took as the pre-determined outcome of Bolshevik ideology: the Soviet party, its policies and leadership were enduringly Bolshevik. Explanatory stress was placed on Lenin's theory of revolutionary organization – allegedly ordained in 1902 in *What is to Be Done* – the dictatorship of the party, and the violence practised in Lenin's lifetime. Stalinism – when the

term began to be used, it was typically as descriptor or epithet – flowed from events before 1917 while the revolution was sometimes conceived as coup d'état rather than popular rising. For many authorities, what happened from 1929 was inherent in Bolshevism and Marxism *per se*. A totalitarian state, terror, coercive collectivization, and brutal industrialization furthered the revolution rather than derailing it.¹⁰ Bolshevism 'determined the character of post-revolutionary Leninism as well as the main traits of what we call Stalinism' (Ulam, 1960, p.198).¹¹ More specifically, 'the most enduring achievement of Leninism was the dogmatization of the party, thereby in effect both preparing and causing the next stage, that of Stalinism' (Brezinski, 1961, p.354).

Partisanship was never far away. The equation, Bolshevism = Stalinism was complemented during the Cold War by the ideology of the Soviet state and its advocates in the world's Communist parties. There, too, it was held that Bolshevism = Stalinism, with the final part of the Western formula, = tyranny, replaced by the Eastern, = socialism. When, in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev fractured the narrative, he did so incompletely: the cracks, he claimed, emerged only from 1934, 'mistakes' were attributed to Stalin, the personality cult, and an out-of-control police state; socialism survived (McIlroy, 2016, pp.14–22). Some Sovietologists were more rigorous: a minority broke with convention to argue that Stalinism was connected to, but in crucial aspects different from, Bolshevism. Stalinism was by no means the inevitable result of 1917. Causation should be located not only in ideology but in subsequent circumstances and choices, personalities and struggles. The mid-1920s witnessed 'a clash between two political camps: between what was still Bolshevism – a radical branch of Russian and European Social-Democracy – and a new current that emerged from the Bolshevik party and which would become known as Stalinism' (Lewin, 2005, p.300).¹²

Dynamic and malleable, Bolshevism, Robert Tucker insisted, was far from the fixed creed stereotyped by earlier scholars. It contained no programmatic masterplan for socialist

construction, rehearsed under War Communism, mothballed during the New Economic Policy (NEP), and implemented from 1929. Aspects of Lenin's thinking, particularly the voluntarist thread running through *State and Revolution* and employment of state coercion to drive forward the dictatorship of the proletariat, influenced Stalin's policies and drew support from enthusiasts of War Communism. However, Tucker stressed, Lenin's views underwent modification from 1921. Prior to his death, he was pondering an evolutionary path which would combine market mechanisms with state regulation in order to foster industrialization while maintaining partnership with the peasantry. That violent termination of the NEP was avoidable, that there were alternatives, was suggested by his last articles and warnings about Stalin – as well as support among Bolsheviks for more measured policies. Stalinism was not an *ad hoc* reaction to crisis in 1928, but a considered policy influenced by 'Stalinist Leninism' (Tucker, 1973, 1977a/1999, 1990). However, collectivization, industrialization, forced labour, the expansion of the bureaucratic party-state and police apparatus represented a rupture with the Bolshevik past, a 'revolution from above'. 'Stalinism', Tucker concluded, 'must be recognized as a historically distinct and specific phenomenon which did *not* flow directly from Leninism, although Leninism was an important contributory factor' (Tucker, 1977b/1999, p.78). Diverging from Marx, Engels and Lenin's understanding of socialism, Stalinism drew on Tsarist state-building and Russified the Soviet culture the Bolsheviks had been planting.

Stephen Cohen's research on Bukharin alerted him to the multi-faceted nature of Bolshevism. Cohen was struck by overriding dissimilarities between the authoritarianism of 1921–1928 and that of 1929–1933, and argued that linear narratives reflected teleology, reading history backwards, and projecting Stalinist outcomes onto Bolshevism. The early 1920s offered alternatives – although anything approximating to liberal democracy was never on the agenda – and constituted a mode of rule radically unlike Stalinism. Cohen based his

attempt to define Stalinism on the formulation of the French Communist, sometime Left Oppositionist and lifelong analyst of the Soviet Union, Boris Souvarine: ‘differences of degree grew into differences of kind ... what had existed under Lenin was carried by Stalin to such extremes that its very nature changed’ (Cohen, 1999, p.14)¹³. Documenting deficiencies in analysis which posed a fundamental unity in developments from or before 1917, Cohen concluded:

Stalinism was not simply nationalism, bureaucratization, absence of democracy, censorship, police repression and the rest in any precedented sense ... Instead, Stalinism was excess, extraordinary extremism in each. It was not, for example, merely coercive peasant policies but a virtual civil war against the peasantry; not merely police repression or even civil war but a holocaust of terror that victimized tens of millions of people for twenty-five years ... not merely a leader cult but deification of a despot. (Cohen, 1999, p.12; see also Cohen, 1985)

Proponents of continuity have been less forthcoming.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Sheila Fitzpatrick remarked that by the 1980s most Sovietologists accepted – as she did – some variant of the linear thesis. Fitzpatrick carefully considered various features of continuity and change. Lenin had created the Cheka and utilized terror against political opponents whereas Stalin had boosted the secret state and applied terror to party opponents, real or imagined. Lenin had developed a centralized party with authoritative powers for the leader and restricted democracy, supporting prohibition of factions. Stalin had established autocratic rule, turned an expedient ban into principle, and enforced it ruthlessly. Lenin laid the foundations which facilitated Stalinism, while weight should be given to the fact that, although the Stalin era was not the intended or inevitable outcome of 1917, it was the actual outcome. She summed up: ‘For historians, there is still a great deal to be said for emphasising continuity’ (Fitzpatrick, 1982, p.154).¹⁵ Ultimately, the question was not whether the two periods ‘were alike but whether they were part of the same process’ (Fitzpatrick, 1982, p.3). She did not expand on why, in relation to origins, goals, policies and methods, 1917 and 1929–1933, which she agreed saw a second revolution, were sufficiently similar to be

subsumed into one historical episode. Instead, employing the analogy of the French revolution, whose chroniclers included Napoleon's wars in 'the general concept of the revolution', Fitzpatrick applied a similar approach to Russia. Continuity, she suggested, outweighed rupture. The workers' revolution from below of 1917 and Stalin's state revolution from above, the soviets of workers and soldiers in 1917 and the turn to brutal dictatorship in 1929 were assimilated as incidents in a single revolutionary process (Fitzpatrick, 1982, pp.3–4, 153–159).

This echoed the arguments of the biographer and commentator on Communism, Isaac Deutscher, who invoked 'a historical law of revolutions' which pass through radical and conservative phases. Rejecting Marxist distinctions between proletarian and bourgeois variants, Deutscher bracketed Stalin with Cromwell and Napoleon who sustained bourgeois revolutions by force as they entered their conservative phase. Reactionary means to attain revolutionary ends were justified by their outcome: progress towards socialism. The criteria for the latter – nationalization of the means of production – like the conflation of different phenomena under the rubric of revolution – may be questioned. 'Non-capitalist' property forms do not necessarily entail or advance socialism. But for Deutscher, Stalin remained the instrument of history and socialist necessity who developed the 1917 revolution although workers took little creative part in that development and workers' power was absent from Stalin's final settlement (Deutscher, 1949/1966, pp.550–555, 1954, p.515, 1963, pp.510–523, 1966, p.234; McIlroy, 2004).

From the 1980s, 'revisionist' history deepened our understanding of Stalinist society without greatly clarifying the by now well-established contention about linear development or scission (Litvin & Keep, 2005, pp.90–191).¹⁶ As historians assessed the Soviet Union in the wake of its collapse, conceptions of a continuum predominated. Dmitri Volkogonov (1994) attempted to eliminate distinctions between Lenin and Stalin prevalent in Soviet

historiography, representing Lenin as a murderous fanatic.¹⁷ The French collection, *The Black Book of Communism* (Courtois et al., 1999), laid the debacle at the door of the ideas of Marx and Lenin – Stalin simply applied them. Despotism, Martin Malia (1994) reasserted, was not the property of Stalin: it was intrinsic to Marxism's onslaught on the market and civil society, and inherent in Bolshevik ideology. Recent analysis is critical of such 'ideocracy' and views Stalinism as distinctive, although still locatable within a Bolshevik paradigm (Priestland, 2007).

Bolshevism and Stalinism in the historiography: Histories of the Comintern and the national parties

Given the influence that Russian politics exercised on their chosen subjects, the questions the literature on the Soviet Union raised were relevant to students of the Comintern and national parties with any inclination to holistic history. They proved reluctant to address them and, in as much as they did, favoured continuity. Its *introduceur* distilled the message of an early survey: 'The dictatorship of the party and not of the proletariat dates from 1917 ... the totalitarian and bureaucratic state grew directly out of the logic of power itself and not out of one man's perversion' (Aron, 1962, pp.4–5).¹⁸ E.H. Carr's multi-volume history of 1917 was conceptually reticent, although he ruminated: 'Lenin's revolution would have run into the sand. In that sense, Stalin continued and fulfilled Leninism' (Carr, 1964, p.214). Examining the American party, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser disagreed:

From the party of Lenin to the party of Stalin, there is a fundamental disjuncture marked by a violent counter-revolution. To say this is not to deny that certain features were held in common by the Communist movement of Lenin and the Communist movement of Stalin ... while Stalinism is a social and political phenomenon radically different from Leninism, it is, nonetheless, possible to find many of its sources in the theory and practice of Leninism. (Howe & Coser, 1957/1962, pp.501, 504)

Their text was unusual: its use of Stalinism and Stalinization was not simply descriptive but analytical. It theorized the role 'socialism in one country' played in shifting

the Comintern and national parties away from world revolution towards prioritizing defence of the Soviet Union. ‘Bolshevization’ of the Comintern, they argued, cloaked growing ‘Stalinization’ – in the same way ‘Leninism’ disguised developing Stalinism. ‘The process of “Stalinization” within the American party’, Howe and Coser claimed, ‘began considerably earlier than some of its historians suggest ... by 1925 it had almost reached its climax’ (Howe & Coser, 1957/1962, p.152). By 1929, American Communism had become American Stalinism, an argument propounded in perceptive essays, ‘The Party becomes Stalinized’ and ‘Towards a Theory of Stalinism’. Such conceptualization was absent from Theodore Draper’s account of the first decade of US Communism. The subordination of the party to the Comintern was, for Draper, nascent if not inherent in the relationship and realized in the early interactions between Moscow and New York. ‘Bolshevization’ was, therefore, only one incident in an already established pattern of dependence. Remarking the ‘magical’ qualities of the term and its elasticity, Draper (1960, pp.153–185) writes about it largely in organizational terms. Stalinism and Stalinization never figured in his monographs. He was a disciple of continuity: ‘Zinoviev’s system in the Comintern prepared the way for Stalin’s system, which was in many ways a continuation and development rather than a new departure’ (Draper, 1957, p.260).

