



The Internationale

PEOPLES SCHOOL FOR MARXIST-LENINIST STUDIES™



Women Against Fascism
Presented by the Women's Commission of the PCUSA

PSMLS 03/04/2025



What we'll be learning today:

Women Against Fascism

- Rosa Luxemburg against the fascist-enabling SPD
- Women Partisans in Spain against Franco
- The Mirabal Sisters against Trujillo
- WWII: Soviet Night Witches
- Vilma Castro against fascist Batista



Rosa Luxemburg - Against the Fascist-Enabling SPD



Early Life

- Luxemburg was born in Poland in 1871 and was involved in political activities from an early age.
- At the age of 15, she joined the illegal Proletariat Party, eventually leading a general strike in which 4 of the party leaders were put to death and the party was disbanded.
- Despite this, the party continued its activities in secret.
- She was wanted by the tsarist police for her political activities, so she hid in the countryside, eventually fleeing to Switzerland at the age of 18 to attend the University of Zurich.





Political Career

Luxemburg was the first woman in the world to be awarded a doctorate in political economy. She was the leading theoretician of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL) party.

She moved to Germany in 1898 to be at the center of the party struggle. She was active in the left wing of the SPD, where she strongly opposed Bernstein's revisionism theory. She became lifelong friends with Clara Zetkin during this time.



Clara Zetkin (left) with Rosa Luxemburg (right) in 1910



World War I

In 1900, Luxemburg published articles attacking German militarism and imperialism. Foreseeing the coming war, she wanted to organize a general strike to prevent it.

SPD leaders refused, and when war broke out in 1914, the SPD majority supported it and voted in favour of the Reichstag funding the war. They agreed to a truce with the Imperial government and promised that SPD-controlled labour unions would refrain from strike action for the duration of the war. Luxemburg contemplated taking her life, as the revisionism she fought for 15 years had won.



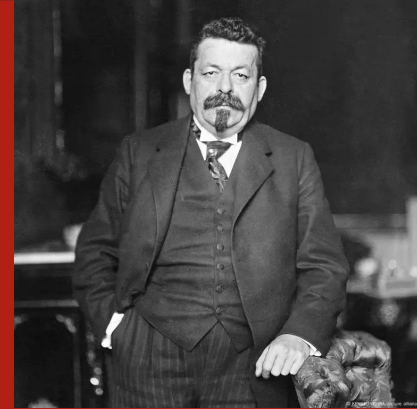
Protests against World War I at the 1918 Women's Peace Conference in The Hague



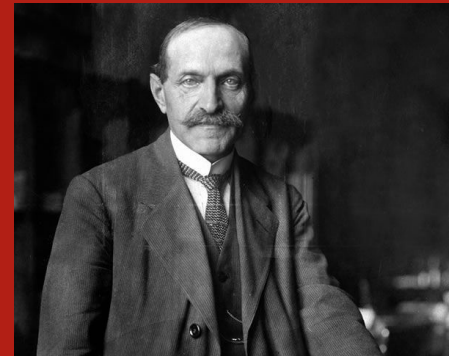
Setting the Stage for the Weimar Republic

In November 1918, the Council of the People's Deputies was formed as a provisional government following the collapse of the German Empire at the end of World War I. It was led by Friedrich Ebert (who was once a student of Luxemburg) of the Majority Social Democratic Party (MSPD) and Hugo Haase of the more left-wing Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), with three representatives from each party.

The MSPD was right-leaning, supporting a social democracy. In a clandestine agreement, the Ebert-Groener Pact was signed in which Groener, General of the German Army, assured Chancellor Ebert of the loyalty of the armed forces. In return, Ebert promised to take prompt action against leftist uprisings.



