

New Member Education Program

This education plan is intended for new ISO members who have already read *Where We Stand*, *The Case for Socialism*, *The Meaning of Marxism*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and the *ISO Members' Toolkit*. The readings cover a number of major topics that form core elements of the ISO's politics.

This program isn't meant to be exhaustive, but it is meant to provide a framework for the continuing education of new members in the theory and politics of international socialism. The readings and questions developed for each of the topics are not only aimed at providing a general Marxist education about them, but also at introducing new members to the International Socialist Tradition's approaches to them.

We have limited the reading to about 50 pages so that members can work their way through program relatively quickly. Each of the sections is designed to provide the basis for an in-person study group. For each session, one member (it can rotate between participants) should briefly introduce the topic, and provide ample space for participants to ask and answer questions. Another person should also be chosen to act as a chairperson to facilitate the discussion.

We recommend that discussion groups be on the smaller side—not more than 8 people—to allow maximum participation and in-depth discussion. We recommend that depending on the size of the group there be one or two more experienced members who can help answer questions and explain aspects of Marxist theory and politics.

The study questions are meant to spark discussion, following the discussion leader's short presentation (we suggest 15 minutes). The questions attempt to guide participants to key "takeaway" points from each session, while also introducing them to key debates around the topics. They are not intended to be definitive, and participants should be encouraged to raise their own questions, too.

The readings are readily available, either through Haymarket Books or online. Since so many of the study sessions are based on Haymarket titles, branches and districts should arrange to sell new members a discounted set of these titles to provide them a start to their personal libraries.

We have tried to include a link to one or two relevant presentations on <http://WeAreMany.org> as part of each section. These can be especially helpful to smaller or newer branches, where having a discussion group based on watching/listening to the presentation might stand in for a session with a discussion leader's presentation.

It's not necessary to follow the order of sessions in the plan. All sections are designed to "stand alone." Branches should set up a schedule that works for cadre and new members who will be participating in the program. We suggest that the study group meet outside of branch meetings for a couple of hours every two weeks.

Since new members will be joining the organization throughout the year, this program will allow people to join a discussion group at any time without feeling like they've missed a crucial earlier session. Branches should aim to run

the educational program throughout the year so that people can catch discussions they might have missed. Branches can also wait until there are 4-5 new members to start additional study groups—this method has the advantage of continuity of discussion among the participants of each group.

As branches and districts gain experience with using this education plan, the ISO's National Office will be interested in hearing how it is going: what worked, what didn't work, what topics/readings/study questions should be added, etc. This feedback will help to inform updates to this education plan. Please send your comments to: ISOorgdept@gmail.com.

1. Socialism from Below & The Centrality of the Working Class

Readings:

Hal Draper, "Why the working class?"

<http://socialistworker.org/2012/09/14/why-the-working-class>

Hal Draper, "The Two Souls of Socialism"

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1966/twosouls/index.htm>

We Are Many:

Emily Giles, "Why the Working Class?"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/why-working-class>

Amy Muldoon, "How Workers Become Revolutionary"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/how-workers-become-revolutionary>

Study questions:

1. Explain why socialists don't idealize the working class.
2. What compels the working class toward socialism?
3. Why do workers tend to challenge the capitalist system when they struggle? How does this contrast with peasants and middle class intellectuals?
4. What is the working class's unique power to make a socialist revolution?
5. What is the difference between socialism from above and socialism from below?
6. What do Stalinism and Social Democracy have in common?
7. How does Proudhon, the father of modern anarchism, fit into the tradition of socialism from above?
8. What is the difference between the elitist approach and the vanguard approach to socialism?

2. Socialism and Human Nature

Readings:

Phil Gasper, "Is Socialism Against 'Human Nature'?"

http://socialistworker.org/2004-1/494/494_08_HumanNature.shtml

Elizabeth Terzakis, "What Do Socialists Say About Human Nature?"

<http://www.isreview.org/issues/47/wdss-humnature.shtml>

Karl Marx, "Estranged Labor"

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

Phil Gasper, "Capitalism and Alienation"

<http://isreview.org/issue/74/capitalism-and-alienation>

We Are Many:

Bill Keach, "Marx and Human Nature" Socialism 2014

<http://wearemany.org/a/2014/06/marx-and-human-nature>

Rebekah Ward, "Is Human Nature a Barrier to Socialism?" Socialism 2010

<http://wearemany.org/a/2010/06/is-human-nature-barrier-to-socialism>

Study Questions:

1. Defenders of capitalism often claim that socialism is impossible because human beings are naturally competitive and selfish. How would you respond to this argument?
2. Do human beings have a fixed nature? Are we, for example, naturally cooperative rather than competitive?
3. Is there such a thing as human nature at all, or are we products of our social environments?
4. What did Marx mean by alienation? Are capitalists alienated?
5. Is it possible to end alienation?