Pioneering the history of British Communism, Henry Pelling (1958) titled chapters ‘Bolshevization 1921–4’ and ‘Stalinization 1924–9’. Paying due regard to the British party’s attempted ‘Bolshevization’ in 1922–1923 – although the term was not employed at that time – Pelling, thus, subsumed the ‘Bolshevization’ of 1924–1925 under ‘Stalinization’. However, he provided little analysis of either term or discussion of the similarities and differences between them. ‘Stalinization’ functions as a descriptor of period. Scrutinizing the factors moulding the subordination of the German KPD between 1924 and 1929, Hermann Weber (1969, 2008) also categorized the process as ‘Stalinization’. His foundational text underlined

the importance of dependence on Moscow; relentless centralization – which enabled a leadership resting on a powerful apparatus to dominate the membership; the intervention of the Comintern via periodic purges; and the KPD’s marginalization in Weimar politics. Weber characterized the Bolshevization of 1921–1922 as ‘the pre-history of Stalinization’. He had less to say about the politics and practices driving these developments in Russia and the Comintern which generated change in the KPD and informed and infused its ‘Stalinization’. Or whether, in what ways and when, Stalinism represented a rupture with Bolshevism.

The opening of the Soviet archives revived research into the Comintern. Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew’s work did not address Stalinization as a political concept. Their Introduction referred to ‘emergent “Stalinization”’ during the Comintern’s Third Period, 1928–1933, when Stalin extended his hold over Soviet politics; and later to the ECCI Presidium of December 1928 constituting ‘a deciding moment in the Stalinization of the Comintern’ (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, pp. xi, 84). There were a handful of allusions to ‘incipient Stalinism’ and ‘Stalinization’ (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, pp.87, 119) while ‘Stalinist’ was employed as an epithet. There was no specific elaboration of the meaning of these terms or their relationship to Bolshevism and ‘Bolshevization’. The years 1924–1928, when many historians saw Stalinization developing, were, in this account, years of ‘Bolshevization’ – the relevant chapter is entitled ‘Bolshevizing the Comintern’. The 1924 Bolshevization, the authors observed, occurred ‘in an embryonic Stalinist form’ (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, p.45). But this point was not expanded upon, and Stalinization received none of the recognition and definition accorded ‘Bolshevization’. Most scholars date completion of the subordination of the Comintern to Moscow to the Third Period, if not before, whereas McDermott and Agnew postpone it to the following decade: ‘1939–43: The ultimate degeneration of the Comintern into an instrument of foreign policy epitomized by

the Nazi-Soviet pact and Stalin's dissolution of the Comintern' (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, p.xxi).¹⁹ Urging clear definition, they characterize Bolshevization as:

a trend towards Russian dominance of the Comintern and its member sections, a trend reflected in the 'Russification' of the ideological and organizational structures of the Communist parties and the canonization of the Leninist principles of party unity, discipline and democratic centralism. More specifically, 'Bolshevization' can be defined as the concentration of power in the Russian party delegation to the ECCI [Comintern Executive]. (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, p.42)

This formulation is substantially couched in organizational terms. Despite adverting to 'ideological structures', it says little about the politics of 'Bolshevization'. Draper, Howe and Coser, Pelling and Weber, might have quarrelled with the use of 'trend', which denotes a general direction: they argued that by 1929 any earlier trend had culminated in subordination, while power was concentrated in the Russian delegation by 1926. Finally, perhaps with the addition of inverted commas around Leninist and a little supplementation, much of this definition could equally apply to some conceptions of 'Stalinization'. The absence of discussion or definition of the latter in McDermott and Agnew's survey could be taken to imply continuity between Bolshevism and Stalinism. This reading received sustenance when the book concluded: 'the seeds of the demise of the Communist ideal should ultimately be sought in the original Leninist prescriptions' (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, p.219).

The French historian, Pierre Broué (1997), concurred in McDermott and Agnew's delineation of a more democratic early Comintern and similarly noted Lenin's warnings against mechanical Russification. Broué was more emphatic in identifying the 1924 'Bolshevization' conducted by Zinoviev as a stalking horse for Stalinization. In contrast with McDermott and Agnew, but in company with Howe and Coser, he drew a line between Bolshevism and Stalinism, portraying the two as locked in struggle from 1923. He located Stalinism's success in defeat of the German revolution; disillusion with foreign endeavours to emulate 1917; a turn to self-reliance and desire for accelerated progress in Russia; the growth of bureaucracy; and the Stalinists' ability to mobilize these tendencies in the context of

continuing Soviet isolation. In key chapters, ‘La Stalinsation de L’Internationale’ and ‘La Comintern Stalinienne’, Broué depicted Stalinism attaining hegemony during the Third Period in a Comintern now dedicated to uniformity, dogma, discipline, monolithicity, fostering denunciation and rituals of self-criticism, as well as eternal vigilance over security and deviation.²⁰

Like Broué, albeit more tersely, the Canadian scholar, Bryan Palmer, insisted Stalinism constituted a politics and programme which drew on, but negated, Bolshevism. Like Broué, Palmer invoked an early period in which the Comintern nurtured a healthy American Bolshevism desiccated by ensuing Stalinization. He was less decided on the role of Zinoviev: he characterized the mid-1920s ‘Bolshevization’ as authoritarian and heavy handed – but possessing positive aspects. Stalinization developed significantly in the Comintern and the US party from 1926 and triumphed by 1929. In both Russia and America, alternatives were available and taken by some (Palmer, 2003, pp.143–145, 2007, pp.4–8 and *passim*). Reviewing the historiography of American Communism from the 1980s, Palmer (2003) welcomed its new insights but concluded that most work side-stepped Stalinism.²¹

A similar verdict might be passed on the British literature (for example, Fishman, 1995; Morgan, 1989; Thorpe, 2000). A survey of the Third Period contains a dismissive reference to Stalinization in its Introduction; but no expansion beyond the unexplained claim: ‘the policies of the Third Period were very much in the Bolshevik tradition and related to the growing ideological breach within the international socialist movement evident since at least the outbreak of the Great War’ (Worley, 2002, pp.105, 12– for a corrective, see McIlroy 2006). A study of Irish Communism adopts McDermott and Agnew’s definition of Bolshevization. On that basis, it states that ‘Bolshevization was integral to the Third Period’ and ‘The Bolshevization of Irish Communism was finally completed between November

1930 and January 1931' (O'Connor, 2004, pp. 96, 158). There is no meaningful reference to the Stalinism and Stalinization which other historians have identified with the Third Period.

A miscellany published in 2008 aimed to address these issues (LaPorte et al., 2008a). Weber updated his account of 'Stalinization' but did not differentiate Stalinism from Bolshevism, indeed at one point 'Bolshevization' is used as a synonym for 'Stalinization' (Weber, 2008, p.22).²² O'Connor repeated his earlier assertions that in Ireland the Third Period witnessed Bolshevization not Stalinization. Irish Communism, it was claimed, underwent Stalinization from 1935. Between 1929 and 1935 it was subordinated to Moscow but remained un-Stalinized and revolutionary. After 1935, however, it rejected revolution (O'Connor, 2008, pp. 254–259). An essay assessing the CPGB registers the unreferenced statement:

while it would be wrong to assert that Stalinism was an inevitable consequence of Bolshevism, the relationship between the two needs to be acknowledged and unpicked if we are to gain a more precise understanding of a complex and shifting political phenomenon. (Taylor & Worley, 2008, p.241)

Despite this declaration of intent, the chapter follows Worley's earlier examination of the Third Period in making no attempt to unpick the relationship. Addressing Weber's limited conception of 'Stalinization' as subordination to Moscow, the authors contend, on tenuous evidence, that Stalinization was unsuccessful in Britain because diversity, high turnover and local initiative ensured the party could never exercise 'total control' over its membership (Taylor & Worley, 2008, p.233).

Such contributions focus analysis on Weber's circumscribed formulation – Stalinization equals subordination – without elaborating on the ideas, politics, connections and fissures with Bolshevism that *Stalinist* subordination involved. Perhaps understandably, given the collection's heterogeneous offerings and multiple editors, the book's Introduction does not take matters much further. 'Bolshevization', readers are informed, 'has been the preferred approach of many scholars. The advantage of Bolshevization is that it allows for

Russifying influences that cannot be traced to Stalin but predated his ascendancy' (LaPorte et al., 2008b, p.13) – but not, it might be observed, significant influences like 'socialism in one country' distinctive to Stalinism. The editors remark that 'Bolshevization' is very like 'Stalinization' and rather than attempt to resolve the issues they subsequently refer to 'Bolshevization/Stalinization' (LaPorte et al., 2008b, p. 13).²³ This suggests a *laissez-faire* stance.²⁴ In contrast to the permissive approach, a recent text on the US (Zumoff, 2015) exploits archival resources to update Draper's account of the 1920s while substantially following Palmer in its analysis of Stalinism and its degenerative impact on Bolshevism.

To sum up: the recent historiography of the Comintern and its American and British sections has arguably over-compartmentalized. It has largely failed to avail itself of the insights of students of Bolshevism and Stalinism. Despite their pertinence for historians constructing national narratives, developments in Russia which intimately influenced the trajectories of Bolshevism and Stalinism are rarely discussed. Instead these terms are sometimes used loosely and even interchangeably. There is inadequate conceptualization and conflicting periodization. The continuity thesis is sometimes implied rather than argued, the relevance of Stalinism questioned, and its content and purpose passed over.²⁵ To clarify matters and expand the historiographical canvas of national Communism, we re-examine the Comintern in the 1920s.

A healthy Comintern? The age of Lenin, 1919–1923

A number of preliminary points require registering. First, American and British Communists were decisively and pervasively influenced by belonging to a centralized global organization. 'In our party', the American leader Jay Lovestone reflected in 1929, 'the first pre-requisite of being worthy of the name of Communist is unquestioned and unquestionable loyalty to the Communist International (Applause)' (quoted in Draper, 1960, p.400). If this was particularly

true of leaders and secondary cadre, there is little evidence that, despite variations in engagement and commitment, rank-and-file activists and ‘ordinary’ members were greatly different.²⁶ Rajani Palme Dutt remarked of the CPGB in 1923:

... the ordinary membership of the Party, including the Executive, will agree to any Thesis that comes from the International without being able to judge one from the other and not even know if one contradicts another. I know that is brutal, but it is what the position amounts to.²⁷

Second, how do we judge health? Both Deutscher and Fitzpatrick affirmed that a historian’s political standpoint influences evaluation (Deutscher, 1966, p. 234; Fitzpatrick, 1982, pp.4–5, refers to ‘political partisanship’ and ‘moral judgement’). Arguably, we should assess the Comintern at least initially in terms of the Marxism it invoked and estimate change in that light. Third, as the literature discloses, classifying events into specific periods, allocating political ideas to different categories, and weighing continuity against disjuncture, can be a highly problematic project.