Friedrich Ebert (above)
Hugo Haase (below)



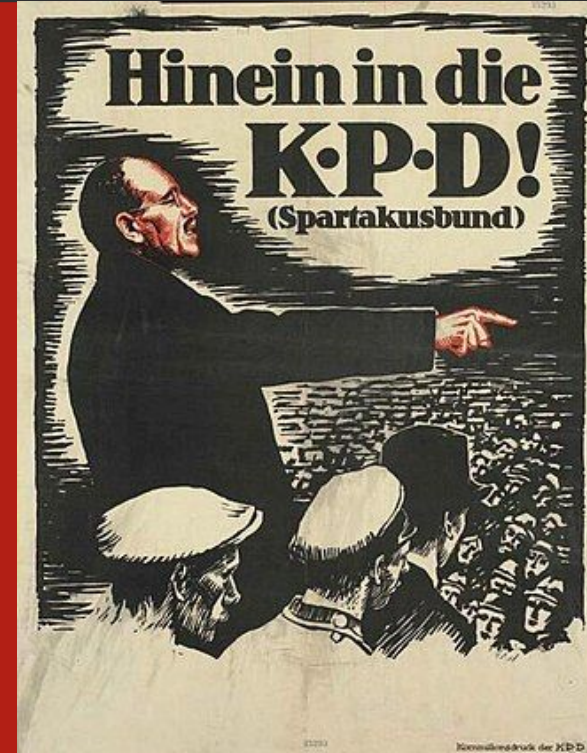


Setting the Stage for the Weimar Republic

Meanwhile, the USPD pursued their revolutionary goals of nationalizing property, stripping power from the military and establishing a soviet republic.

In January 1919, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht founded the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Luxemburg supported the KPD participating in the Weimar National Assembly elections, but she was out-voted and the KPD boycotted the elections.

The KPD and USPD, along with the Revolutionary Stewards, were the primary organizations which would later form the Revolutionary Committee.





The Spartacist Uprising - Start of the Uprising

In December 1918, a dispute arose over back pay owed to the People's Marine Division and as a result, Police Chief Eichhorn of the USPD was dismissed. The USPD and KPD interpreted Eichhorn's dismissal as an attack on the revolution.



This became the immediate trigger of the uprising, which occurred in January 1919. The protest exceeded expectations of scale and turnout, in numbers exceeding 100,000. The Spartacus League's publication, *The Red Flag*, called for the KPD to occupy the press buildings.



The Spartacist Uprising - Failure of Leadership

- The Revolutionary Committee could not agree on how to proceed. Representatives were divided, some called for armed insurrection while others pleaded for negotiations with Ebert. Liebknecht, against the advice of Luxemburg, supported the plan to unleash a civil war.
- The Committee was unable to signal to the thousands of demonstrators waiting for direction in the streets on what they should do. As a result, protestors went home on the evenings of both 5 and 6 January without having accomplished anything.
- On January 6th, the Revolutionary Committee began negotiating with Ebert through the mediation of USPD leadership. The negotiations failed due to the unwillingness of either side to compromise. The chance for a nonviolent settlement of the conflict was lost.



The Spartacist Uprising - The Bloody End

- In response to the uprising, Ebert ordered the Freikorps, a far-right paramilitary formation, to suppress the protesters.
- The insurgents were not prepared for organized battles. In many cases they surrendered voluntarily. Despite this, the military killed over a hundred insurgents and an unknown number of uninvolved civilians in the area.
- Tragically, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were arrested and tortured before being executed by the Freikorps. Their murders were staged as an assassination.
- Despite being utilized by the leader of the Weimar Republic, many Freikorps despised the Republic and were involved in assassinations of its supporters, later aiding the Nazis in their rise to power.



Initially, propaganda was spread that Luxemburg was killed by a mob before a proper investigation revealed her true cause of death.



The Spartacist Uprising - Lessons Learned

Had the Spartacist uprising been more organized and better planned, a successful revolution could have been the outcome.

With the crushing of the rebellion, the stage was set for the breakdown of democracy under SPD leadership and the takeover of the Nazi party.