3. The Revolutionary Party

Readings:

John Molyneux, Marxism and the Party, Chapters 2 & 3

<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/molyneux/1978/party/ch02.htm>

<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/molyneux/1978/party/ch03.htm>

Chris Harman, "Party and Class"

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1968/xx/partyclass.htm>

Duncan Hallas, "Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Party"

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/hallas/works/1971/xx/party.htm>

We Are Many:

Tony Cliff, "Lenin and the Party"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wXpbl3hTW4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fldk9Xds8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c1vQ4TKaaY>

Paul Le Blanc, "Lenin and the Debate on 'Leninism'" (S13)

<http://wearemany.org/a/2013/06/lenin-and-debate-on-leninism>

Study Questions:

1. In Molyneux's chapters, Lenin is quoted as saying that the workers' party should not be equated with the working class as a whole. What do you think he meant by that?
2. Lenin talked about the need to organize the "vanguard" of the working class? Isn't that an elitist conception?
3. Lots of people talk about political parties, and it usually refers to electoral parties. How was Lenin's idea of a workers' party different?
4. Is it possible to be both democratic and centralist?
5. Do centralized organizations inevitably undergo bureaucratic degeneration? What steps can be taken to ensure that they remain democratic?
6. Lenin formed his views about political organization in Tsarist Russia over 100 years ago. Are they still relevant today?

4. The Russian Revolution

Readings:

Ahmed Shawki, "80 Years Since the Russian Revolution"

http://www.isreview.org/issues/03/russian_revolution.shtml

Chris Harman, "How the Revolution was Lost"

<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/harman/1967/xx/revlost.htm>

Anthony Arnone, "The Fall of Stalinism: Ten Years On"

<http://www.isreview.org/issues/10/TheFallOfStalinism.shtml>

(Readings also available in Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism

<http://www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/Russia-From-Workers-State-to-State-Capitalism>)

We Are Many:

Katie Feyh, "Russia's Revolutionary Process: 1905-1917"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2011/07/russias-revolutionary-process-1905-1917>

Julian Guerrero, Rigo Gogol, "How the Russian Revolution Was Won and Lost"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2014/06/how-russian-revolution-was-won-and-lost>

Study Questions:

1. Describe the difference between the Mensheviks' and the Bolsheviks' understanding of the tasks of socialists in Russia before the revolution.
2. What did Trotsky mean by "permanent revolution"? How did his views differ from those of the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks? Was Trotsky right?
3. Why did a revolution break out in February 1917? Was the Bolshevik seizure of power in October a coup or a popular revolution?
4. Why did soviet power give way to a bureaucratic dictatorship? Was the degeneration of the revolution inevitable? Did Lenin lead to Stalin?

5. Was the USSR under Stalin and his successors a workers' state, state capitalist, or something else?
6. Why did the Stalinist system in the USSR and Eastern Europe eventually collapse? Was this a step backwards, a step forward, or neither?

5. Marxism, the Unions, and the Lessons of the 1930s

Readings:

Sharon Smith, *Subterranean Fire*, Chapters 1, 3 (pp. 78-87), and 4

Sharon Smith, "Marxism, Unions and the Class Struggle,"

<http://isreview.org/issue/78/marxism-unions-and-class-struggle>

We Are Many:

Lucy Hershel, "Marxism and the Trade Unions"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/marxism-and-trade-union-struggle>

Larry Bradshaw, "The Rank and File Strategy"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2014/06/rank-and-file-strategy>

Study Questions:

1. Labor unions are reform organizations within capitalism. Why do socialists support them?
2. What is the "trade union bureaucracy" and what role does it play in US labor relations? Why do socialists organize the rank and file?
3. What were the achievements of the IWW? What are the problems with anarcho-syndicalism?
4. What were strengths and weaknesses of the Communist Party in the 1930s?
5. What role did the Democratic Party and Roosevelt play in the 1930s?
6. Why did 1934 mark a turning point in US labor history?
7. How did the Communist Party lead labor radicals backward?
8. How would a labor party have made a difference in the 1930s?