For the Bolsheviks, the Comintern was ‘the general staff’ of world revolution, the epoch one of wars and revolutions. Until 1921, revolutions were considered imminent. That a body created to overthrow capitalism became operational as that prospect faded, is fundamental to understanding the organization.²⁸ Abatement of world revolution reinforced a further factor: one affiliate was unique, it ruled a vast country, foreign parties were its dependents. This disparity would intensify over a decade where no other party came to power. Moreover, by 1922, when the defeat of the ‘March Action’ in Germany was followed by the Treaty of Rapallo which secured economic and military cooperation with Germany, the Soviet Union’s sometimes contradictory interest in assailing bourgeois states and protecting its immediate domestic interests by bargaining with those states, had assumed some significance. It did not always coincide with the interest of foreign parties and proletariats in overthrowing capitalism. Moves towards insurrection could contaminate relationships with capitalist powers; successful revolutions could provoke a backlash against

the Soviet Union and threaten its survival. The Kremlin therefore needed to control the Comintern in order when necessary to synchronize its policy with Soviet diplomacy.²⁹

Fernando Claudin's conclusion remains difficult to dispute: 'the premises for transforming [the Comintern] into an appendage of the Soviet state were present from the first day of its creation, even if the transformation was not inevitable' (Claudin, 1975, p.115).

The Bolsheviks took the lead in creating the Comintern and the '21 Conditions' required all sections to adopt Soviet models and build parties 'in the most centralized way governed by iron discipline' (Riddell, 1991, pp.765–771). Comintern headquarters remained in Moscow and from the beginning the decisions of Russia's ruling party were transmitted through the Soviet delegation (Firsov, 1992). Power was concentrated in the Executive Committee [ECCI] which the Bolsheviks dominated. The bureaucracy was preponderantly Russian – foreigners were typically transient or émigrés, frequently deferential and sometimes of poor quality. *Ab initio*, the paramount influence was the Soviet party. Its predicament, and how power-holders reacted to it, moulded the Comintern. A working-class revolution in an empire characterized by limited capitalist development, a tiny proletariat and the economic and social weight of the peasantry rendered socialist advance problematic. Revolution arrived in many parts of Russia via the Red Army during the civil war – rather than following the classic model of proletarian insurrection (Smele, 2016).³⁰ Everywhere, the experience of workers' power was brief. Everywhere, in state, party, and civil society, proletarian democracy was progressively diminished. One retreat followed another with corrosive, long-term consequences. Difficulties were magnified by capitalist aggression; civil war; depletion of the working class; collapse of the soviets; dilution of party membership; debilitation of cadre; crucially by the failure of revolution in advanced societies and the relative absence in Bolshevik ideology of viable scenarios for unilateral progress towards socialism in a country like Russia (Lih, 2017; Wade, 2017).

Lenin reminded the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921:

It was clear to us that without the support of the international world revolution, the victory of the proletarian revolution was impossible. Before the [Bolshevik] revolution and even after it, we thought: either revolution breaks out in the other countries, in the capitalistically developed countries, immediately or at least very quickly, or we must perish. (Lenin, 1921/1965, p.480)

The dilemmas of survival, how to guard against regression and capitalist restoration, whether to prioritize external revolution or internal construction as the best way forward, quickly surfaced. Mobilization of labour, appropriations from the peasants, and antagonism to the market which characterized War Communism were complemented by the Comintern's policy of revolutionary offensive. War Communism gave way to the NEP, rehabilitation of the market and agreement that progress required a longer timescale and peasant support. The NEP was reflected in Comintern acceptance that world capitalism had received a reprieve. Affiliates needed to augment their forces via united fronts with social democratic parties. Foreign policy as a means of defending the interests of the new state became an alternative pole of attraction to the Comintern (Carr, 1966; Haslam, 2006; Smith, 2017, pp.217–312).

Many commentators diagnose the Comintern's first period as healthy and appropiate Lenin's role. Yet he personally participated in drafting the '21 conditions' which legislated for centralization although he subsequently sought to combat such tendencies when he believed they would impact adversely on world revolution. Having advocated Stalin's appointment as general secretary of the Soviet party, Lenin did his utmost to curb the latter's excesses albeit with minimal success. However, he supported, even if on a temporary basis, the prohibition of factions in the Soviet party. Nonetheless, he spoke out against exporting Russian models to countries with different conditions; questioned whether Comintern resolutions adequately conveyed to foreign Communists the Bolshevik experience; and prescribed further reflection and study (Lenin, 1922a/1966, pp.430–432; Broué, 1997, p.265). Criticizing the 1922 Organizational Theses, he urged: 'There is no immutable, absolutely

correct structure for Communist parties’ – the balance between democracy and centralization should reflect the level of class struggle, Communists’ relationship to it, and differences between various countries (Riddell, 2015, pp.42–43).³¹ Lenin performed valuable services, exorcizing ultra-leftism and attempting to reconcile the German leader, Paul Levi, with the KPD after the failure of the 1921 *putsch*. A critical factor was his deteriorating health from 1921, his increasing incapacity from the end of 1922, and the termination of his political activity in March 1923. Lenin’s engagement with the Comintern was short and sporadic (Lewin, 1968a). It is arguably more precise to talk of ‘the age of Zinoviev’.

For the constitutional direction of the International in Lenin’s last years was, despite Lenin, centralist: power was crystallizing in the ECCI, in Soviet functionaries, and in Moscow. The ethos remained democratic. ECCI decisions were open to debate at the frequently disputatious first four Congresses. Factions defined by Lenin as ‘the formation of groups with separate platforms striving to a certain degree to segregate and create their own group discipline,’ were tolerated (Liebman, 1980, 385–416). At the 1922 Congress, for example, Alexandra Kollontai expounded the positions of the Workers’ Opposition and urged the Comintern to restore democracy in the Russian party. Nonetheless, stress on centralization and military discipline persisted alongside de-legitimation of factions. Far from other affiliates acting as a counterweight to initiatives in the Russian party – that they abstained from doing so hardened into convention – their own Russification accelerated. By September 1923, Comintern president, Grigori Zinoviev, was instructing the French party to implement dissolution of all factions (Humbert-Droz, 1971, p.95).

The Comintern’s role in cohering national parties was, in its own terms, a remarkable achievement. In the US, it succeeded in establishing a legal organization, weaned the WP from leftism, encouraged ‘Americanization’, pointed the party towards work in the labour movement and on ‘the Negro question’, and steered it away from ideas of imminent

insurrection and towards the united front. In Britain, it provided the party with some inkling of Bolshevism, helped quell anti-parliamentarian tendencies and directed the CPGB towards the Labour Party and the established trade unions. This took up most of the Comintern's first period. But it produced only small, fragile parties with high turnover, materially and politically dependent on Moscow. It was 1923 before either party functioned in meaningful fashion. Comintern leadership facilitated CPGB progress in the labour movement; in America, after early advance, it achieved little. Endeavours to construct a Farmer-Labor Party and influence Robert LaFollette's 1924 presidential campaign won few new friends and lost valuable allies (Zumoff, 2014, p.112–151). In both parties, Moscow's role strengthened the subordination seeded in 1919. Lubricated and reinforced by financial subsidies, it was primarily ideological, voluntary and self-willed. Problems were generally resolved through debate and persuasion; outcomes on all significant issues favoured Moscow. This was typically because of the power of its argument and its political authority but there were already examples of coercion. The conclusion that subservience was present from the start and subordination was actualized by interactions *before* 1924 is convincing (McIlroy & Campbell, 2002a).

'Bolshevization' does not appear to have been used at this point – although the term was subsequently employed by historians of the period. But pressures to adopt Russian politics, methods and organization were present. In Britain, a Committee on Reorganization was appointed in March 1922 and its proposals, influenced by the Theses on Party Organization approved at the Third Comintern Congress, were adopted by the CPGB. A further motivation was dissatisfaction with the party – it was not only un-Bolshevik but chaotic and factionalized – expressed by Comintern emissaries. The report recommended an organizational version of what would soon be labelled 'Bolshevization'. It proposed a break with the federalism and propaganda orientation of the CPGB's predecessors, centralized

leadership, organization based on workplace or locality, party-controlled mass work, an interventionist press, and customized education (Macfarlane, 1966, pp.77–89).³² Inadequately understood, it attracted resistance, prompting Comintern intervention. In summer 1923, the International reconstructed the leadership, emphasizing centralization and an end to factionalism, and reorganized party work in the labour movement.³³ In America, barriers – attachment to ‘undergroundism’, the Foreign Language Federations, falling membership, high turnover and entrenched factionalism – ensured ‘Bolshevization’ awaited the 1924–1925 drive (Draper, 1960, pp.152–185).

It is difficult to appraise the early Comintern uncritically: an efficient engine of world revolution would surely have been more democratic and egalitarian as envisaged by Rosa Luxemburg. It would have made explicit the obstacles it confronted, and combatted, rather than encouraged, Russocentrism. It would have exhibited greater flexibility, attempted to better comprehend prospects in different countries and nurtured a leadership based to a greater degree on affiliates. Logistical difficulties apart, that it failed to do this was related to the predicament of a state under siege beginning to prosecute its own interests in security and development; and the weakness and dependence of national parties – rather than Soviet imposition. By 1923, the Comintern’s race was far from run; but the odds were stacked against progress.

Bolshevization, Stalinization or incipient Stalinization? The Comintern 1923–1928

During the Comintern’s second phase, the Bolshevik leaders agreed that development in Russia would continue within the framework of the NEP and conciliation of the peasantry. Lenin and Nikolai Bukharin pursued a cautious approach; Trotsky and the Left pushed accelerated industrialization, central planning, strengthening the working class vis-a-vis the peasantry and a limited extension of party democracy; Stalin, presenting himself as a

pragmatic realist, occupied a centrist position, built a base in the party and emerging elites, and assembled alliances – with Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, and later Bukharin, premised on defending the NEP against the Left and constructing a *commandiste* party (Lewin, 1985; Priestland, 2007, pp.133–188; Smith, 2017, pp.263–312). The conflict between the triumvirate and the Left Opposition confirmed the new authoritarianism, signalled by Zinoviev’s injunction to the 1923 Russian party conference: ‘Every criticism of the party line, even a so-called ‘left’ criticism, is now objectively a Menshevik criticism’ (quoted in Deutscher, 1959, pp.95–96). Milestones included defeat in Germany (1923) and China (1927); Lenin’s death in 1924; and the crystallization of a mood, an atmosphere and disparate theorizing into the beginnings of a new programmatic politics with the first drafts of ‘Leninism’, ‘Bolshevization’ and ‘socialism in one country’ in its aftermath. Faith in external assistance eroded; the Russians’ sense of superiority – and foreign parties’ sense of inferiority – and belief in their ability to survive unaided, hardened. Advocacy of ‘unity’, ‘iron discipline’, action not chatter, and building socialism in Russia burgeoned (Broué, 2005; Deutscher, 1959, pp.75–163).

