# Editorial

In *Socialist History* Issue 55, our four contributors consider how the Revolutionary Left strove to adapt Marxist theory to differing national and transnational contexts. Beginning with Central Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, Mike Makin-Waite reassesses the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic's place in the history of early Communist state-building. The founding of the Soviet Republic, that briefly ruled over the central and western portions of present-day Hungary from March to August 1919, mirrored that of its more famous Russian counterpart: both came into existence after the old regime had been deposed by liberal reformists, whose own authority in turn rapidly disintegrated under a combination of escalating domestic and international pressures. Indeed, the dominant Party of Communists in Hungary, established in November 1918 by the ex-journalist Béla Kun, mainly consisted of former Austro-Hungarian soldiers who had been prisoners of war in Russia. The Hungarian Communists' assumption of power occurred amidst a rising tide of regional violence that ultimately led to the collapse of their own regime. While previous scholarship attributes these failings to rural unrest and opposition from the Social Democratic Party, with whom the Communists governed in coalition, Makin-Waite argues that the Soviet Republic's ultimate failure lay in its inability to resist the myriad external forces ranged against it. It faced military interventions by Czechoslovakia and Romania, and when Romanian troops occupied the Hungarian capital Budapest, the Soviet Republic fell. It had lasted just 133 days. The defeat of the Hungarian revolution had an enduring legacy in shaping the Comintern's strategic mantra that communists must avoid contamination with social democracy at all costs.

Nicholas Vrousalis addresses the radical German left's efforts to resolve similar dilemmas during the revolution of 1918 to 1919, as it sought to replace Germany's pre-war hybrid monarchical/parliamentary system with democratic self-government, as set out in the German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) 'Erfurt Programme' of 1891. In the days and weeks after the fall of the Kaiser, the SPD and the more radical Independents (USPD) attempted to articulate alternative models for the new German state. Vrousalis identifies a strong current in favour of a hybrid system of parliamentary democracy supported by a system of workers' councils, which he terms 'council Erfurtianism'. As the

revolution spread throughout Germany's industrial centres in November 1918, establishing such councils served as an ideological cornerstone for many of the leftist groups as they fought to wrest power from the central and state governments. However, growing sectarianism among these factions coupled with resurgent counterrevolutionary forces cut the ground from under 'council Erfurtianism', so that by 1920 it had been largely abandoned.

Charlie McGuire offers a differing perspective in his analysis of socialist political thinking in the context of the Irish struggle for independence from 1912 to 1923. In contrast to their British and continental European counterparts, Ireland's socialist and labour movements were forced to navigate between competing political visions; the rise of nationalist agitation represented the principal challenge, while left-wing opposition to direct rule from London was undermined by its inability to reach a consensus over Ireland's political future. As a consequence, Irish socialism failed to capitalise on its earlier potential to emerge as an alternative to republicanism and unionism, ensuring the marginalisation of socialism in Irish politics, north and south, in the postwar period.

In the final contribution, Gavin Bowd presents one case of how revolutionary Marxism manifested as a transnational phenomenon in the cultural sphere. Central to this analysis is the life and work of the Australian-born communist writer Jack Lindsay, best known for his historical fiction set in ancient Rome and translation of various Latin poets. Bowd argues that Lindsay's gradual shift towards the political left, culminating in him joining the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1936, was much shaped by his cultural engagement with Marxist artists and intellectuals in France. These interactions were a key influence in his own efforts to develop a form of communism more attuned to the social climate of interwar, wartime and Cold War England. Moreover, by framing Marxism in the context of Lindsay's literary career, Bowd offers fresh insights into its application as a means of confronting social alienation alongside political and economic injustice.

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