6. The Democratic Party

Readings:

Lance Selfa, *The Democrats: A Critical History*, Chapters 1, 7, and appendix by

Hal Draper, "Who Will Be The Lesser Evil in '68?"

We Are Many:

Lance Selfa, "Obama: From Hope to Hopeless"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/obamafromhopetohopeless>

Ragina Johnson, "The Democrats and Social Movements"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2011/07/democrats-and-social-movements>

Study Questions:

1. Why do socialists argue the Democratic Party is a capitalist party?
2. Are there any differences between the Democrat and Republican parties? What are the different roles these two parties play?
3. Can the left enter and take over the Democratic Party?
4. What is the impact of the Democratic Party on working class and social movements?
5. Why is supporting the lesser evil a dead end?
6. Can activists build social movements and work on behalf of Democratic Party candidates? What about those who limit their participation to “only a few minutes” on Election Day?
7. Why is the U.S. is the only major industrial capitalist country without a social democratic or labor party? Was that inevitable?
8. How can socialists use elections to advance the working class movement? Why would having a labor party be an advance for the American working class?

7. Black Liberation

Readings:

Ahmed Shawki, *Black Liberation and Socialism*, Chapters 1, 7, and Conclusion (available from Haymarket books)

We Are Many:

Keeanga Yamahtta-Taylor, “The Political Economy of Racism”

<http://wearemany.org/a/2013/06/political-economy-of-racism>

Study Questions:

1. What role did slavery play in the rise of capitalism?
2. Was slavery the cause of racism, or racism the cause of slavery?
3. Why did racism survive the end of slavery? Whose interests did it continue to serve?
4. How did Lenin and the Russian Revolution change the American Communists’ attitude to racial oppression?
5. Why did Trotsky call for our supporting self-determination for Blacks? Did he mean support for a separate Black nation?
6. What did CLR James right mean when he wrote, “the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and a validity of its own?”
7. Do all whites benefit from racism? Is working class unity possible?

8. Women’s liberation

Readings:

(Note that this will be updated with the new edition of *Women and Socialism*.)

Sharon Smith, "Women's liberation: The Marxist Tradition"

<http://isreview.org/issue/93/womens-liberation-marxist-tradition>

Sharon Smith, "Theorizing Women's Oppression"

<http://isreview.org/issue/88/theorizing-womens-oppression-part-1>

Tithi Battacharya, "What is Social Reproduction Theory?"

<http://socialistworker.org/2013/09/10/what-is-social-reproduction-theory>

Sharon Smith, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality"

<http://isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality>

We Are Many:

Rachel Cohen, "The Origins of Women's Oppression"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/originsofwomensoppression>

Jen Roesch, "From Criminalization to Rape Culture: Rethinking the Politics of Sexual violence"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2014/06/from-criminalization-to-rape-culture>

Study Questions:

1. Has women's oppression and social inequality always existed?
2. What caused women's oppression? Did it precede the rise of class inequality?
3. In what way does capitalism depend on the role of the family and "privatized reproduction?" Could capitalism do without it?
4. What is "social reproduction" and what role does it play in the perpetuation of capitalism?
5. All women are oppressed, but they experience that oppression differently depending on class and race. Can you think of examples?
6. In what way is ending women's oppression connected to the class struggle and the fight against capitalism?
7. Why is rape and sexual violence so widespread in our society? Should we rely on the criminal legal system to fight rape?
8. What is the difference between a postmodern concept of intersectionality and a Marxist conception?
9. What kind of social and economic changes would be necessary to fully liberate women?

9. LGBT Liberation

Sherry Wolf, *Sexuality and Socialism*, Chapter 1: "The Roots of LGBT Oppression," Chapter 8: "An injury to one is an injury to all"

John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity"

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic464958.files/DEmilio%20Capitalism%20and%20Gay%20Identity.pdf>

We Are Many:

Sherry Wolf, "Sexuality and Socialism,

<http://wearemany.org/v/2009/09/sexuality-and-socialism-at-brown-university>

Sherry Wolf, "Marxism and Gay Liberation: the real history"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2008/06/marxism-and-gay-liberation>

Study Questions:

1. What is the relationship between the oppression of LGBT people and the oppression of women, and the relationship of both to the role of the family and social reproduction under capitalism?
2. Did homosexuality and oppression of homosexuals exist before capitalism?
3. How did modern capitalism created the "social space" for a gay and lesbian identity to emerge?
4. If the family reproduces women's oppression as well as LGBT oppression, why would we support gay marriage?
5. Given the rapid succession of states that are legalizing gay marriage, could LGBT oppression be done away with under capitalism? If not, why not?
6. What accounts for transgender oppression?
7. Different societies have had different conceptions of gender and also of what sexual behaviors and roles are permissible. Discuss.