The Comintern introduced biennial, instead of annual, Congresses, clarified the binding nature of ECCI directives, and granted the executive powers to dispense with decisions of national parties and expel their members. By mid-decade, ‘a permanent delegation of the [Russian party] was installed within ECCI. Constitutionally, this had no status as an organ of the Comintern, yet it became the centre where decisions concerning cadres, finance and politics were made, decisions that were binding on foreign parties’ (Vatlin & Smith, 2014, pp.190–191).³⁴ Already in 1923, the Comintern had reconstructed the leaderships of the Finnish, French, German and Polish parties. The Poles were informed by Zinoviev: ‘If you attempt to stand against us we will break your bones’ (Broué, 1997, p.378). The following year, supporters of the Left Opposition, notably Pierre Monatte, Alfred

Rosmer, and Boris Souvarine were purged from the French party and Henrik Brandler and August Thalheimer replaced by a leadership around Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow in the KPD. The Fifth Comintern Congress in summer 1924 witnessed foreign leaders recording their lack of understanding of revolutionary politics and demanding a world party based on Russian politics and organization (Degras, 1971, pp. 190, 154; Deutscher, 1959, 140–151).

The Fifth Congress intensified Russification, reciting already well-worn verities: all sections must follow the Soviet road and that required ‘a centralized party permitting no factions, tendencies or groups – it must be fused in one mould.’ Affiliates must become mass parties, intimately connected to the working class and demonstrate flexibility, while avoiding sectarianism and opportunism (Degras, 1971, pp.154–156). The ‘Congress of Leninism and Bolshevization’ was followed by theses adopted at the Fifth Plenum in 1925 which repeated the mantras of centralization and discipline, but in a balanced, albeit malleable, fashion. ‘Bolshevization’ entailed applying the practice of the Russian party but also the experience of other sections: ‘Bolshevization is the application of the general principles of Lenin’ but adapted ‘to the concrete situation of each country’. It would be ‘a mistake to transfer Russia’s experience mechanically to other countries, a mistake against which Lenin uttered a warning,’ but: ‘There is much in the experience of the Russian revolution which Lenin considered of general significance for other countries’ (Degras, 1971, p.144).

Despite these qualifications or tergiversations, Zinoviev and Stalin transposed *their* model to affiliates. Reversing Lenin’s maxim, there was *now* ‘an absolutely correct structure for all Communist parties.’ ‘Bolshevization’ required national sections to break with social-democratic tendencies and federal organization and enshrine a conception of revolution premised on soviets and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Members had to be collectivized for action in workplace and street groups with ‘fractions’ penetrating the labour movement and civil society, coordinated by leadership bodies and armed with an agitational press.

Enrolling advanced workers, parties must be based on a now formulaic democratic centralism.

Lenin's latest biographer observes that for the early Bolsheviks:

The party as vanguard meant simply that the organization must find roots as part of the social class and incorporate all progressive and revolutionary elements, that is 'those who are first to mount the barricades' as mentioned in *The Communist Manifesto*. This description of vanguard, of course, has no real kinship with the structure that came about in a later period, the bureaucratic embodiment of the Stalinist state party. (Krausz, 2015, p.118)

The 1924–1925 'Bolshevization' decisively replaced ideas of the party embodying openness and democratic decision-making with conceptions of a military contingent with connotations of command, closure, and restricted democracy which had gathered momentum since 1920. The party was in rhetoric leading the working class: a relationship to be created was assumed. Illusions of grandeur constituted a barrier to constructing leadership – a process which could challenge preconceived ideas. The Comintern, in contrast, offered a finished product influenced by governing through an attritional civil war and the *commandiste* predilections of Zinoviev and Stalin. As Tamás Krausz notes: 'It is easy enough to define the basic concept of democratic centralism: democracy in reaching decisions and unity in implementing them. The difficulty resides in how to apply the basic principle to small propaganda groups that do not have an organic relationship with the working class' (Krausz, 2015, pp.118–119) – such as the American and British parties. It was hard to see how vulgar vanguardism could facilitate powerful proletarian parties in the America and Britain of the 1920s.

Two points should be stressed. First, Bolshevism was never primarily about structures. It was fundamentally about the politics and culture which infused and periodically transformed structures in a particular context; and securing the party's imbrication with the working class. Structure was a function of purpose and politics. Second, 'Bolshevization' did not, therefore, entail generalization of organizational formulae propounded by Lenin in 1902 or 1917 – or a timeless politics. David Priestland is only the latest historian to demonstrate

that Bolshevism was not a monolithic ideology which provided a prototype for action. Focussing on ideas and discourses, he exposes a variety of Bolshevisms in post-1917 Russia. The ‘Bolshevizers’ of 1924, for example, defended the NEP and legitimated it via a ‘technicist’ strain in Bolshevism. This acknowledged the objective obstacles to socialist development; accorded economics precedence over politics; viewed workers as rational, self-interested actors, motivated by material incentives; and favoured the emerging technical intelligentsia. The triumvirate’s antagonists, the Left Opposition, were, in Priestland’s typology, ‘elitist revivalists’ who considered proletarian class-consciousness the key creative force in history and politics, and believed it could overcome barriers to socialist construction and bourgeois and bureaucratic impediments – if mobilized under a controlled regime. By 1927, the United Opposition had embraced a ‘populist revivalism’ while Stalin, still preaching ‘Bolshevization’, moved from the Bukharinite technicism he had earlier espoused, to extreme versions of the oppositions’ revivalism. By the early 1930s, he was mobilizing ‘neo-traditional’ ideas which justified fixed hierarchies of class and ethnicity and legitimated autocracy and centralization (Priestland, 2007, pp.16–57 and *passim*). Whatever we think of Priestland’s classification, it is evident that Bolshevism was more complex than many have conceived and comprised different and, at times, conflicting ideas and policies.

‘Bolshevization’ represented contested variants, and was different in 1921, 1924 and 1929.

Half a century ago, Marcel Liebman demonstrated a similar suppleness in Bolshevik organizational ideas. The conception of the party adumbrated by Lenin early in the century accepted ideological struggle between competing tendencies apparent in 1905. In its aftermath, the Bolsheviks moved towards monolithicity and 1909 saw the expulsion of the ‘Leftists’. Full-blooded democracy was incompatible with underground activity. But it resurfaced after 1914 and blossomed in 1917 when hierarchy and obedience gave way to

internal controversy and the clash of factions (Liebman, 1980, pp. 25–52, 57–61, 147–154; see also LeBlanc, 1990; Lih, 2006, 2011). Alexander Rabinowitch remarked:

The phenomenal Bolshevik success can be attributed in no small measure to the nature of the party in 1917 ... I would emphasise the party's internally relatively democratic, tolerant and decentralised structure and method of operation, as well as its essentially open and mass character – in striking contrast to the traditional Leninist model. (Rabinowitch, 1976/2017, p.311)

Before 1921, Lenin's stance on party democracy remained flexible. Internal groupings and debates should be curtailed if they disrupted organization, compromised unity and hindered struggle – caveats, it should be stressed, open to conflicting interpretations. Nonetheless, factional activity remained legitimate after 1917, and the Democratic Centralism group and the Workers' Opposition remained active and articulate until 1921. Only at the Tenth Party Congress were factions outlawed, although there are grounds for believing this was considered a temporary expedient (Liebman, 1980, pp.298–304).

It was a rebuff to democracy, effectiveness, and, in retrospect, the continuity of Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks' political monopoly was complemented by restriction of political freedom within the party. Lars T. Lih has distinguished 'Old Bolshevism' prior to 1917 and 'State Bolshevism' 1917–1924 in terms of a number of changes and continuities. 'The freewheeling debates and groupings of pre-war Bolshevism,' he observed, 'shifted fairly rapidly to a new emphasis on monolithic unity and strict disciplined centralism' (Lih, 2017, p.160). The earlier accent on *democratic* centralism and control from below which applied between 1905 and 1907 and through 1917 was replaced by democratic *centralism* as power accumulated above in the context of exercising state power. A ruling party enmeshed in the state and prioritizing the need to present a united front to a hostile world perceived 'factionalism' as dangerous.

By 1924, 'Bolshevization' entailed amplification and endorsement of one strand, one potential in Bolshevik politics and, organizationally, the export of democratic *centralism*, a

model functional to running a state, but at some distance from the organization which had led the revolution. The CPGB and WP were engaged in advancing revolution not running a state. Yet they were instructed and schooled to emulate the practice of the Bolsheviks in power, rather than their practice in winning power. This ‘Bolshevization’ was dysfunctional. Time proved it would produce unhealthy, hierarchical parties with power concentrated at the top, self-perpetuating leadership, and members prohibited from contact outside official structures. Prohibition of organized opposition and rights to publicly dissent cramped the quality of internal life, the development of ideas, and education – while undermining free exchange with other parties and the openness necessary to achieve a united front. Restricted democracy could circumscribe motivation and repel new and potential recruits. In context, ‘Bolshevization’ did more to reinforce Soviet control of undemocratic Comintern affiliates than to facilitate revolutionary progress. It cannot be divorced from the attempts of the anti-factional triumvirate to secure via the Comintern support from national parties for their factional crusade against their Bolshevik opponents: the ECCI Theses conceived ‘the final liquidation of Trotskyism within the party’ as integral to ‘Bolshevization’ (Degras, 1971, p.195).

Claims that ‘Bolshevization’ had a good side, that it functioned as a ‘two-edged sword,’ (Palmer, 2007, p.228; Zumoff, 2015, pp.152–153) are contentious. If it stimulated more integrated, disciplined parties, the question remains to what purpose? Use of ‘Bolshevization’ in these circumstances risks validating the linguistic imperialism of Stalin and Zinoviev – of a part with their appropriation of ‘Leninism’ – to denote ideas which represented a move *away* from Lenin’s Bolshevism. Lewin (2005, p.308) exaggerated when he designated 1924 ‘as marking the end of Bolshevism’. But Broué (1997, p.385) had a point when he deemed use of ‘Bolshevization’ to describe what was happening ‘an abuse of language’; and Weber was stretching things when he employed ‘Stalinization’ to characterize

events from 1924. The direction of travel of the Comintern was towards Stalinism: but in 1924 the process was incomplete.