As Clara Zetkin would write just 4 years later in her pamphlet, *The Struggle Against Fascism*,

“It is not at all the revenge of the bourgeoisie against the militant uprising of the proletariat. In historical terms, viewed objectively, fascism arrives much more as punishment because the proletariat has not carried and driven forward the revolution that began in Russia.”

“We
will be
victorious
if we
have not
forgotten
how
to learn.”



-ROSA LUXEMBURG
1871-1919

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Discussion



World War II



NIGHT WITCHES



They flew under the cover of darkness in bare-bones plywood biplanes. They braved bullets and frostbite in the air. They were feared and hated so much by the Nazis that any German airman who downed one was automatically awarded the prestigious Iron Cross medal.

All told, the pioneering all-female 588th Night Bomber Regiment dropped more than 23,000 tons of bombs on Nazi targets. And in doing so, they became a crucial Soviet asset in winning World War II.

The regiment consisted of woman aged 17 through 26, 400 selected from 20,000 volunteers. They underwent a highly compressed education—expected to learn in a few months what it took most soldiers several years to grasp. Each recruit had to train and perform as pilots, navigators, maintenance and ground crew.

The ground crew – Night Witches all – would repair any damages, refuel the planes, and load more bombs for the *next sortie*, sometimes three in one night.



NIGHT WITCHES

The Germans nicknamed them the *Nachthexen*, or “night witches,” because the whooshing noise their wooden planes made resembled that of a sweeping broom. “This sound was the only warning the Germans had. The planes were too small to show up on radar... [or] on infrared locators.” “They never used radios, so radio locators couldn’t pick them up either. They were basically ghosts.”

Steve Prowse, author of the screenplay The Night Witches,



Due to both the planes’ limited weight capacity and the military’s limited funds, the pilots also lacked other “luxury” items their male counterparts enjoyed. Instead of parachutes (which were too heavy to carry), radar, guns and radios, they were forced to use more rudimentary tools such as rulers, stopwatches, flashlights, pencils, maps and compasses.



NIGHT WITCHES

The military, unprepared for women pilots, offered them meager resources. Flyers received hand-me-down uniforms (from male soldiers), including oversized boots. “They had to tear up their bedding and stuff them in their boots to get them to fit,” said Prowse.

The military provided them with outdated Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes, 1920s crop-dusters. These light two-seater, open-cockpit planes were never meant for combat. “It was like a coffin with wings,” said Prowse. Made out of plywood with canvas pulled over, the aircraft offered no protection from the elements. Flying at night, pilots endured freezing temperatures, wind and frostbite. In the harsh Soviet winters, the planes became so cold, just touching them would rip off bare skin.



Briefings occurred before their flights as there was no radio contact during their strikes.



NIGHT WITCHES

The planes, each with a pilot upfront and a navigator in back, traveled in packs: The first planes would go in as bait, attracting German spotlights, which provided much needed illumination. These planes, which rarely had ammunition to defend themselves, would release a flare to light up the intended target. The last plane would idle its engines and glide in darkness to the bombing area. It was this “stealth mode” that created their signature witch’s broom sound.

Altogether these daredevil heroines flew more than 30,000 missions in total, or about 800 *per pilot and navigator*. From the first mission in 1942, to the end in of their commission in 1945, they lost a total of 30 pilots, out of 400 pilots, and 24 of the flyers were awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union. Some downed crews were tortured before execution. There were no “extractions”.

The all-female 588th Night Bomber Regiment was decommissioned 6 months after the war.





Discussion



Mirabal Sisters - 1960



The Mirabal Sisters

- 1930-1960 Rafael Trujillo staged a coup in the Dominican Republic and assassinated all political rivals to gain control
- Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa Mirabal were part of a group that would eventually become known as the 14th of June Movement in honor of the group of exiled Dominicans who were aided by Cuba.
- Minerva was the first woman to graduate law school, but after rejecting Trujillo's advances, she faced harassment from his underlings, and he denied her of her license.