10. Marxism and Immigration

Justin Akers-Chacon, "The War on Immigrants," pages 173-235 in *No One is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State violence on the US-Mexican Border*

We Are Many:

Justin Akers-Chacon, "Marxism, Borders, and the Fight Against Deportation"

(<http://wearemany.org/a/2013/06/marxism-borders-and-fight-against-deportation>)

Justin Akers-Chacon, "Immigration, migration, and the World Economy"

(<http://wearemany.org/a/2008/06/immigration-migration-and-world-economy>)

Study Questions:

1. Why have immigrants sometimes been welcome in the US, and at other times attacked and deported? What accounts for the variation in immigration policy in the United States?
2. Why aren't borders more open?
3. Aren't workers better off if they keep immigrants who will accept lower pay out of the country?

4. Evaluate the truth or falsity of this statement: *some immigrant workers are deemed "illegal" in order to prevent them from working in the US.*
5. Why do some immigrant groups face more discrimination than others?
Does it have anything to do with class and/or race?
6. What was the aim of the eugenics movement?
7. Is there a relationship between anti-immigrant policy and US foreign policy?

11. Marxist Economics

Reading:

Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx*, Ch. 6

Karl Marx, "Value Price and Profit"

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/valuepriceprofit/>

We Are Many:

Petrino DiLeo, "The ABCs of Marxist Economics"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/abcsofmarxisteconomics>

Hadas Thier, "Marx's Theory of Crisis"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/marx%E2%80%99stheoryofcrisis>

Study Questions:

1. What is the "labor theory of value"?
2. What is the relationship between value and price?
3. What is commodity fetishism? How is this related to the labor theory of value?
4. Is it possible to have capitalism without exploitation?
5. What are ways that capitalists can increase their profits?
6. Is it possible to have "full employment" under capitalism?
7. What is overproduction and how does it lead to crisis?
8. Why does the rate of profit tend to fall?
9. What are ways that capitalism can try to get out of crisis and restore profitability?

12. Marxism and Ecology

Readings:

Chris Williams, *Ecology and Socialism*, Chapters 6 & 7 (Available from Haymarket books)

We Are Many:

Ian Angus: "The Malthus Myth: Population, Poverty and Climate Change"

<http://wearemany.org/v/2010/05/malthusmyth>

Chris Williams & Amity Paye: "Rising Profits, Sinking Planet: Socialist Solutions to the Climate Crisis"

<http://wearemany.org/v/risingprofitssinkingplanet>

Study Questions:

1. Some claim that Marxism is "productivist." Is this true?
2. How does capitalism cause environmental destruction?
3. What are the arguments against the idea that overpopulation causes environmental problems?
4. What do socialists say about the call for workers to consume less?
5. What are the limitations of market-based solutions to deal with the ecological crisis?
6. What are some immediate reforms that can mitigate capitalism's destruction of the environment?
7. Can the environmental crisis be solved under capitalism?
8. How would socialism stop environmental destruction?

13. Imperialism

Readings:

Brian Jones, "Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism"

<http://www.isreview.org/issues/44/imperialism.shtml>

Phil Gasper, "Introduction to Lenin and Bukharin"

VI Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Ch. 7

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imphsc/ch07.htm>

N.I. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*, Ch. 12

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1917/imperial/12.htm>

We Are Many:

Phil Gasper, "Lenin and Bukharin on Imperialism"

<http://wearemany.org/v/2008/06/leninandbukharinonimperialism>

Ashley Smith, "Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and its Rivals"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/lenin's-theory-of-imperialism-and-its-rivals>

Study Questions:

1. What does Lenin mean when he argues that imperialism is a stage of capitalist development?
2. How does the internationalization of the system produce inter-imperial antagonism?
3. How might inter-imperial antagonisms lead to war between the great powers?
4. Are wars between the great powers always rooted in competition over raw materials?
5. Could imperialist states overcome their antagonisms and jointly exploit the world's working classes?
6. Do workers in imperialist countries benefit from imperialism?
7. Why does Lenin argue that imperialism set the stage for international

- socialist revolution?
8. Has globalization made wars between the major powers less likely?