Zinoviev presents a problem in characterizing Comintern developments before 1926 as ‘Stalinist’. McDermott and Agnew cite Soviet accounts to the effect that by 1923 Stalin was in the ascendant and together with Zinoviev animated the ‘Bolshevization’ campaign. They also quote Deutscher’s statement that by 1924 Zinoviev possessed ‘complete mastery of the International’ and conclude that the most plausible explanation was that ‘Stalin was quite prepared to follow Zinoviev’s lead in Comintern affairs’ (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, pp.49–50). Certainly, at this stage they remained collaborators, while Zinoviev also dabbled in ‘Leninism’ and ‘social fascism’. Moreover, the fact that Stalin was the strongest force in the party does not preclude a degree of autonomy for Zinoviev in the Comintern. Nonetheless, Stalin was becoming prominent, taking an active part in the German fiasco and the subjugation of the Polish party in 1923, and key Comintern bureaucrats supported him. Otto Kuusinen considered Zinoviev a figurehead, and a far from impressive one, who expended too little time on the detail of Comintern work, and Kuusinen reported on all serious matters directly to Stalin (Kotkin, 2015, pp.609–610; Kuusinen, 1974, p.78).³⁵ On the basis of recent archival research, Stephen Kotkin quotes Zinoviev himself on Stalin’s role by 1924:

Even at sessions of the Comintern run by Zinoviev and Bukharin, Stalin was dominant. ‘Stalin arrives, glances around and decides. And Bukharin and I are ‘dead bodies’ – we are not asked anything ... in practice there is no ‘triumvirate’, there is Stalin’s dictatorship. Illich [Lenin] was a thousand times correct.’ (Kotkin, 2015, pp.506–507)³⁶

By 1926, Stalin’s domination of first the Russian party and then by extension the Comintern, in conjunction with Bukharin, was evident. In March 1926, speaking on behalf of the Soviet delegation, Stalin attacked the French party’s choice of leaders. In November, the Russians created the ‘Bureau of the Delegation’ made up of Stalin, Bukharin and Osip

Piatnitsky.³⁷ The same month, the Seventh ECCI Plenum empowered Stalin and Bukharin, who replaced Zinoviev as titular head, ‘to decide all urgent questions themselves’. On their recommendation, Fischer and Maslow, identified with Zinoviev, were expelled, and Stalin’s protégés, Ernst Thälmann and Heinz Neumann, installed at the helm of the KPD. In France, Albert Treint and Suzanne Girault were removed (Huber, 2000, p.74; Wolikow, 2017, p.237).

Rather than 1924 marking the end of Bolshevism, it may be seen as marking the beginning of the end. The process by which Stalin secured control of the Comintern was underway by 1924 and there are arguments for dating the Stalinization of the International from 1926. A difficulty is that his domination remained contested both in the Russian party and the Comintern by the United Opposition of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev. Moreover, if we plausibly identify Stalinism with the policies of ‘the great break’, we come up against the fact that in 1926 Stalin was resolutely defending the NEP and relying ideologically on Bukharin. Perhaps it is preferable, it is certainly more exact, to dispense with ‘Bolshevization’, and ‘Stalinization’, with its connotations of completion, and, applying a dash of retrospective insight, characterize 1923–1927 as a time of ‘creeping Stalinization’ or ‘incipient Stalinization’ in relation to both the Russian party and the Comintern. These judgements, it must be emphasised, do not refer to the programme and politics which constituted the core of Stalinism: they had yet to emerge, still less attain ascendancy. They refer to the well-advanced attenuation of democracy and control over the levers of power which facilitated the hegemony of Stalinism from 1929. And they acknowledge that while nobody knew what was to come, the perceptive opposed what was happening as a move away from Bolshevism. It is, therefore, anachronistic to label 1923–1927 as a period of Stalinization rather than a period in which the foundations for Stalinization were being laid in the face of opposition. Matters remained contested and ‘incipient Stalinization’ seems more suitable to denote these years of conflict and transition.

In America and Britain, ‘incipient Stalinization’ involved refreshing an already well-established, generally accepted subordination which dated at least from 1923. By 1925, Zinoviev was commending the CPGB for its efficient execution of Comintern directives, while the point is affirmed by the acceptance of all sections of the WP of the Comintern emissary’s dramatically undemocratic removal of the Foster leadership the same year (Macfarlane, 1966, p.141; Zumoff, 2015, pp.163–166). In Britain, where Soviet structures had already been adopted, the immediate impact of the Zinoviev-Stalin initiative was a drive to reconstitute the CPGB on a workplace basis. The cells that were formed tended to be ineffective and short-lived, given the prevalence of intimidation and victimization in the factories of the 1920s – this, not political resistance, was the main factor in failure (Macfarlane, 1966, pp.133–134, 157). Matters were not greatly different in America (Draper, 1960, pp.157–159; Zumoff, 2015, pp.181–183).

There, the episode dealt a blow to the Foreign Language Federations and facilitated not only centralization but ‘Americanization’ of a party where most members still spoke imperfect English (Zumoff, 2015, pp.177–186).³⁸ The loyalty of both parties to whoever controlled Soviet party policy was unquestionable. Before ‘Bolshevization’ the CPGB accepted Soviet arraignment of the Workers’ Opposition and curbed dissemination of its ideas in Britain. The WP approved the anti-Trotsky campaign, scapegoated Ludwig Lore for views considered, on Moscow’s authority, Trotskyist, and condemned the United Opposition. The WP stood with the CPGB – which announced ‘implicit faith in the Communist Party of Russia and the Executive Committee of the Communist International’ (McIlroy, 2001, pp. 40–41) – in proposing the anathema on Trotsky at the Fifth World Congress.³⁹ An important difference between the two parties was the prevalence of factionalism. By 1925, it had disappeared from the CPGB but, albeit in Comintern-loyal form, it survived Comintern criticism in the WP. Future heretics like Jim Cannon regurgitated the Comintern theses in

speeches demanding a party ‘prohibiting faction, tendencies and groups ... a monolithic party hewn from one piece’ (*Workers’ Monthly*, November 1924, quoted in Howe & Coser, 1957/1962, p.154). To little effect: it would take Stalinization to finally eradicate factionalism in America.

Bolshevization or Stalinization? The Comintern’s Third Period, 1929–1933

In 1927, the NEP and Bukharinite economics held sway: contradictions between commodity production and the state sector were intensifying. With the breach with Britain and failure of the alliance with Chiang Kai Shek, the ‘war danger’ resurfaced. By the turn of the year, restriction of grain deliveries assumed serious proportions. Stalin shifted from Bukharinite gradualism towards an extreme version of the strategy propounded by his left-wing opponents since 1923. Resources would be re-directed from the countryside to develop heavy industry, galvanize growth, and eradicate peasant power. Workers would be mobilized against kulaks, specialists, bureaucrats and bourgeois remnants to facilitate the Five-Year Plan, industrialization and collectivization, overcome backwardness and overtake the imperialist economies.

Rather than stumbling into ‘the great break’, the best view is that Stalin seized the opportunity of the 1928 grain crisis to launch a crusade for the modernization he believed was indispensable to the military defence and economic survival of the Soviet Union. For many activists, it seemed a compelling way out of the Russian impasse. Nonetheless, from 1931, falls in production, chaos and famine prompted a reassertion of economic realities, discipline, nationalist ideology and an enhanced role for the state (Carr, 1969–1976; Nove, 1993; Priestland, 2007, pp.189–243; Reiman, 1987; Smith, 2017, pp.311–312, 370–373; Tucker, 1977b/1999, pp.84–101, 1990, pp.44–222; van Ree, 2002, pp.96–113). Much of the

academic literature characterises ‘the great break’ as a ‘revolution’ without specifying exactly what that meant in terms of class power. The argument that the second revolution was engineered by a bureaucratic elite or a new class which it installed in power is unsustainable. On the evidence, the bureaucracy served, and to a degree benefitted from, the emergent dictatorship. But it did not rule. Perhaps Trotsky’s theorizing of Bonapartism based on Marx’s conception of dictatorial rule and command of the executive with the state reflecting but mediating between key interests, represents a better avenue to explore the problem in the light of recent research.⁴⁰

Innovation was reflected in Comintern policy: the Sixth World Congress adopted a programme drafted by Bukharin which sanctified ‘socialism in one country.’ Events proceeded through the purge of Bukharin’s supporters and his replacement by Stalin’s henchman, Vyacheslav Molotov, at the Comintern. ‘Class struggle’ in the Soviet Union produced ‘Class Against Class’ internationally. Problems controlling mobilization at home were paralleled by intervention to manage foreign parties, if, as in Germany, moves to challenge the bourgeois state threatened Soviet diplomatic interests. What would endure was ‘socialism in one country’ as the doctrinal lynchpin of the International. One historian reflected: ‘from the moment when the building of socialism in the USSR was seen as the essential, determining factor of the world revolution, all other revolutionary movements were reduced objectively to a subordinate role, and it was from that angle that they had to be regarded in the Comintern’s strategy and tactics’ (Claudin, 1975, pp.76–77). As Trotsky put it: ‘The task of the parties in the Comintern assumes, therefore, an auxiliary character; their mission is to protect the USSR from intervention and not to fight for the conquest of power’ (Trotsky, 1928/1966, pp.79–80).⁴¹ Stalin affirmed the new meaning of internationalism: ‘an *internationalist* is one who is ready to defend the USSR without reservation, without wavering, unconditionally; for the USSR is the base of the world revolutionary movement’

(Stalin, 1927/1954, pp.53–54). But if earlier moves in that direction were discernible, the Third Period saw a decisive shift away from the primacy world revolution had held in Bolshevism. One result was a further fillip for resurgent Russian nationalism (Broué, 1997, pp.493–521; Carr, 1982; McDermott & Agnew, 1996, pp.80–119).