MIRABAL SISTERS

CONTINUED

Within the 14th of June Movement, the Mirabal sisters gained the codename “Las Mariposas” or the butterflies.

They distributed pamphlets listing the names of Trujillo’s victims, held/attended secret meetings to lead the middle-class.



Trujillo was the dictator of the Dominican Republic from 1930 until his assassination in 1961, while Francisco Franco ruled Spain as a dictator from 1939 until his death in 1975. The connection between Trujillo and Franco can be summarized as follows: - Ideological Similarities: Both leaders adhered to authoritarian and nationalist ideologies, emphasizing strong centralized control, militarism, and conservative social policies. They suppressed political dissent and controlled their countries through oppressive measures.

- Diplomatic Relations: Despite being on opposite sides of the Atlantic, Trujillo and Franco maintained diplomatic relations. Trujillo supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) by sending some limited military support, aligning with Franco’s Nationalists who eventually won the war.



MIRABAL SISTERS

CONTINUED

Given permission to visit their husbands in jail, Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa were ambushed by Trujillo's men. The sisters were assassinated and their death's staged to look accidental. The orders came directly from Trujillo.

- The people knew this was no accidental death, and instead of the Mirabal sisters no longer being a problem, they became martyrs.
- Trujillo's regime outwardly had a progressive attitude, granting women's suffrage in 1942, but for some, this assassination was a step too far.
- Trujillo was assassinated shortly after the Mirabals' assassination



Mirabal Sisters' Legacy

- The United Nations declared November 25th is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women as a tribute to the Mirabal sisters.
- Most places in in the Dominican Republic have streets or some other type of commemoration dedicated to them.
- Trujillo had an obelisk created for himself and the Dominicans replaced it with a butterfly.
- *In the Time of Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez is a fictionalized telling of their story, later turned into a movie.





Discussion



WOMEN PARTISANS in Franco Spain



Women's contribution in the anti-fascist struggle

- Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas (AMA) (Antifascist Women's Group) was an organization that was founded by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) as the Spanish section of the international organization Mujeres Contra la Guerra y el Fascismo (Woman against war and fascism), initiated by the Communist International following Hitler's rise to power in Germany.
- It functioned similar to a mass organization and was focused on bringing the broadest sections of society into the anti fascist struggle.
- Was a very influential in Spain during the civil war that encouraged women to actively participate in politics, started literacy campaigns and political education for women.
- It also organized medical brigades, food distribution, and care for refugees during the war .



Women's Contributions in the Anti-fascist struggle

- Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas (The Unified Socialist Youth) was a youth organization formed in the spring of 1936 in Spain through the amalgamation of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and Communist Party of Spain (PCE) youth groups and had many women amongst its ranks.
- The JSU mobilized thousands of women, young workers, students, and peasants to defend the Spanish Republic.
- After the fall of the Republic to Franco's Fascist forces one of the more infamous cases of repression was Las Trece Rosas ("The Thirteen Roses"). which involved thirteen young JSU women who were executed on August 5, 1939, accused of participating in underground resistance against the Francoist regime.



VILMA ESPÍN



Vilma Espín

- Vilma Lucila Espín Guillois born on april 7th 1930 in Santiago de Cuba as the daughter to a wealthy Cuban Lawyer.
- She graduated after studying chemical engineering at the Universidad de Oriente. This is Also where she met Frank País and got involved in politics.
- She also studied at MIT in Massachusetts at the request of her father in an attempt to divert her form socialist politics. Her time in the USA left her with a fire that she used to join the July 26th movement while in Mexico en route to Cuba.