14. Marxism and National Liberation

Readings: Tom Lewis, "Marxism and Nationalism"

http://isreview.org/issues/13/marxism_nationalism_part1.shtml

http://isreview.org/issues/14/marxism_nationalism_part2.shtml

VI Lenin, "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Question"

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm>

We Are Many:

Jonah Birch, "Lenin and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2014/06/lenin-and-right-of-nations-to-self-determination>

Study Questions:

1. Why did Marx and Engels see bourgeois nationalist movements against feudalism as progressive?
2. Why did Marx and Engels support Ireland's fight for independence? How did they see this as advancing the international class struggle?
3. Why did Lenin oppose the Bund's demand that it be the sole representative of Jewish workers?
4. Why does Lenin argue for oppressed nations right to self-determination?
5. Why does Lenin argue that socialist should support this right, but not necessarily endorse secession?
6. What is Luxemburg's position on the national question and what are Lenin's arguments against it?
7. Why does Lenin oppose the idea of national cultural autonomy and instead support international or cosmopolitan culture?
8. What is the significance of Lenin's argument that socialist should maintain their independence in national liberation struggles and never give them communist coloration?

15. Zionism and Palestine

Phil Gasper, "Israel: Colonial Settler State"

http://www.isreview.org/issues/15/israel_colonial.shtml

Lance Selfa, "Israel: The U.S. Watchdog"

http://www.isreview.org/issues/04/Israel_watchdog.shtml

Mostafa Omar, *The Struggle for Palestine*, Chapter 13, "The Palestinian National Liberation Movement"

We Are Many:

Sherry Wolf, "Israel's Apartheid State"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/israel's-apartheid-state>

Omar Barghouti, "The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights"

<http://wearemany.org/v/2011/07/bds>

Eric Ruder, "How Can Palestinian Liberation Be Achieved?"

<http://wearemany.org/v/2010/06/how-can-palestinian-liberation-be-achieved>

Study Questions:

1. What was Zionism's approach to anti-Semitism?
2. What was the Zionist's relationship to the imperial powers?
3. Why did the Zionist colonization lead to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine?
4. Why does US imperialism fund and rely on Israel, in contrast to friendly Arab regimes, as its most loyal ally and enforcer?
5. How do Israeli workers benefit from US imperial subsidies? What does this mean for a socialist strategy?
6. Why did the PLO strategy fail and turn the Palestinian Authority into a tool for Israeli occupation? How different is Hamas' strategy?
7. What are the arguments in favor of BDS?
8. Why does Palestinian liberation depend on a pan Arab working class movement?

16. Marxism and Other Left Traditions

Readings:

John Molyneux, *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?*

Duncan Hallas, "Trotskyism Reassessed,"

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/hallas/works/1977/07/reassess.htm>

We Are Many:

Jonah Birch, "Social Democracy: Can We Vote our Way to Socialism,"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2010/06/socialdemocracy>

Tithi Battacharya, "The Rise and Fall of Maoism"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/riseandfalofmaoism>.

Study Questions:

1. What is the class basis of Marxism? What is the class basis of the other Socialisms?
2. Why does Marxism put working class self-emancipation at the center of the socialist project?
3. How does Social Democracy's parliamentary road abandon the project of working class self-emancipation?
4. How did Stalinism emerge from the defeat of world revolution?
5. Why and how did Stalinist parties in the rest of the world betray working class revolution?
6. How did third world nationalism's strategy of guerrilla struggle abandon Marxism?

7. What is the class basis of third world nationalism?
8. What are weaknesses of Orthodox Trotskyism?

17. Marxism and Anarchism

Readings:

Paul D'Amato, "Anarchism: How Not to Make a Revolution"

<http://www.isreview.org/issues/03/anarchism.pdf>.

Erik Kerl, "Contemporary Anarchism"

<http://www.isreview.org/issues/72/featanarchism.shtml>.

We Are Many:

Jonah Birch, "Anarchy vs. Authority: The Debate Between Marx and Bakunin"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2012/06/anarchyvsauthority>.

Erik Kerl, "Anarchism: Theory and Practice"

<http://wearemany.org/a/2010/06/anarchism>.

Study Questions:

1. What are core beliefs of anarchism?
2. How did the founders of modern anarchism become proponents of authoritarianism themselves?
3. Why is a worker's state necessary to consolidate a socialist revolution?
4. How did anarchism's principles lead to defeat in the Spanish Revolution?
5. How can anarchism lead to elitism and opposition to democracy?
6. What are prefigurative politics? Is this an effective way of organizing?
7. Can society be changed without taking power?
8. Are anarchists in favor of reforms?
9. How should Marxists relate to anarchists in movements?