Culmination of earlier developments melded with dramatic change. ‘Social fascism’ constituted the spine of Class Against Class. It has to be read in the context of Stalin’s foreign policy, particularly overtures to the Weimar Republic, opposed by the German Social Democrats. The claim that social democracy was the moderate wing of fascism, floated by Zinoviev and Stalin in 1924, was fully elaborated at the Tenth Plenum in 1929. This rupture with Lenin’s theorizing of social democratic politics further suggested Stalinism’s incompatibility with Bolshevism. In Britain, it undid Lenin’s analysis of the Labour Party (Draper, 1969, 1972; McIlroy & Campbell, 2002b; van Ree, 2002, pp.213–220). In Germany, it entailed the KPD cooperating with the Nazis over the referendum to remove the Social Democratic Prussian government in 1931 and the Berlin transport workers’ strike in 1932. Insistence that the ‘social fascists’ were the main enemy, helped Hitler (Broué, 1997, pp.530–532, 540–541). ‘Social fascism’ pivoted on a one-sided assertion of the bourgeois nature of reformism at the expense of its working-class base and mission to prosecute working-class interests within capitalism; and an equally one-sided insistence on the integration into the state of the union bureaucracy. These ideas were inserted into a catastrophic theory of capitalist crisis – its propagation verged on caricature of Bukharin’s arguments about increasing instability – which generated millenarian radicalization (McDermott & Agnew, 1996, pp.100–105; McIlroy & Campbell, 2002b).⁴²

Crucial to the breach with Bolshevism, was the elevation of Stalin to an infallibility Lenin had never enjoyed during his lifetime as the authoritative interpreter of the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin. This was accompanied by a personality cult Lenin would have

ridiculed, which waxed as the 1930s proceeded. Marxism-Leninism was reduced to dogma. Another break with Bolshevism involved removal from the canon of Trotsky, Bukharin and Rosa Luxemburg, their heresies illuminating the rectitude of ‘Leninism’ (Barber, 1979; Plamper, 2012). This ensured future changes in Soviet and Comintern ideology would be concentrated in Stalin’s hands and that Stalinism packaged as ‘Leninism’ would stifle creativity.

In the political sphere, Stalinization demanded termination of the Bolshevik united front: in special circumstances there could be collaboration with fascists but not with social fascists. Only unity from below with reformist workers against reformist leaders was tolerated. Social fascist trade unionists were vilified and exposed by confrontation which did not stop short of breaking up their meetings. Red unions would follow and accelerate radicalization. Organizationally, the required structures were largely in place: it was a matter of infusing them with ‘iron proletarian discipline based on ideological solidarity’ and ensuring centralism predominated over democracy (Stalin, 1925/1954, pp. 38–40). In America, Comintern exhortations over factionalism were finally implemented: ‘All factionalism ... within the party must be immediately liquidated’ (Howe & Coser, 1957/1962, p.155). Fitzpatrick noted: ‘Lenin had imposed a formal ban on party factions ... Stalin actually succeeded in putting the ban into effect with the result that potential factions became conspiracies’ (Fitzpatrick, 1982, p.155). The WP leader, Max Bedacht, had already invoked new religious inspirations: ‘If we revolutionists had not already learned the lessons of ideological unity, we could learn the value of ideological unity and organizational centralization from the Catholic Church’ (quoted in Howe & Coser, 1957/1962, p.160). Stalin, who never demonstrated great regard for the Comintern, referring to it derisively as ‘the corner shop’, now opined: ‘The Comintern is the holy of holies of the working class’

(Draper, 1960, p.411; Haslam, 2006, p.644). Bedacht affirmed its infallibility, recanting his earlier views:

after the argument is settled by a definite decision, we not only accept the decision as a matter of discipline, but we accept the correctness of the decision as a means of recognizing the international and ideological superiority of the Comintern over ourselves. The formal acceptance of the decision must therefore in all cases be transformed into a political acceptance. The formal acceptance of a CI decision must be complete, with a political analysis of the decision to which we submit in order to penetrate and absorb the political reasons of the Comintern for making the decision. (Draper, 1960, p.421).

Despite majority support in the WP, the ruling Lovestone faction bowed the knee or were expelled (Zumoff, 2015 pp.267–285). Among CPGB leaders, nobody emulated Lovestone or Cannon in defying Stalinization. But there was initial resistance and Tom Bell, J.R. Campbell, Arthur Horner, Wal Hannington, Albert Inkpin, Tommy Jackson and Andrew Rothstein were removed or demoted. Harry Pollitt, who had assisted the Comintern in deposing the WP regime, was installed as CPGB leader with Stalin's approval. Russian rituals of inquisition, confession and recantation flourished, together with denunciations and persecution of dissidents, and the beginnings of a Stalin cult appeared (McIlroy, 2006; McIlroy & Campbell, 2002b).

Did Stalinization mean the Comintern and national parties ceased to be revolutionary, despite Third Period politics and the revolutionary mindset of their members? Jonathan Haslam remarked, with reference to China and Germany, the 'extraordinary credibility gap' between the revolutionary clamour and 'the flagrant timidity and conservatism of Stalin's instructions to foreign parties' (Haslam, 2006, pp.646; McDermott & Agnew, 1996, pp.94–98; O'Connor, 2008, p.246; Zumoff, 2015, pp.365–366). There can be little doubt that the anti-social-democrat crusade was entangled with eliciting a pro-Soviet stance from Weimar. However, Stalin was conscious of the dangers a capitalist response to revolutionary progress in Europe held in terms of moves against a Soviet Union in the throes of the revolution from above. This informed his calculations, although millions of Communists remained committed

to overthrowing capitalism in their own countries and perceived that objective as integral to defending the Soviet Union. Their restraint bespoke their weakness, deference and faith in the Soviet state.

Stalin was, nonetheless, determined to maintain his revolutionary credentials and keep the troops, who remained diplomatic bargaining chips, mobilized. Pressure on capitalist states could facilitate Soviet foreign policy if things did not go too far – which, given the fragility of many parties and injunctions against collaboration with Social Democrats, was unlikely. What was required was a balancing act which managed contradictions between foreign policy and the Comintern and revolution and defence of the Soviet Union. Matters were usually resolved in a conservative direction. In the German cockpit, social fascism disabled limited prospects of revolution and Stalin applied the brakes when it appeared affiliates might lurch into ‘adventures’.⁴³ Politically, 1935 may seem, as some suggest, a convenient point from which to date the Comintern’s transition from revolution to reform. However, popular frontism was initially projected and experienced as tactical rather than strategic, while the journey had been set in train earlier with consecration of ‘socialism in one country’. In terms of politics and activists’ subjectivity, it is important to remember that erosion of revolutionary consciousness was gradual and uneven. It is perhaps best to mark 1929 and 1935 as way stations on a winding road. In an uncertain world, individual revolutions were never ruled out – witness the botched coup in Brazil in 1935 – but what was envisaged were bourgeois-democratic revolutions with the working class subordinated. What went was the *perspective* of world proletarian revolution and Russian reliance on it.

This was all a long way from Lenin and the early Comintern which had offered world revolution as the best defence of the Soviet Union and some distance from Rapallo when Lenin had believed it possible to reconcile economic and military collaboration with the German state with overthrowing German capitalism. By 1934, the Franco-Soviet pact and

entry into the League of Nations resolved tensions between Soviet foreign policy and the Comintern in favour of the former. The International was governed through Stalin's satraps, Lazar Kaganovich and Molotov, and functionaries such as Manuilsky, Piatnitsky and Kuusinen (Firsov, 1992). If the Russian regime had little connection with socialism as previously conceived, the Comintern had little to do with socialist internationalism. The veteran German Communist, Clara Zetkin, concluded: 'the Comintern has turned from a living political body into a dead mechanism which on the one hand is capable only of swallowing orders in Russian and on the other regurgitating them in different languages' (quoted in Kotkin, 2017, p.20).

Bolshevism and Stalinism: Unpicking the relationship

We are now in a position to present some conclusions to the questions which prefaced this paper concerning the continuities between Lenin and Stalin, Bolshevism and Stalinism, Bolshevization and Stalinization. The connections are transparent. Lenin's achievement provided the basis for Stalin. Bolshevism provided the cocoon in which Stalinism incubated. The party-state, the monopoly of politics, the attenuation of party democracy, the paramountcy of the leader, state violence, emergent bureaucracy, controls over labour and civil society – all were present at Lenin's death, accompanied by determination to remain in power, a growing culture of political cynicism, *realpolitik*, and the mentality Luxemburg deplored, which exaggerated the merits of expediency and turned necessary vices into virtues. What seems compelling is the insight of Souvarine, expanded by Cohen, that Bolshevism as it had developed before Lenin's death was subsequently taken to such extremes that its very nature was transformed. What was involved in the excess and extremism of Stalin was a qualitative, not a quantitative, change which constituted a break with the ideas, politics and practice that preceded it (Cohen, 1999, p.12).

Stalinist terror transcended what had earlier transpired. It moved from war against the peasantry to the purges, show trials and terror of the 1930s, directed against those who knew first-hand what Bolshevism had been, before afflicting civil society. Where Lenin fought bureaucracy, Stalin co-opted it; his rule appealed to and was sustained, in a fraught relationship, by the new elites. He did not significantly change the structures of the party but nevertheless transformed it. Lenin's willingness to adapt organization to circumstance gave way to the petrified centralism maintained beyond Stalin's death. Lenin advocated a temporary ban on factions. Stalin prohibited dissidence permanently and in principle and broke with Lenin in utilizing violence and the security police to silence inner-party critics. Only under Stalin were 'rank and file Communists ... kept in virtual ignorance of the discussions of the party leadership and the leaders – particularly the supreme Leader – began to cultivate the god-like attributes of mystery and inscrutability' (Fitzpatrick, 1982, p.155). Lenin attained primacy through argument and authority, an authority questioned and disputed without attracting sanctions. Stalin's dictatorship was underpinned by unprecedented coercion. Bolshevik structures favoured a powerful leader and centralized control; this facilitated their remaking. Yet as Stephen Smith observes:

What this logically entails – though it is often overlooked by those who see Stalinism as arising seamlessly out of Leninism, is that if Bukharin or Trotsky had become general secretary, the horrors of Stalinism would not have come to pass, although economic backwardness and international isolation would still have constrained their room for manoeuvre. (Smith, 2017, p.388)

Bukharin and Trotsky lacked Stalin's appetite for power and absence of scruple in pursuing it. Consideration of character is pertinent to understanding Stalinism (Flewers, 2011; Tucker, 1973, pp.3–9, 444–445). Lenin should neither be canonized nor demonized. His calculated use of violence against class enemies did not compare in scope, intensity or purpose with Stalin's terror – although the threats before 1922 were greater than those in 1929. Lenin was prepared to do deals with capitalist states; but within the perspective of

world revolution. He never advocated ‘socialism in one country’. Or its corollary, Russian nationalism and its foreign policy outliers, ‘peaceful co-existence’ ‘collective security’ and the popular front strain foreign to earlier Bolshevism that Stalin embedded in ‘Official Communism’. Within a Marxist problematic, this kind of alliance between workers and their party, and the ‘democratic’ wing of capitalism and its parties, had no ideological precedent and traded the working-class interest in revolution for support for the Soviet Union. Dissolving the Bolshevik unity between the two entailed trimming revolutionary politics to what ‘progressive’ capitalists would wear. ‘Official Communism’ subsided into reformism, bread-and-butter trade unionism, winning official positions, with the overriding purpose of mustering support for Russian policies. It is difficult to imagine Lenin advocating either social fascism or popular front politics.⁴⁴

Before his death, he was travelling in a different direction: his last struggle was devoted to removing Stalin as general secretary (Lenin, 1922b/2017; Lewin, 1968a). As Tucker and others noted, Lenin was aware that Bolshevism, and Marxism generally, provided nothing like a blueprint for building socialism in a backward country beleaguered in a sea of capitalism. Rather, he maintained until the end ‘the elementary truth of Marxism that the joint efforts of the workers of several advanced countries are needed for the victory of socialism’ (Lenin, 1922c/2017, p.32). Navigating uncharted territory required realism and patience. It demanded education; a culture of cooperation; rebuilding party and class; revitalizing socialist consciousness; and creating a concordat with the middle peasantry – while persevering with international revolution (Žižek, 2017). Lenin wanted to develop not ditch the NEP: he wanted to reach agreement with the peasantry ‘to save the revolution’; he wanted to maintain market mechanisms, while expanding the state sector, within a horizon of decades (Lenin, 1923a,b/1966). We should neither lend too great coherence to the ideas in his final writings, nor exaggerate their potential for success. There can be little doubt he was

groping towards a strategy of cautious, modulated advance. This was Lenin's socialism in one country: it hinged on gradual industrialization and persuading the peasants, simultaneously nurturing revolutionary prospects in Europe and the East without whose success socialism would prove impossible. This was different from Stalin's 'socialism in one country', no more utopian – in all likelihood immeasurably less dystopian – than that turned out to be.