Role In July 26th movement

- After the failed Moncada Barracks attack by a group including a young Fidel Castro that sent him and his brother Raul into exile in Mexico, this is where those two met Espín
- Espin Served as a key messenger between July 26th movement leaders in Mexico and Frank País in Cuba and their underground work against the Batista Regime.
- She then went on to assist the in the Sierra Maestra mountains after the 26th of July Movement's return to Cuba on the Granma yacht in November 1956.
- On January 1, 1959, Batista announced his resignation, fleeing the country to the Dominican Republic under the protection of Rafael Trujillo,



VILMA ESPIN

- She played a key role in liberating Cuba from the dictatorship of Bautista.
- After the revolution she was vowed as Cuba's first lady as she was Raul Castro's wife and Fidel Castro's sister-in-law
- she took an active role in many branches of the Cuban government from the conclusion of the revolution to her death.
- Espín helped found the Federation of Cuban Women and promoted equal rights for Cuban women in all spheres of life.
- Women played a huge role during the revolution and after in defending their homeland and were an essential part.
- Celia Sánchez, Haydée Santamaría, and Melba Hernandez are a few comrades who were active in underground networks from the beginning.



Prisoner Number 11710



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn who spent twenty-eight months in the Alderson Federal Women's Reformatory from 1954 to 1957. The Flynn of Alderson, also known as Prisoner Number 11710, was a heavy-set, gray-haired, elderly woman.

In 1951, at the age of sixty-one, Flynn was one of 132 "second tier" Party leaders indicted under the Smith Act for allegedly advocating the overthrow of the government by force and violence. She was found guilty and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Other women convicted along with her include Claudia Jones, a Trinidad-born journalist, feminist, Black nationalist, and member of the National Committee of the Communist Party, and Polish immigrant Betty Gannett, a teacher, writer, and National Education Director for the Party.



Prisoner Number 11710 cont'd





Discussion



Discussion & New Members Introductions



New Member Introductions

- What is your name, pronouns and state (or country/territory)?
- Where do you work? Is it unionized?
- How did you find out about the People's School?
- What do you think about tonight's class?



Discussion & Wrap Up



Announcements

- The PSMLS has recovered our old Youtube account we lost to wreckers in 2022 and we have re-uploaded all our old videos. Like, subscribe, and check out what subjects we covered prior and what we aware saying in the past.
- PCUSA Cell Chairs need to call members of their cells to remind them about attendance.
- The next issue of New Masses (2025) has begun production. If you have art you want us to feature, email it to info@partyofcommunistsusa.net.



Volunteers Needed!

We are in need of volunteers for the staff of the People's School! Here's a few roles we need filled:

- People to help manage posting on our social media and podcast platforms
- Video Editors, Audio Editors, Graphic Designers, Artists, Narrators
- Facilitators, Web Controls, Moderators

Email info@peopleschool.us if you're interested and try to attend our next staff meeting if possible.




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You haven't nothing to lose
but your chains - start
here.




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Materials to help promote the school!

What is the Peoples School?

The *Peoples School for Marxist Leninist Studies* is part of a long-line of American Communist Party sponsored schools, such as the *Jefferson School of Social Science* and the *People's School of Marxist Studies*.

The PSMLS was initiated by and is sponsored by the *Party of Communists USA*, but it is not a party school, which allows a wide variety of perspectives that don't necessarily reflect the party line.

We hold classes online every week on Tues at 8 PM EST - 9:30 PM EST and Thurs at 9 PM EST - 10:30 PM EST. These are public classes on Zoom that are organized into sections of presentations, and discussion periods. Join our classes and participate in collective education!



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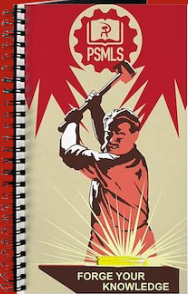
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"With no revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement"
- V. I. Lenin



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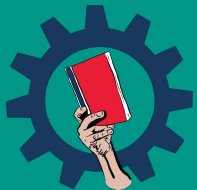
View From Left Field
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The Old PSMLS Youtube is now the Youtube of View From Left Field, a podcast of analysis and discussion of current events from a progressive perspective.

