

A Morning with Comrade Lenin: A Collective Workshop on the Heroes and Ideas of Communism and Socialism

(UCOR 2000 The West and the World, 40 students per section)



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The general problem: sustaining student interest during a required Core Curriculum course

The specific problem: helping post-Cold War students understand the ideas and appeal of Communism

Method: Students re-enact key speeches of key Communist/Socialist leaders, followed by a field trip to Fremont for a brief lecture on the statue of V. I. Lenin. I have done this exercise in every UCOR 2000 section I have taught for the past eight years.

Preparation: A few days before the Workshop, we divide into 7 groups and students get their scripts. Each group's scripts consist of introductions to key historical figures, and speeches or writings of those figures. Students practice dramatic introductions and readings, plan costuming, stage blocking, stage business, etc.

Workshop: Each historical figure is introduced by a student, who acts out introducing the person live in the time and place the speech would have been given. Other students act out the historical character giving the speech. Students always bring strong creativity to this: costuming, stage blocking, sometimes mock arguments. Concludes with the class singing the show-stopping musical number, "The Wobbly Doxology" (see last item on list of texts).

Field Trip: Walk/drive to Lenin statue in Fremont for a brief lecture on the forms and significance of Soviet-era political art. Statue sculpted by Emil Venkov, in Czechoslovakia, 1988.

Origins of Communism: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

Texts: Communist Confession of Faith (1847); Communist Manifesto (1848).

Themes: Class struggle, exploitation of workers, abolition of private property, need for state control of the economy, abolition of child labor, free public education, superfluity of religion.

Russian Communism: Vladimir I. Lenin

Texts: Lenin speech in exile in Switzerland (1916); Lenin speech to Congress of Workers and Soldiers (1917); Lenin speech to Congress of Women Workers (1918)

Themes: WWI as a war to expand European imperialism, introduction of democracy into army and factories, abolition of private land ownership, emancipation of women and expansion of women's rights.

Interlude: L'Internationale

Listen to and sing L'Internationale, the international anthem of socialism

Russian Communism: Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin

Texts: Permanent Revolution (1930), Stalin speech to Congress of Women Workers (1925). *Themes:* Necessity of promoting worldwide Communist revolution; importance of peasant and working women to success of Communist revolution.

Chinese Communism: Mao Zedong

Texts: Sayings and Poetry of Mao Zedong *Themes:* Righteousness of armed revolution, necessity of violence, glory of women soldiers, need for discipline, self-criticism, and self-sacrifice, inevitability of socialist triumph.

American Socialism: Eugene V. Debs

Text: Debs speech "The Socialist Party and the Working Class, given during the U.S. presidential campaign of 1904 *Themes:* Wage labor is but wage slavery, worker control of means of production, emancipation of women, abolition of child labor.

American Socialism: Industrial Workers of the World ("Wobblies")

Texts: IWW statement of purpose (1920); street-corner oration by 'San Francisco' Phil Mellman (1920s); courtroom statement by Mellman as he is sentenced to jail time (1922). *Themes:* All wage earners are part of working class, necessity of one big union, call to a general strike to shut down the system, state use of "criminal syndicalism" laws to jail people for attending IWW meetings.

Conclusion: Singing of the Wobbly Doxology

Praise Boss when morning work bells chime

Praise him for bits of overtime

Praise him whose wars we love to fight

Praise him fat leech and parasite. A-men