We cannot usefully speculate what Lenin might have done had he survived until 1928. What may be said is that before his death he never countenanced anything resembling Stalin's 'great break'. Nor did Bukharin. Nor did Trotsky: 'We can be confident that although the left shared Stalin's determination to smash the fetters of socio-economic and cultural backwardness, it would not have unleashed anything like the violent collectivization or Great Terror that soon ensued' (Smith, 2017, p.388).⁴⁵ The fact that leading Bolsheviks thought differently to Stalin points to the limits of determinism and the continuity thesis. The weight of evidence sustains the verdict that:

Stalin's new policies of 1929–33, 'the great change', were a radical departure from Bolshevik programmatic thinking. No Bolshevik leader or faction had ever advocated anything akin to imposed collectivization, the 'liquidation' of the kulaks, breakneck industrialization and a 'plan' which was, of course, no plan at all ... The years of 'revolution from above' were historically and programmatically the birth period of Stalinism. (Cohen, 1999, p.24)

In short, the rupture was decisive and qualitative, the differences sufficiently significant to make it both compelling and useful for historians to distinguish Stalinism from Bolshevism. Further development would occur. However, in terms of ideology, programme, politics and policy, 1929–1933 represents a watershed: 'although the institutions of rule did not change, personal dictatorship, the unrestrained use of force, the cult of power, paranoia about encirclement and internal wreckers, and the spiralling of terror across an entire society, all served to underline the difference between Stalinism and Leninism' (Smith, 2017, p.389). But if we accept that, there still remains a fine and, it must be said, subjective and difficult

line to be drawn between pronouncing Stalinism to be, on the one hand, an extreme variant of Bolshevism, and, on the other, an ideology, politics and practice beyond it. Bolshevism was elastic but not infinitely so. Acknowledging that different conclusions are possible, we concur with those scholars who believe that Stalinism went beyond the bounds of Bolshevism. Many historians do not explicitly consider the distinction. Priestland (2007, p.56), for example, speaks of ‘a fundamental ideological change at the beginning of the 1930s’ and notes Stalinism incorporated non-Marxist, ‘neo-traditional’ elements. But he addresses innovation largely within the framework of Bolshevism.⁴⁶ Elaboration of support for continuity generally remains rare: many endorsements are terse and allusive. Bob Service, for example, adverts, rather opaquely, to the continuity thesis as ‘nearer the truth’ although ‘Stalin had changed the balance and composition of the elements of the Soviet compound’ (Service, 1997, p.169). On the evidence reviewed in this article, we believe it reasonable to add: to a degree where it is more exact and helpful to historical understanding to think in terms of a generic change.

Similar considerations apply to attempts to assimilate 1929–1933 to 1917 (notably Deutscher, 1949/1966; Fitzpatrick, 1982). Their provenance and agency were different. The Bolshevik revolution was a working-class insurrection. The agent of the Stalinist revolution was a bureaucratic state commanded, not by the working class but by an emergent dictatorship underpinned by a party faction. It completed its tasks by liquidating the cadre of 1917, accomplishing its party’s subordination to dictatorship, and transforming economy and society in a fashion Deutscher compared with the savageries of Britain’s industrial revolution. Whatever obstacles it encountered and whatever the compromises subsequently made – which undermined its socialist mission – October promised a society governed by working-class power, self-management and democratic decision-making, a society moving towards human emancipation. These objectives had no place in the second revolution premised on catching up with capitalism, expropriation, and in some cases extermination, of

the peasantry, and subjugation of the working class. The second revolution delivered its quietus to the first, extinguishing its hopes of democracy and socialism. Unless, that is, we are prepared to replace internationalism, workers' ownership and management of the means of production, and democratic control of party and state, with nationalism, absence of democracy, and ownership and control of the means of production vested in a despotic state, as the essence of socialism.⁴⁷ If we consider fundamentals and examine events, we will conclude that Stalin and his supporters helped engineer and then extended, ratified and finally transformed into a new politics, the incremental, accelerating erosion of Bolshevism which had unfolded after 1917. We will agree with Liebman that 'it is hard to exaggerate the basic incompatibility of Leninism and Stalinism' (Liebman, 1980, p.433); and concur with Georg Lukács that in the final analysis: 'Leninism in which the spirit of Marx lived was converted into its diametrical opposite' (quoted in Le Blanc, 2016, p.82).

We can expand sketchily and schematically on what this negation involved, underlining that 1929–1933 saw only the breakthrough after which the new politics developed their own dynamic. Passing through successive phases, Stalinism, and its application, Stalinization, was characterized by institutionalized acceptance in the Soviet party-state, the Comintern, and national parties of policy and practice finally decided in the higher echelons of the party and approved by the dictator; bureaucratic 'socialism in one country'; authoritarian planning; a state-controlled economy; terror, hierarchy, discipline and reassertion of 'traditional values' in all walks of life; social mobility which furthered crystallization and renewal of political, administrative and intellectual elites; state domination of working-class institutions which facilitated atomization and exploitation; state supervision of culture; cultivation of a siege mentality and the 'war danger'; revival of nationalism; and growing assertion that bourgeois resistance intensified with progress towards socialism, so that the state could not wither away but must be strengthened. As an ideology serving the

state, Stalinism's manifestations moved on from the ultra-left Third Period emphases to the adaptations to reformism of the popular front era, culminating in 1941–1945 when, in solidarity with the Soviet Union, Stalinism moved towards the right wing of American and British politics. However, it is mistaken to identify it beyond Russia purely with popular frontism, despite its enduring significance, or view it simply in terms of imposed dominion. As a strategy for survival in intractable circumstances, Stalinism had a strong base and for many a compelling logic. The regime depended on coercion, but it would be wrong to underestimate its ability to mobilize support and achieve transformative, although non-socialist, change worldwide (Cohen, 1999; Fitzpatrick, 1974, 1990; Lewin, 1968b; Reiman, 1987; Rossman, 2005; Tucker, 1977b/1999, 1990).

If we turn to the American and British parties, it is clear that political subordination to Moscow – variously assigned in the literature to the early 1920s, 1924, 1929 or even 1939 – *preceded* Stalinization and cannot be identified with it. The WP's subservience, willed by its leaders, accepted by its members, was accomplished by 1923: 'The first change of line was every other change of line in embryo' (Draper, 1957, p.395). Each originated in Russia, each was accepted by the WP: 'a Russian initiative has always effectively begun and ended it' (Draper, 1957, p.395). Until 1923, subordination yielded some benefits; Comintern leadership subsequently proved unhelpful. Similar conclusions apply to the CPGB.⁴⁸ From its acceptance of Lenin's arguments against syndicalism and for engagement with the Labour Party in 1920, through its attempt to implement the Theses on Organization in 1922, to Moscow's reformation of the leadership and redirection of trade union work in 1923, the party followed the political lead of the Comintern and became dependent on it (McIlroy & Campbell, 2002a). What happened with the 1924–1925 'Bolshevization' was not the creation of subordination but its confirmation. Each change of line presented opportunities for insubordination, never grasped because of the CPGB and WP's 'implicit faith' in the Soviet

leadership. In 1929, the politics of already-existing subordination shifted radically. Stalinization was not subordination in some abstract, general sense. It represented a break with Bolshevism and discrete subordination to a newly-installed dictatorship purveying distinctive politics underpinned by ‘socialism in one country’. Glossing over its specificity courts historiographical imprecision, depoliticization, and normalizing Stalinism. In the CPGB, no significant opposition emerged; the WP witnessed only the relatively small rebellions of Cannon and Lovestone. Faith in the Soviet leadership was fundamental and overarching. Resistance typically meant individual complaint, inactivity or exit.

Some cite reluctance to embrace organizational initiatives, notably workplace cells, as evidence of resistance. But few acted to oppose this politically, asserting it debilitated democracy or encouraged economism. Resistance was based on a hostile environment, and fear of victimization.⁴⁹ Other writers have minimized the Stalinization of the CPGB by measuring it against unrealistic notions of ‘total control’ which, given the party ultimately accepted every change in Comintern politics, appear to transcend politics. One account claims rather nebulously that subordination was restricted because party branches had different kinds of members and priorities (Taylor & Worley, 2008, pp.233, 241). This evades the salient point. Whatever the different backgrounds, interests, commitment and experience of members, branches operated within a common political framework and there is insignificant evidence members strayed from it in meaningful fashion, still less pursued a counter-politics. Assertion that ‘new members, new policies, new problems and new priorities’ (Taylor & Worley, 2008, p.241) qualified the political subordination of the CPGB to Moscow – it is just as plausible to argue they solidified control – is fanciful. The American and British parties replicated the Soviet party model in its essentials. Given the cultural chasm between centre and satellites and functional distinctions between a party in power and oppositional groups, differences were unsurprising. Where the CPGB and WP fell short, as

with workplace units or trade union fractions, the pattern was one of continuing endeavour, creation–relapse–renewal, in the face of a recalcitrant context. If they failed to mirror the ruling Russian party with exactitude, they were distinctive in relation to other American and British parties.

