

A Survey of Comintern Auxiliary Organizations - Part 1: Introduction

Sunday 3 October 2021, by [RIDDELL John](#) (Date first published: 5 April 2021).

By John Riddell: Clustered around the early Communist International's world congresses were gatherings of an array of related organizations, ranging from the massive Red International of Trade Unions (RILU) to a small gathering of Proletarian Culture (Proletkult) enthusiasts.

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These auxiliary bodies greatly expanded the Comintern's influence in the working class and beyond, establishing a presence in diverse sectors of cultural life, broadening the scope of its global campaigns, and providing an channel for increased recruitment.

In this regard, the Comintern reproduced the approach of many parties in the pre-1914 Second International, and particularly that of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Indeed, the youth and women's affiliates of the Comintern had actually been founded as part of the older International.

The [Comintern Publishing Project](#), initiated by John Riddell and now directed by Mike Taber, includes three volumes of annotated documents on auxiliary organizations, all now in preparation, covering the Communist Women's Movement (CWM), the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), and, the Communist Youth International (CYI).

The present survey will provide brief overviews of eight of the Comintern's auxiliary organizations, focusing on its opening years, 1917-24. This list is far from exhaustive. The international Proletkult initiative is cited below; a report on the International Union of War Veterans will appear in the Publishing Project's forthcoming volume on the trade union international. The most comprehensive treatment of this topic remains that found in E.H. Carr's monumental history of the Russian revolution (*The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 3, chapter 30; *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3, chapters 44 and 45).

After these introductory remarks, this survey will take up the following organizations:

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Red International of Labour Unions \(RILU or Profintern\)](#)
3. [Communist Youth International](#) (KIM)
4. [Communist Women's Movement](#)
5. [International Workers' Relief](#) (MRP)

6. [International Red Aid](#) (MOPR)
7. [Communist Work in Cooperatives](#)
8. Red Sport International (Sportintern)
9. Peasant International (Krestintern)

A Varied Spectrum

The auxiliary organizations differed greatly in character. Some examples:

- The Comintern's youth wing (CYM) originated as a component of the Second International and came over in its entirety to Communist movement. The "workers' relief" campaign (MRP), by contrast, was born as a novel response to an entirely new challenge: a severe famine in Soviet Russia.
- The MRP was structurally autonomous; the Communist Women's Movement (CWM), by contrast, was a wing of the Comintern Executive Committee; while the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) was hybrid, formally independent but in reality closely tied to the Comintern.
- Many of the auxiliary bodies were based in Moscow, but there were exceptions: MRP was always based in Berlin; CWM was based first in Berlin but later in Moscow.
- The Youth International was avowedly political in character, while the Sport International, with which it was closely related, focused more narrowly on an arena of working-class culture.

During the Comintern's Second Congress (1920), a side-meeting was held with an expressly cultural purpose: the creation of an international bureau of the Soviet organization Proletarian Culture (ProletKult). Initiated by Soviet Commissar Anatoly Lunacharsky, the meeting elected a seven-person committee.[1]

Alongside the global auxiliary organizations, the Communist movement also encompassed many nationally based initiatives, such as the "language federations" based on immigrant communities in the United States and Canada. The Communist movement sought to gain influence in every domain of working-class life and among all victims of capitalist oppression, and thus provide a basis for political campaigns with broad social impact.

Colonial Freedom Struggle

The struggle for social and political freedom in colonies and semi-colonies received close attention in the early Communist International, including at two major conferences: the First Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in Baku in 1920, and the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East, which took place in Moscow two years later.[2]

The Baku Congress established a Council for Propaganda and Action, based in Baku, which carried out a vigorous publication program in the languages of the Near East. In 1922 its functions were integrated into the Comintern center in Moscow.

Other such initiatives followed, like the China-oriented Sun Yat-Sen University in Moscow and the [League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression](#).

Comintern relations with Communist groups and parties in the colonial world were handled either directly, from the Moscow centre, or by the Communist party in the colonizing party, an arrangement that, as Ho Chi Minh explained to the Comintern's Fifth World Congress in 1924, was fraught with shortcomings.[3]

All components of the Comintern organized intensive educational and advocacy work in defense of the Russian Soviet Republic (after 1922: the Soviet Union) as part of a permanent global campaign. Many sections formed agencies dedicated to this work. However, no special agency existed to coordinate this work until 1927, when the International Association of Friends of the Soviet Union was formed in celebration of the Soviet republic's tenth anniversary.

The End of the Auxiliary Internationals

Following its Seventh World Congress in 1935, the now-Stalinized Comintern gained increased prominence and, in France and Spain, significant government influence through participation in "popular fronts." Yet the 1935 world congress effectively abandoned the guiding goal of socialist revolution that had provided the International with its *raison d'être*.

During the years after the congress, the murderous Stalin purges took aim at Comintern leaders within reach of the Soviet authorities, striking down the majority of the surviving cadres from the International's first fifteen years. The Comintern itself was progressively dismantled. The massive auxiliary organizations were shut down one after another. By the end of 1939, they were all gone, save for the Youth International, which was dissolved together with the Comintern itself in 1943.

The post-1945 pro-Moscow "Communist" movement encompassed some organizations playing an auxiliary role, but no longer as components of a revolutionary world movement.

"Comintern Outreach" is continued in "[Continued in Part 2: The Red International of Labour Unions](#)."

Notes

[1]. See John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress (1920)*, New York: Pathfinder, 1991, vol. 2, p. 484.

[2]. Riddell, ed., *To See the Dawn: Baku 1920, First Congress of the Peoples of the East*, New York: Pathfinder, 1993, p. 30; John Sexton, ed., [Alliance of Adversaries: The Congress of the Toilers of the Far East](#), Leiden/Chicago, Brill, 2018/Haymarket Books, 2019).

[3]. Riddell, Vijay Prashad, and Nazeef Mollah, eds., [Liberate the Colonies! Communism and Colonial Freedom, 1917-1924](#), New Delhi: pp. 258-65.

P.S.

• John Riddell blog. April 5, 2021:

<https://johnriddell.com/2021/04/05/comintern-outreach/>