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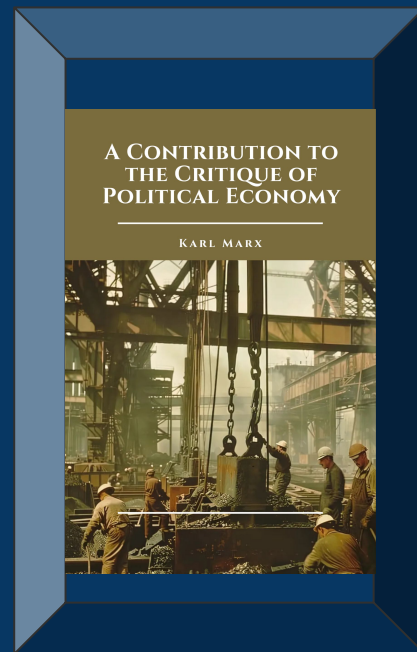
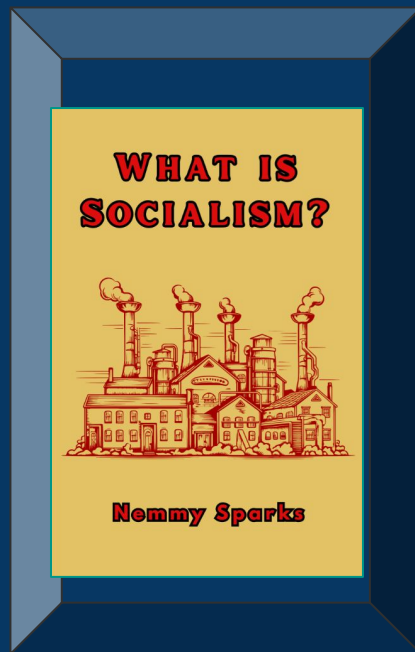
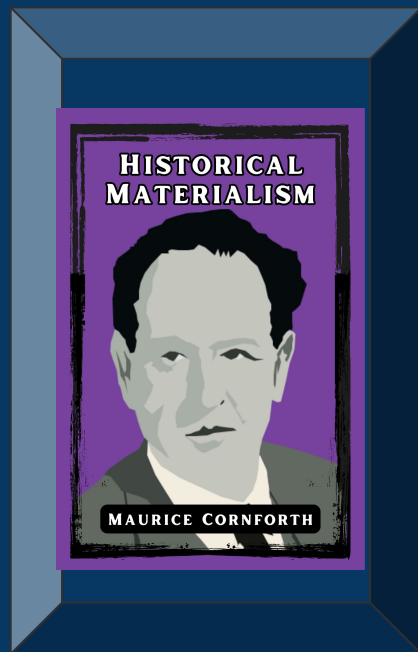
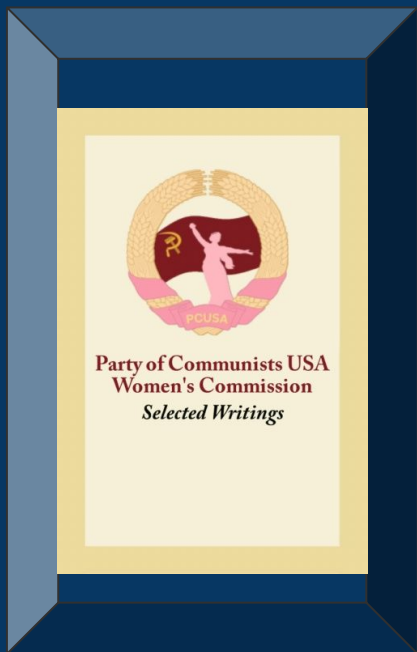




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Harry Bridges School of Labor

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The Harry Bridges School of Labor is a monthly class held 2x per month. Classes cover a variety of topics aimed at building class consciousness among union members.

March's class is on "Triangle Waistshirt Factory Fire" Class will be March 5, 2024 at 9pm EST/6pm PST and Saturday February 8, 2024 at 7pm EST/4pm PST.





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