Scholars reaching back to Howe and Coser who lifted the veil of ‘Bolshevization’ in 1924–1925 to reveal the triumvirate’s struggle against their Bolshevik opponents and the first signs of Stalinism were perceptive if at times premature. It is incumbent on historians to go beyond labels pinned on initiatives by self-interested actors. What was in play from 1929 was not Bolshevization but Stalinization: historians, no more than ornithologists, should confuse geese with swans or conclude significant distinctions are unnecessary or impossible to make. The task is to attempt to penetrate complexity rather than retreat invoking it. Stalin presented himself as Lenin’s direct political heir and rejected ‘Stalinism’. This was taken as good coin by the Communist parties for whom Bolshevism remained a vital mobilizing myth. Today we can see Stalinist linguistic appropriation for what it was: an exercise in political legitimation and the invention of tradition. After all, few historians would credit the National Socialist German Workers’ Party with pursuing either a socialist mission or representing workers’ interests in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Fainsod (1953); Brzezinski (1956); McNeal (1963).

² For continuity, see, for example, Shapiro (1955/1977), pp.360–361; Fitzpatrick (1982). For disjuncture, see Lewin (1968a,b, 1975); Tucker (1973); Cohen (1974).

³ An important exception was James (1937/1993).

⁴ For America, see Palmer (2003). For Britain, see McIlroy & Campbell (2003, 2005).

⁵ See Palmer (2003), p.171, n.71. Edward Thompson’s response to political critics is of relevance to historians of Communism: ‘You are *not* a “post-Stalinist generation”. You are a generation amongst whom the reasons and legitimations of Stalinism are by means of “theoretical practice” being reproduced every day’ (Thompson, 1978/1981, p.136). Happily, there is little talk of ‘a post-Hitler generation’. For differences and similarities between the two systems, see Kershaw and Lewin (1997).

⁶ For media stereotypes, see Lawson (2018): ‘Stalinism cannot be separated by an ideological cigarette paper from Lenin’s thought or that of Karl Marx.’

⁷ The US party operated under various names. From 1921 it was known as the Workers' Party, later the Workers' (Communist) Party before becoming the Communist Party (USA) in 1929. To simplify matters, we refer to it throughout as the WP.

⁸ For recent analysis of Bolshevism which addresses debates about democratic centralism and permanent revolution, see, for example, Lih (2006, 2011, 2013, 2017); Le Blanc (2014, 2017).

⁹ It is, nonetheless, acceptable to use Leninism to refer to Bolshevik praxis until 1923, although some distinctions seem overdrawn – viz: 'Bolshevism, although often used synonymously with Leninism, refers to the practice of, or the movement for, Marxist socialist revolution, whereas Leninism is the theoretical analysis (theory and practice) of socialist revolution' (Lane, 1991, p.53).

¹⁰ A valuable survey of the literature is provided by Cohen (1999). See also Boffa (1982), pp. 30–44, Priestland, (2007), pp.1–16.

¹¹ Cf. 'decisions made by Stalin and the manner in which they were made and executed were prepared by Lenin' (Meyer, 1957, pp.282–283).

¹² Stalinism, Lewin argued, 'was not a direct outgrowth of Bolshevism but rather an autonomous and parallel phenomenon' (Lewin, 1985, p.9); the influence of pre-revolutionary ideas on Stalinism is stressed (pp.304–310).

¹³ For an introduction to Souvarine, see Richardson (2001).

¹⁴ The philosopher Leszek Kolakowski was a notable exception – see, for example, Kolakowski (1999).

¹⁵ In the following decade leading British Sovietologists still took continuity for granted: 'With the ascendancy of Stalin ... Bolshevism became associated with his policies' (Lane, 1991, p. 54).

¹⁶ Kangaspuro & Oittinen (2015, p. 9) chimed with historiographical fashion in seeking to illuminate 'Stalinism as a socio-cultural phenomenon'.

¹⁷ For the Russian literature, see Litvin & Keep (2005), pp.32–76.

¹⁸ Claudin (1975) documents and discusses discontinuity without conceptualizing Bolshevism and Stalinism.

¹⁹ This may refer to frictions between the policy of the Russian state disseminated through the Comintern and the policy of the Russian state disseminated through the Foreign Ministry. However, there appear to have been no contradictions of lasting significance in the years preceding the Hitler-Stalin pact. The point of substance is that by the 1930s the Comintern, in company with the Foreign Ministry, was an agency of the Russian state and ultimately subject to Stalin's direction.

²⁰ See also Callinicos (1990); McNeal (1999).

²¹ Palmer applied this judgement to both the 'traditionalist' work of Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes – for a summation see Haynes & Klehr (2003) – which followed Draper in addressing a composite 'Communism', and the 'history from below' of 'New Left' writers.

²² Intriguingly, an extended review of Weber's *Die Wanderlung* by Hobsbawm refers to 'Bolshevization' but never mentions 'Stalinization' (Hobsbawm, 1970, p.86).

²³ In Morgan (2006, p.233) 'Bolshevization', unexplained, makes a single-sentence appearance. 'Stalinization', equated with Weber's limited use of the term to designate the process, mechanics and outcome of subordination – and apparently co-terminus with Weber's periodization, 1924–1929 – is introduced vis-à-vis the CPGB at the end of the book. Its relationship to 'Bolshevization' is unexplained.

²⁴ It brings to mind Matthew Arnold:

Let the long contention cease!
Geese are swans and swans are geese
Let them have it how they will ...

'Farewell: The Last Word', in McPhail (1916).

²⁵ There is reluctance to refer to the extensive literature which analyses the Stalinist state, society and economy in Marxist terms: see van der Linden (2007).

²⁶ This is neither to deny nor grant undue significance to passive, inactive and temporary members. If loyalty was to be tested, it endured. On application cards for joining the American party, commitment to the Comintern took first place, commitment to its US party, second place: 'The undersigned declares his adherence to the program and statutes of the Communist International and the Workers' (Communist) Party ...' (quoted in Draper, 1957, 263).

²⁷ Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (hereafter RGASPI), 495/38/1, English Commission, June-July 1923.

²⁸ See McDermott & Agnew (1996), pp.1–40; Broué (1997), pp.17–266. For primary materials, see Riddell (1987; 1991; 2011; 2015).

²⁹ Space precludes full discussion but see Haslam (2006).

³⁰ We are grateful to Steve Smith for emphasising these points to us.

³¹ It is suggestive that Lenin hoped to move the Comintern headquarters to Berlin after the German revolution.

³² Macfarlane heads the relevant section, 'Bolshevizing the Party'.

³³ RGASPI, 495/38/1, English Commission, 1923. The record provides a vivid account of the dire condition of the CPGB.

³⁴ Also relevant were the gaps between congresses – four years between the Fifth and Sixth World Congress and seven years between the Sixth and Seventh World Congress in 1935.

³⁵ Similarly, at the Red International of Labour Unions, where from 1922, Alexander Lozovsky, ‘as a supporter of Stalin ... immediately implemented his turns of policy’ (Tosstorff, 2016, p.500). Stalin’s control of the party was facilitated by debilitation of its working-class base, dilution of its cadre, the turn from politics to administration lamented by Lenin, and growing reliance on centralization. By 1922, two-thirds of members were administrators, cells met infrequently, and key posts were filled by appointment from the centre, rather than election (Acton, 1990, p.207).

³⁶ The concluding remark refers to Lenin’s criticism of Stalin in his *Testament*.

³⁷ For Piatnitsky’s role in the imbrication of the Comintern with the Russian party and police apparatus from 1926, see Rosenfeldt (2009), esp. pp.199–206.

³⁸ Reorganization of the WP went hand-in-hand with a drop in membership – see Draper, (1960), pp.187–188.

³⁹ For America, see Palmer (2007), pp.226–227.

⁴⁰ For the different theories, see van der Linden (2007). We are indebted to Steve Smith for discussion of this point.

⁴¹ He continued: ‘It is of course not a question of subjective intentions but of the objective logic of political thought.’

⁴² Ironically, capitalist crisis emerged as Stalinist leftism waned.

⁴³ Haslam, (2006), p.647, suggests Stalin aimed to embroil the German nationalists in conflict with France.

⁴⁴ For contemporary dissection of Stalin’s attempts to trace his ideas to Lenin, see Trotsky (1966). Martemyan Ryutin, the leader of the 1932 opposition, also produced a detailed statement, ‘Stalin and the Crisis of the Proletarian Dictatorship’, which unfavourably contrasted Stalin with Lenin and Stalinism with Bolshevism: see, for example, Kotkin, (2017), pp.2, 70–71. For a pioneering account, see James (1937/1993).

⁴⁵ Cf. ‘No candidate for the Lenin succession ... would have done what Stalin did ... Lenin’s widow quipped that if he had not died in 1924 he would be serving time in one of Stalin’s prisons’ (Service, 1997, p.227). The less than sympathetic Service concluded: ‘Lenin did not envisage a strategy of liquidating millions of innocent and hard-working peasants ... Nor did he aim to exterminate his enemies, real and imaginary, in the party ... His vision of a future for mankind when all exploitation and oppression would disappear was sincere. That surely is the central point of his life’ (Service, 1995, pp. 322–323). E.H. Carr (1961/1987, p. 169) remarked: ‘Under Lenin the passage might not have been altogether smooth, but it would have been nothing like what happened.’

⁴⁶ ‘My own view was that in domestic politics divisions over what I called ‘revivalism’/‘technicism’ and ‘elitism’/‘populism’ are more useful in explaining policy shifts over a number of issues, such as economic policy and political violence, than ‘Leninism’ and ‘Stalinism’. But I can see that if you are working on the Comintern, where a central question is that of degrees of centralization in the relations between Moscow and national parties, the political organization and style of politics questions might be more important, and so the distinction between Leninism and Stalinism might explain more’ – David Priestland, Personal communication to authors, December 1, 2018.

⁴⁷ For similar comments, see Lewin (2005), pp. 379–380; Reiman, (1987), pp.121–122. In forensic terms, the use of ‘revolution’ to denote the events of 1929 is perhaps problematic – but helpful in evoking their transformative sweep.

⁴⁸ This is not to deny that Comintern direction after the early 1920s was not sometimes beneficial. Or that Moscow’s approach was not superior in some cases to that of native Communists. Nonetheless, the successes at times ascribed to Moscow initiatives, a healthier orientation to trade unions, black workers, community and cultural work, growth in party membership, influence and popularity, are predominantly located in the popular front periods, 1935–1939 and 1941–1945. They were thus based on sacrificing revolutionary policy to pursuit of populist reformism. And they do not detract from the over-riding negatives: the misplaced, quasi-religious faith American and British Communists placed in the Soviet Union and Comintern; and an unequal relationship which prioritized the interests of the rulers of Russia over the interests of the workers of America, Britain and other countries. The relationship may in itself be judged antithetical to socialist values.

⁴⁹ For a discussion, see McDermott & Agnew (1996), pp.63–67. For the CPGB, see Macfarlane (1966), pp.133–135, 157–158. For the WP, Draper (1960), pp.157–161, 191–193, 217–218.

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